

# Posttraumatic growth in women of domestic violence

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## Abstract

Domestic violence can have serious psychological, physical and emotional effects on victims. But some victims are able to recover through posttraumatic growth a positive change following trauma. This study aims to explore the dynamics of posttraumatic growth in female victims of domestic violence by differentiating the process in the early adult and late adult age categories. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with phenomenological methods to understand in depth the experiences of the participants consisting of two female victims of domestic violence. Data was collected through in-depth interviews focusing on aspects of post-traumatic growth. The results showed that there are some differences in the post-traumatic growth process in early adulthood and late adulthood. Early adult subjects focus more on self-development, exploring new careers, expanding friendship networks, and demonstrating independence and personal resilience. Whereas late adult subjects emphasized happiness in small moments with family, deepening existing relationships, the ability to deal with conflict, and higher spiritual changes. This difference in focus reflects the influence of age phase on priorities and coping strategies in achieving post-traumatic growth, with early adulthood tending to seek change and exploration, whereas late adulthood prioritizes emotional stability and acceptance of life. The results of this study are expected to be the basis for improving and accelerating the achievement of victims of domestic violence at the posttraumatic growth stage.

## Keywords

Domestic violence, Posttraumatic growth, Women

## Introduction

When two individuals commit to marriage, they typically aspire for a harmonious union that endures throughout their lives. Each family member, in turn, plays a vital role in the smooth functioning of the household [1]. However, in reality domestic life frequently encounters a range of conflicts, which may emerge due to a variety of factors, including differing opinions, personality backgrounds, interests, needs, and misunderstandings. Unfortunately, not all couples possess the ability to manage these conflicts in a constructive manner, such as through open and effective communication. Instead,

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some choose to express their frustrations through verbal assaults, curses, or even physical violence, exacerbating the situation and further damaging the relationship between partners, ultimately leading to domestic violence [2].

Data from CATAHU 2019-2023 illustrates the incidence of violence against women, with 1,277 cases reported in 2019, rising to 2,134 cases in 2020, and 3,838 cases in 2021. However, the number slightly declined in 2022 with 3,442 cases, followed by a further reduction in 2023 to 3,303 cases. The majority of these instances involved violence against wives, accounting for 1,573 cases in 2023, while violence against children amounted to 518 cases, and violence in dating relationships totaled 496 cases. Among the most prevalent forms of violence against wives, psychological violence led with 3,489 cases, followed by physical violence with 2,081 cases, sexual violence with 2,078 cases, and economic violence with 762 cases [3].

Domestic violence is a behavior that causes violence in the form of psychological, physical, verbal, economic, sexual and spiritual violence [4]. The impact of domestic violence includes anxiety, stress, trauma, loss of self-confidence [5], low self-esteem and feeling inadequate, acting aggressively, daydreaming and crying, difficulty sleeping, self-harm and even wanting to end their lives [1].

Based on the findings of the preliminary study, which was conducted through interviews with victims of domestic violence, Subject S experienced psychological and economic violence for four years. Psychological violence is manifested in the form of neglect of personal time and relentless demands for household chores rooted in patriarchal culture, while economic violence is manifested in the form of neglect of family responsibilities and failure to provide maintenance. The consequences of this violence left Subject S with stress, emotional pain and a profound loss of trust. For a year after her traumatic experience, Subject S attempted to rebuild her life by finding comfort in faith, seeking support from her family, and building her self-confidence. After these efforts, Subject S felt more resilient, independent and had greater inner calm and peace. With this preliminary study, the author would like to explore the dynamics of posttraumatic growth by distinguishing the process in the early adult and late adult categories.

Posttraumatic growth is the process of an individual struggle with the new reality after experiencing trauma which is crucial in determining the extent to which posttraumatic growth can be realized [6]. The concept of posttraumatic growth in women suggests that women not only return to a normal state but that they can grow beyond their previous state as a result of their experience [7]. Evidence of posttraumatic growth can be seen in changes in self-perception, interpersonal relationships, philosophy of life, appreciation of life and finding new possibilities [8].

