

Growth After Adversity: The Lived Experiences on Posttraumatic Growth Among Selected Covid-19 Survivors in Bataan, Philippines

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Abstract

Dealing with a traumatic event, such as severe COVID-19 symptoms, may deplete one's strength and fill them with fear and hopelessness. Despite such events that may demoralize an individual, the Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) phenomenon allows for growth in the face of adversity. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Posttraumatic Growth of COVID-19 survivors and to ascertain what aspects of positive growth they have experienced. The researchers used purposive sampling to obtain the required number of respondents and used the interview protocol to conduct a semi-structured interview to gather the necessary information. Five themes have been identified using Colaizzi's seven steps for descriptive phenomenological data analysis. Specifically, (1) savor, (2) invigorating, (3) benevolent, (4) optimistic, and (5) light, which is then abbreviated as SIBOL, a Tagalog word that means sprout; growth, spring that symbolizes the beginning of the growth of COVID-19 survivors. They perceived Posttraumatic Growth as an opportunity to live differently, this time embracing the new positive changes in their lives. Though there have only been a few studies on Posttraumatic Growth in the Philippines, it has the potential to raise a lot of awareness about the possible benefits of attaining Posttraumatic Growth. This assists in identifying a way to view adversity as a challenge that will aid in the growth process, where our emphasis shifts from learning about negative experiences to facilitating Posttraumatic Growth.

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1 INTRODUCTION

There have been numerous barriers and enormous changes worldwide since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. The virus transmission spread widely, and the number of people infected by the disease increased rapidly. The sudden unforeseen disease brought fear, confusion, doubts, anxiety, and mixed feelings to various people who did not know what to expect and how long this crisis would last. According to Tee et al. (2020), the 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic threatens societies' mental health. Research reveals that during the early phase of the pandemic in the Philippines, one-fourth of respondents reported experiencing moderate-to-severe anxiety, and one-sixth reported moderate-to-severe depression and psychological impact. Those infected with COVID-19 have experienced much adversity in life, from having trouble breathing

to being the center of gossip in their barangay. One of the assumptions about the survivors of COVID-19 is that they are no longer suffering after physically recovering from the virus. Their lived experiences as COVID-19 survivors certainly brought a heavy toll on their mental health (Sahoo et al., 2020). It affects their whole system, and they encounter various difficulties in overcoming fear, anxiety, withdrawal from others, shame, and discrimination from the people around them, which are evaluated as symptoms of psychological trauma (Robinson, Smith, & Segal, n.d.). Coping with a traumatic event often results in thousands of failures and dysfunction in daily tasks; according to Xiao, Luo, and Xiao (2020), most survivors even struggle hard to recover mentally due to these happenings. COVID-19 infection can cause psychological distress and significantly impact patients' lives. Still, it can also lead to positive changes (Sun, Goldberg, Lin, Qiao, & Operario, 2021); these positive changes were introduced by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), and they identify it as Posttraumatic Growth (PTG). Akhtar (2017), author of the book *#WHATISPOST-TRAUMATICGROWTH?* said philosophers and theologians had documented the phenomena of positive change due to adversity throughout history. All major religious traditions have something to say about how we respond to suffering. Still, it was not until the 1990s that psychologists formed a field of study dedicated to growth through adversity.

PTG is characterized as positive psychological changes in self-perception, life philosophy, and interpersonal connections that can occur due to a person's struggle with adverse life circumstances (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). It is said that people who confront psychological challenges due to adversity are considered to experience favorable growth. However, this does not imply that PTG develops in every person subjected to various traumatic circumstances. Growth may not happen in all dimensions; PTG may not occur for some persons. Moreover, PTG is focused on long-term changes resulting from greater in-depth reflection. It does not concentrate on changes immediately after an event, when individuals may respond spontaneously and without thought (Tedeschi, Shakespeare-Finch, Taku, & Calhoun, 2018). Also, PTG often occurs naturally, without needing psychotherapy or other forms of formal intervention, though it may be aided in five ways: education, emotional regulation, disclosure, narrative development, and service (Tedeschi, 2020). PTG encompasses five dimensions of positive changes in coping with adversity: improved relationships with others, recognition of new possibilities for one's life, increased personal strengths, spiritual growth, and enhanced appreciation of life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). PTG emerges from highly stressful situations. The COVID-19 pandemic may qualify as one (Lau, Chan, & Ng, 2021).

Though it is necessary to remember that PTG does not solve all problems, it does not eliminate all tension and stress. However, it can give a person's life true meaning. It is common for individuals who have been through trauma to believe that their lives will never be the same again. However, as proven by a growing body of studies, individuals have the ability to not just "bounce back" from trauma but also to live a positive life on the opposite side of a traumatic experience (Lees, n.d.). Although PTG and resilience are often seen as the same, they differ. According to Xu et al. (2016), PTG is distinct from resilience. Contrary to resilience, which emphasizes an adaptive response to an adverse situation that results in sustained physical functioning, PTG stresses a higher level of functioning, surpassing pre-trauma functioning. PTG results in an extraordinary human transformation beyond what resiliency can provide. Accordingly, the researchers believe it is crucial to know what PTG is and how it happens. It talks about numerous things about coping and accepting the changes in our lives, which are relevant in today's world situation. Even though the concept of growing through adversity is not relatively new, the theory about PTG is still not widely spread and studied by other researchers (Victoria Stokes, 2021). PTG does not have enough studies about the outcomes and individual differences among survivors of multiple types of adverse events, as well as qualitative literature that explores people's experiences of PTG. Thus, the researchers would like to reach out to those struggling in life and invite them to study the various essences of growth that an individual can attain through our research. In today's pandemic, we would like to remind everyone that there is still life after COVID and growth after trauma, no matter how difficult life is.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Study Design

A qualitative approach is used to accomplish the study's goal. The term "qualitative research" refers to research that looks into and explores further real-world issues (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Qualitative research collects information about participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior. It answers the how is and whys rather than how many or how much (Tenny, Brannan, & Brannan, 2021). The researchers employed Descriptive Phenomenology as the research design to conduct the study to know the view and perspective of our key player in our layer of experience. Descriptive phenomenology reveals the "essence" or "essential structure" of any phenomenon under investigation – that is, the characteristics that distinguish it from something else (Morrow, Rodriguez, & King, 2015). The study indicates that it is essential to correctly see the struggles and crises in the bigger picture. This study aims to spread awareness and add new information to existing knowledge about PTG.

2.2 Participants

The subject of this research is the COVID-19 survivors. The inclusion criteria for this study are the individuals who experienced severe symptoms of COVID-19, such as chest discomfort, trouble breathing or shortness of breath, loss of speech or movement, and disorientation, as well as COVID-19 survivors who were hospitalized, aged 18-65 years old, passed the screening process, and are from two (2) selected municipalities in Bataan, specifically Hermosa and Dinalupihan. On the other hand, the exclusion criteria for this study are those who experienced mild symptoms such as cough, tiredness, and loss of taste or smell. COVID-19 survivors who are asymptomatic, diagnosed with any mental health disorders, and taking prescribed medication. Furthermore, Table 1 shows the 10 participants in this descriptive phenomenological research. According to Ellis (2016), numerous sample sizes are suggested for phenomenological analysis in different textbooks, but a sample of 6 to 20 persons is adequate.

Table 1. The robofoto of the COVID-19 survivors

Selection's Code	Age	Sex	No. of Family Members	Home Address	Family Status	Highest Educational Attainment	Employment Status	Economic Status	Religion	Marital Status
CS #1	29	F	5	Hermosa	Extended Family	Bachelor Degree	Employed	16,000 – 25,000	Catholic	Married
CS # 2	54	M	5	Dinalupihan	Nuclear Family	Bachelor Degree	Employed	26,000	Methodist	Married
CS # 3	26	F	6	Dinalupihan	Extended Family	Bachelor Degree	Employed	11,000 – 15,000	Catholic	Married
CS # 4	65	F	2	Hermosa	Nuclear Family	Bachelor Degree	Retired	16,000 – 25,000	Catholic	Married
CS # 5	43	F	4	Dinalupihan	Nuclear Family	Junior High School	Unemployed	16,000 – 25,000	Catholic	Married
CS # 6	43	M	6	Hermosa	Nuclear Family	Bachelor Degree	Self – Employed	40,000	MCGI	Married
CS # 7	33	M	6	Hermosa	Single Parent	Post Graduate	Unemployed	30,000	Catholic	Single
CS # 8	58	M	2	Hermosa	Nuclear Family	Bachelor Degree	Employed	16,000 – 25,000	MCGI	Widowed
CS # 9	38	F	2	Dinalupihan	Extended Family	Bachelor Degree	Self – Employed	30,000	Methodist	Married
CS # 10	54	F	3	Hermosa	Nuclear Family	Bachelor Degree	Employed	11,000 – 15,000	Mormon	Married

2.3 Sampling and Study Site

Purposive sampling was used in this research to better identify the primary selections based on population characteristics and the study's objectives (Crossman, 2020). The respondents are from two (2) selected municipalities in Bataan, specifically Hermosa and Dinalupihan. Furthermore, the population and sample used in this study were the researchers' primary data sources. Thus, the sample selected out of the population undergoes a process to provide the required information to complete the study.

2.4 Instrumentation

The interview protocol, which comprises fifteen (15) interview questions initially created by the researchers and evaluated by professionals, was the key instrument used in this study. However, the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), a scale first developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), was employed as a source of information rather than a data collection tool for statistical analysis. Furthermore, the PTGI scores indicated the respondents' degrees of PTG, which helped with the analysis and interpretation of other qualitative data. Next, the respondents were given informed consent and a participants' information letter, followed by the robofoto to gather the information of the subjects thoroughly that was sent using Facebook Messenger. Then, a semi-structured Interview Guide/Interview Protocol with fifteen (15) items and follow-up questions directed the researchers to ask questions via Google Meet. The interview lasted up to thirty (30) minutes to one (1) hour and was completed with an audio and video recorder and the respondents' permission.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

Through purposive sampling, the researchers were able to gather the needed respondents. To begin the selection, the respondents first took the virtual screening process by answering a 21-item Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) that aims to assess if they experienced the PTG phenomenon and how traumatic event survivors' sense of personal advantages (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). The PTGI scale used in this study serves only as a screening tool to determine if they can proceed to the interview process. Before the interview, the researchers discussed the participant information letter, informed consent, and demographic questionnaire with the qualified respondents. Afterward, a semi-structured interview was used to acquire the needed information ultimately. Due to the continuous threat of the COVID-19 virus, the respondents were given two alternatives for how they wanted to do the interview, and five out of ten decided to conduct it virtually using an online application, Google Meet or Facebook Messenger, while the remaining five wished to be interviewed in-person.

In order to obtain the participants' responses to the questions and follow-up inquiries, a screen voice recorder was employed with the consent of the participants. On the other hand, the researchers also note the respondents' verbal and nonverbal actions, tone of voice, emotions, and atmosphere during the screening interview process of each selection. After the responses were gathered and transcribed into texts, the voice recording confirmed that the responses were deleted. The data findings were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven steps of descriptive phenomenology methods and cautiously monitored so the researchers could become more familiar with the responses. After the interview, a token was sent to the respondents to appreciate their willingness to participate and openly communicate the risks of remembering painful memories and traumas.

2.6 Data Analysis

The ten (10) recorded interviews of the COVID-19 survivors were transcribed into text. To analyze the data, researchers followed the seven steps of Colaizzi's process for descriptive

phenomenological data analysis (Abu Shosha, 2012). To begin the process, (1) the verbatim transcript of the COVID-19 survivors about PTG must be read and reread several times to acquire familiarity, understand the similarities and differences of the data thoroughly, and look for a pattern found in each selection's answers. Next, (2) the significant statements per transcript that pertained to PTG were extracted. On a separate sheet, the statements were recorded, noting their transcript numbers, page numbers, and line numbers. Then, (3) significant statements are thoroughly examined to construct formulated meanings. Subsequently, (4) the formulated meanings were sorted into categories, clusters of themes, and themes. Then, (5) the findings were integrated into exhaustive descriptions of PTG. Afterward, (6) the findings were reduced, and redundant descriptions were eliminated from the overall structure. Lastly, (7) the research findings were returned to the respondents for validation to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Given the sensitive topic of this research, various ethical considerations are considered while conducting the study. Participants are protected under the Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act, which requires the security of all types of information, whether private, personal, or sensitive. Another law that protects the participants' privacy is under the Code of Ethics and Professional Standards for Psychologists Section 10, entitled research, which discusses every right of the participants to join or withdraw from that study and the essential ethical considerations that the researchers considered. Thus, the researchers also seek Mr. Richard G. Tedeschi and Mr. Lawrence G. Calhoun for permission to utilize the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), used in the study as a screening tool only, in honor of its creator. The researcher utilized PTGI to determine whether or not each individual was qualified and had posttraumatic growth. Furthermore, the researchers debriefed after the virtual interview and gave the participants a mindfulness breathing exercise to ensure no harm was brought to the participants. Lastly, as a gift for participating in the study, the participants received a token of appreciation from the researchers.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS



Figure 1. ADL's SIBOL of Posttraumatic Growth

In the in-depth analysis of Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenological Method of each respondent, five themes with three corresponding subsets have emerged. The following classify the PTG experienced by COVID-19 survivors who experienced severe symptoms. The themes are (a) savor, (b) invigorating, (c) benevolence, (d) optimism, and (e) light as shown in Figure 1.

A1. Savor

Savor can be defined as attending, appreciating, and enhancing positive experiences that occur in one's life. The term denotes a process and represents the counterpart of coping (Duran, 2021). This refers to the respondents' ability to set objectives and make plans, emphasizing their deeper realization of the importance of time and each moment in their lives.

A1.1 Visionary

According to a blog entitled How to Inspire Change and Drive Personal Growth in the Workplace, developing a vision needs creativity, emotional intelligence, and strategic thinking and is a great way to promote personal growth. This sub theme involves the respondents' discernment of future opportunities and a strong desire to live a meaningful life (Saleh, 2023). As mentioned by the COVID-19 survivors:

As I have said, I did not want to study; I didn't even know why I shifted to that perspective to do it. But I always arrived at an answer that I would do it for my sake and my family's. Even at the age of 44, I still have the plan to go to school, but I am willing to accept those challenges. (CS6)

A1.2 Flourishing in Career

As a result of what the respondents had experienced, they developed fulfillment in their lives through doing the most important, desirable, and worthwhile tasks. Seligman (2011) concluded that to flourish, one can seek life with greater goals to live life to the fullest. As indicated by the COVID-19 survivors:

It's because you will realize that this is already your second life, so you will live your life to the fullest. You will do all the things that you want to do. Are you just going to do the same thing that's happening in your life? Are you just going to do computer stuff and encoding? (CS3)

A1.3 Recognition

Spencer (2012) defines recognition as a feeling, sense, or belief that there is something bigger than we are. When the fragility of life is revealed, a person may reconsider the meaning of their existence. This corresponds to the respondents acknowledging numerous life circumstances and remaining grateful to have experienced them. As expressed by the COVID-19 survivors:

But in life, they said that you will not learn if you haven't experienced any serious negative events. In that downfall, to all those negative things, that's where we will learn. So, for me, my experience with life and death situations is the number one reason why I learned. (CS1)

A2. Invigorating

According to Sydney City Psychology on *Creative ways to feel good during COVID lockdowns* (2021), where Psychologist Angel-Lee Aube discussed a method for fostering well-being during the COVID-19 lockdown, invigorating senses through discovering countless imaginative ways that can stimulate minds and energies. Likewise, respondents could also consider the invigorating support from others that assisted them in exhibiting a firmness of mind and a strong will to live.

A2.1 Affirmation for Others

According to a blog post by Montijo conveying twenty (20) positive affirmations for a fulfilling life, affirmations can help regain composure and give enough confidence to make useful decisions rather than being driven by fear. Likewise, acquiring a newfound strength through encouragement from others provided ways for the COVID-19 survivors to achieve PTG. As some of the COVID-19 survivors stated:

Of course, medicine really does help, but there is a different impact when the people around me help me ease my mind. What strengthens my emotions are those people who are sincerely upholding me. It set my mind that I needed to recover because there were a

lot of people who loved me. That's why, for me, they are my remedy because medicines can only limit you to recovering physically.(CS8)

A2.2 Thriving

Thriving is more focused on one's performance on such tasks, which is assessed based on how well an activity, operation, or procedure is carried out (Brown, Arnold, Fletcher, & Standage, 2017). This subtheme refers to the eagerness of the respondents to live and to reflect a higher level of well-being and performance across a series of situations. As shared by some of the COVID-19 survivors:

We still have to work hard so that we can see the essence and importance of what's happening in our lives. It is like having oneself as an enemy if we do not choose to be brave. (CS10)

A2.3 Valiant

Relying on the certain definition of Valiant itself from the Dictionary, an act of remaining courageous amidst the difficult circumstances brought by the COVID-19 virus ultimately led the respondents to develop PTG. More so, valiant as a subtheme also refers to the respondents' ability to adjust their beliefs and ways of living and align them more favorably. As uttered by some of the COVID-19 survivors:

Before, I was a sensitive person, but after going through and dealing with the COVID-19 virus, I have learned to be courageous. I molded my emotions into thinking that not all things should be cried for and that you should not be sensitive to all various things. I think, after going through that adversity, I think of myself as a fighter who defeated the COVID-19 virus. (CS3)

A3. Benevolence

Brandt (1976) describes that a benevolent person is driven to take any action that he believes would likely avoid any reductions in others' happiness and well-being and will enhance it instead. Similarly, respondents of the study were also able to convey their willingness to show kindness and compassion towards other people as soon as they recovered from the traumatic experience.

A3.1 Humility

When handling interpersonal conflict, competitiveness, and accepting criticism, persons who exhibit humility are expected to handle these circumstances better than others (Yücel & Arslantürk, 2019). Likewise, one of the remarkable changes the respondents experienced was their ability to set aside negative emotions towards other people to acknowledge and appreciate their second life in a way that expresses humility despite interpersonal conflict. As stated by the COVID-19 survivors:

That's why, as I was recovering from my COVID-19 virus experience, I appreciated more of the people around me. I removed the hate because it is just tiring to feel negative. I forgive those who hurt me, and after that, I look at my life as something that is important and that I should take care of every second.(CS3)

A3.2 Exceptional

In a blog post by Christof (2019) about the qualities that make an exceptional care worker, it is conveyed that the true difference is created by someone's enthusiasm for aiding the less fortunate. Similar to the respondents' eagerness to show compassion to others with their unique ways of extending help to those in need. As some of the COVID-19 survivors said:

After recovering from the COVID-19 virus, I learned that it greatly affected me. So now, when I know someone is in need of help or in pain, I feel like I also feel that pain, and I also feel like I am the one who is having the problem too. The next thing I know is that I am finding ways just to help other people.(CS2)

A3.3 Cultivating

An article by [Koydemir \(2020\)](#) said that understanding how we relate to people and the world around us and how we make sense of it is another aspect of cultivating a sense of purpose in life. This subtheme emphasizes the respondents' act of nurturing themselves, sharing and expressing their life testimonies, and learnings from the traumatic events they have been through. As claimed by some of the COVID-19 survivors:

Actually, my interest is more to ... more into writing... I love to write, and then even the things that I experienced, I write it too... what I write, I share it with my friends, not only on Facebook but also on private means. I talked about it with my friends, and then I shared the meaning of those words; I told them that life is like this because you have to do this, you have to do that, so you can sort it out. And I evangelize in one way or the other.(CS4)

A4. Optimism

According to [Scott \(2022\)](#), optimism is a mental attitude marked by hope and belief in success and a bright future. It involves demonstrating a positive outlook in life despite traumatic experiences, faith included. It focuses more on looking at the comforting prospect of life after an adverse event.

A4.1 Steadfast

Steadfastness is not a virtue that blooms in comfort but rather in conflict, afflictions, and uncertainty ([Mathis, 2021](#)). This refers to the respondent's realization of developing deeper faith in God despite experiencing difficulties. As one of the COVID-19 survivors put it:

I also changed in terms of being religious. Before when I was too workaholic, I lose time in that aspect of my life. I didn't even attend the mass, read the bible, or even attended the bible study. But after getting Covid-19 and recovering from that virus physically, and emotionally, I realized that in times of trouble, God is always with me. God and my family did not neglect me. After that, I became somewhat like a prodigal son, I changed and made enormous changes in myself.(CS3)

A4.2 Fortified

Fortified is defined as strengthened or protected ([Fortified definition, n.d.](#)). This includes developing a strong defense and support from the family and the respondents' greater intimacy in the family. As some of the COVID-19 survivors described it:

Especially with my family, one big realization for me is that in times of trouble, they are here for me. When I got home and recovered emotionally, I hugged them really tight, my children, my parents, and my in-laws. Before I felt like I was trapped, trapped in a scary room while being sick. (CS3)

A4.3 Cognizance

It is the range of what one can know or understand and the breadth of what one can perceive ([Cognizance definition, n.d.](#)). It involves the respondents' awareness through recognizing all life forms, such as nature, animals, and other living things. As mentioned by the COVID-19 survivors:

Your environment, nature, so that you can appreciate all living things in life. There are a lot of negative things and happenings, but they still have a variety of positive things that we can see in life.(CS2)

A5. Light

Light symbolizes that hope always remains ([Miller's Guild, 2023](#)). This refers to the new changes the respondents had experienced and various transitions that occurred in their lives, generating new possibilities.

A5.1 Adaptable

Being adaptable in your thoughts may help you see things differently Saavedra (n.d.). This refers to the welcoming and embracing of the recent changes in life within the self. As stated by the COVID-19 survivors:

I felt like I suddenly realized that you need to remove your excess baggage and unspoken feelings. Even if they know that you loved them, you still have to let them hear it, it is still much better to let them know through word of mouth. Then afterward, I learned to myself how to be accepting, I slowly accepted the negative things that happened in my life, though I know that it is still there, now I learned how to express my feelings, to reach out to others, something that I cannot do before. I realized the importance of talking to others about your feelings, especially if you are in dire need of help or pain. And I no longer resist change, before I do not want to change because I always felt like something bad will happen, but now I embrace the changes happening within me.(CS5)

A5.2 Active

Being active is something positive that one can do to make one's life better (*What is being active?*, n.d.). This includes being aware of the importance of nourishing both mind and body. As uttered by some of the COVID-19 survivors:

But these past few weeks, whenever I feel sad or sudden sadness, or when I feel like having an anxiety attack what I do is either asked my husband to go outside to breathe or I kept myself busy. I baked, cooked, or even talked to my co-teachers, have conversations with them, stroll, and did anything to divert my attention.(CS1)

A5.3 Venturesome

The term venturesome describes someone willing to take chances (*Venturesome definition*, n.d.). This can also refer to the respondents stepping out of their comfort zone and outside their safe space. As mentioned by some of the COVID-19 survivors:

Before, I am not the outgoing type of person... I always settled into my comfort zone, or things that I felt familiar and safe. After experiencing all the things that happened to me, the Covid-19 virus, and breakdowns, I realized that I missed a lot of things and that I will miss varieties of things if I will stay only in my comfort zone. I think the term for my growth is awakening. I became aware of the things I lacked, and I think of using my second life to correct it. Growth for me taught me how to socialize with others that I didn't even do before. I cared for them a lot, especially with what happened and communicate everything now. (CS7)

4 DISCUSSION

This study focuses on how COVID-19 survivors were still able to develop PTG following a life-threatening situation as a hospitalized patient and suffered from severe symptoms of the said virus. The concept of growing through adversity is not relatively new, and it is a well-known idea to others as the calm after a storm. However, there are only a minimal number of existing local studies of PTG conducted in the Philippines, and most of them focus on the PTG among victims of calamity and natural disasters (Chan, Ho, Tedeschi, & Leung, 2011; Nalipay, Bernardo, & Mordeno, 2017) and grieving parents (Villazor & De Guzman, 2022). As a result, few relevant literature were cited. As described by the respondents during the initial phase of their battle between life and death situation with the COVID-19 virus, the negative emotions that appeared, such as vulnerability, fear, doubts, discouragement, and hopelessness, were unquestionably high intensity. Although PTG involves acquiring positive changes after a particular traumatic event, the PTG literature does not attempt to deny that negative reactions to adversity are a natural part of the human experience (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

This research study intends to determine how the respondents perceive PTG after they have recovered from the severe COVID-19 virus. Results were interpreted using the five themes that

emerged from the analysis. The first theme, savor, comprises the respondents' capacity to create goals and make plans, highlighting their greater understanding of the value of time and each moment in their lives. Next is invigorating, which involves the consideration of the encouragement and support of others as they demonstrate a strong desire to live and mental toughness in the face of adversity. The theme also emphasizes the respondents' finding the courage to take care of themselves during their isolation, knowing that the virus is fought inside a room with four corners and in the middle of uncertainty. Given the fact that the psychological burden while physically recovering from the virus was heightened since they were detached from their family and peers, the third theme, named benevolence, came forth. It indicates the respondent's greater need and appreciation of building connections with others, conveying a willingness to show compassion and goodwill to the people around them in all ways a COVID-19 survivor can do. Also, as a result of continuous support and encouragement through numerous ways from family, peers, and even from the people they least expected still arise, it helped them completely accept that they need others to cope with their challenging circumstances.

This result is consistent with the findings of the PTG proponents (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) regarding the factors that people who have experienced posttraumatic growth report changes relating to others. Respondents also developed spiritual enlightenment that enabled them to build a strong foundation of courage in overcoming adversity and determining the purpose of such events. These findings were also backed up and expanded on the idea of PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Consequently, the theme of optimism arose, which indicates how the respondents maintained positivity, including faith, amid adversity. Lastly, light, which pertains to the respondents' new experiences and numerous transformations in their lives, symbolizes hope amidst the traumatic situation, which has resulted in new possibilities. The respondents were also able to recognize and practice mindfulness and self-regulation of those negative emotions and, thus, considered those as a stepping-stone in making meaning and purpose from their traumatic experiences that gradually led them to PTG. This is in relation to the theory of Garland, Hanley, Goldin, and Gross (2017), which emphasizes the innate psychological ability of an individual to properly process natural stress responses and contribute to the development of positive meanings present in PTG. As supported by literature (Tuncay & Musabak, 2015; Larsen & Berenbaum, 2015), knowing that people might differ on how to respond to trauma, it has been demonstrated how emotion-focused coping techniques such as acceptance of the current circumstance as well as trying to consider it as a challenge rather than a problem served as a pathway for the respondents to attain PTG.

As the severity of PTG was described by the respondents as life-threatening compared with their previous life experiences, respondents were psychologically shaken, and it can be assumed that some degree of posttraumatic stress has been developed, driving them to achieve PTG. Such findings are similar to several studies asserting that the greater the number of PTS symptoms that emerge, the higher the PTG can be reported as specific indications leading to discovering newfound strength within oneself (Hall et al., 2010). Generally, the gathered data reflects the rapid transformation of COVID-19 survivors from a sense of hopelessness to a restoration of their commitment to different aspects of life. As seen from the findings, respondents were able to promote the re-establishment of one's general self-worth and self-awareness in terms of physical health and lifestyle since the importance of health is common knowledge for everyone, and the battle with COVID-19 virus primarily affects the individual's health state. Additionally, one of the most important implications from the responses gathered after a traumatic event is the emerging self-awareness to identify their values, passions, emotions, and influence on others.

Interestingly, respondents came up with an amplified understanding of how other people view them, how they are showing empathy, and taking others' perspectives to sustain better relationships. Indeed, commitment and determination become even more apparent when challenged. Another study's most notable findings are the respondents' different perspectives on the value of their existence after being recovered from the COVID-19 virus. The majority of the respondents came up with a realization that everything in life is a constantly changing condition and is not always beyond human control, where endless opportunities do not exist, individual strength is limited, and the unfavorable situation will always find their spot, which aims to assess

one's weaknesses; however, it is where PTG takes place.

5 CONCLUSION

There are times in our lives when an event profoundly impacts our well-being. Those experiences shake us to the core and send out multiple shockwaves that can rock every corner of our world. When this adversity takes place in our lives, it can be both burdensome and life-altering to us, which can be the catalyst for personal growth. In brief, PTG is both a transformation process and a potential outcome after grave adversity. This has been prominent among the COVID-19 survivors who experienced severe symptoms and underwent a life-and-death situation. They endure a variety of negative emotions, ranging from being gripped by fear to being burdened by sadness.

They have, however, gone through a life transition that allows them to view adversity as a challenge to which they can rise and contribute to their growth, which is how PTG emerged. More so, researchers obtained the necessary information from the COVID-19 survivors through semi-structured interviews conducted virtually and face-to-face. This led the researchers to answer the central question of their study, which is, "What does Posttraumatic Growth mean to individuals who recovered from COVID-19?" To answer the study's central question, five themes have been identified using Colaizzi's seven steps for descriptive phenomenological data analysis. Five major themes were constructed, specifically: (1) savor, (2) invigorating, (3) benevolent, (4) optimism, and (5) light, which then abbreviated as SIBOL, a Tagalog word that means sprout, growth, spring that symbolizes the beginning of the growth of COVID-19 survivors. This research shows that there can be a silver lining to negative experiences that can transform into something positive in their lives.

More so, throughout the initial phase of the respondents' struggle between life and death with the COVID-19 virus, the negative feelings that occurred, such as vulnerability, fear, doubts, discouragement, and hopelessness, were undoubtedly high-intensity. Aside from those negative emotions along with the severe symptoms of the COVID-19 virus that the respondents had experienced, what also increased their burden was their detachment from family, peers, and the environment, which remarkably affected their mental state. Nonetheless, the findings of this study show that COVID-19 survivors can emerge stronger from the pandemic's most trying times and that PTG can lead them to a life of greater meaning and deeper happiness, as Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) also have demonstrated in their research. Certainly, they perceived the PTG as an opportunity to live differently, this time embracing the new positive changes in their lives.

They have experienced a change in themselves as they become more accepting of their vulnerabilities, a change in relationships as they have more compassion for others, and a change in their philosophy of life as they re-evaluate all of their previous beliefs and priorities into something more meaningful. The researchers hope that those going through adversity while reading this research will find it comforting to know that something more positive is happening: something that will allow them to experience positive changes due to a negative experience, which is Posttraumatic Growth (PTG).

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