Aspects of Posttraumatic growth include a) Appreciation of life, which is the result of positive cognitive development after experiencing a traumatic experience by changing priorities and giving meaning to small things. b) Relationships with others changes in

relationships with others, which strengthen social relationships, increase appreciation for support from family and friends. Good relationships will help in the PTG process. c) Personal strength is an individual realizing abilities and strengths that were not previously realized, making them better prepared to face life's challenges. d) Spiritual change is an individual's strength in fighting trauma by getting closer to God. e) New life and possibilities: individuals find new meanings and possibilities that were previously unthinkable [6].

Factors that influence posttraumatic growth are a) Distress trauma experiences can trigger psychological growth, where individuals are encouraged to find new meaning and adapt to adversity, b) Personality characteristics such as openness to experience, resilience, and responsibility can affect PTG, c) Coping Strategies in problem solving are related to cognitive processing in individuals so that they can determine the level of PTG experienced, d) Social Support, support from family and friends provides emotional strength and makes it easier for individuals to overcome trauma, e) World Assumptions PTG occurs when individuals change their world assumptions, adjusting their beliefs to the new reality after trauma, f) Rumination Positive forms of rumination can aid the individual's growth process, g) Spirituality can provide emotional support and provide calm and peace, and h) Optimism, optimistic behavior after experiencing trauma can affect the PTG process [6].

The results of previous research show that posttraumatic growth experienced by subjects of domestic violence victims showed positive changes in their lives and were able to develop themselves to be better than before [9]. Survivors of domestic violence can achieve posttraumatic growth by having a positive attitude and personal strength [10]. Positive changes experienced include improved social and environmental relationships, engagement in new activities, an optimistic view of the future, and greater appreciation of life [11].

Based on the explanation above, the authors want to explore more deeply how the dynamics of posttraumatic growth take place in victims of domestic violence. The difference between this research and previous research is related to the characteristics of the developmental stages of the research participants. Research shows that the research conducted focuses on early adult subjects [9]. While in this study researchers tried to compare the dynamics of posttraumatic growth in research participants who were in the early adult category and participants in the late adult category. This research will explain how the posttraumatic growth process and the factors that help achieve posttraumatic growth. The purpose of this study is to explore in depth the dynamics of posttraumatic growth in victims of domestic violence by identifying the dynamics of posttraumatic growth in victims of domestic violence. The results of this study are expected to be the basis for improving and accelerating the achievement of victims of domestic violence at the posttraumatic growth stage.

## Method

Researchers use descriptive qualitative research, which is research conducted by analyzing data and interpreting the text of interview results which aims to find the meaning of a phenomenon [12]. The phenomenological approach is used by researchers to obtain an in-depth, detailed and comprehensive understanding of information related to the dynamics of posttraumatic growth in female victims of domestic violence.

The criteria for participants in this study were 1) female, 2) age 20-60 years, 3) had experienced domestic violence, 4) has reached posttraumatic growth, 5) domiciled in Magelang, 6) willing to participate in this study. All research subjects gave written informed consent after receiving a complete explanation of the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of the study. To maintain data confidentiality, all participant data were stored in encrypted digital form and could only be accessed by the principal investigator and research assistants. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the participant's home. Before the interview began, the researcher always ensured that the participant was comfortable and willing to continue.

The data collection technique in this study used in-depth interviews. In-depth interview is a way of collecting data or information by directly meeting face to face with informants in order to obtain complete and in-depth data [12]. In this study, researchers used a semi-structured interview type, namely asking open-ended questions using an interview guide designed to explore various aspects of posttraumatic growth using the theory of Tedeschi and Calhoun. By asking open questions to obtain and explore in-depth information on posttraumatic growth in victims of domestic violence.

The data analysis used in this study uses three stages that are carried out systematically, namely 1) Researchers select, simplify and convert raw data into a form that makes it easy to analyze (data reduction), 2) Researchers then organized and presented the data in a more meaningful way to help show patterns, relationships or themes (data display, 3) Researchers began to draw final conclusions based on the results of the previous stages, identifying emerging themes and understanding information (conclusion drawing) [12].

## Results and Discussion

### Results

This study uses two subjects who are female victims of domestic violence in the early adult and late adult categories. Participant 1, namely 30-year-old T experienced domestic violence for 6 years. Participant 2, 47-year-old R experienced domestic violence for 10 years. The description of domestic violence behavior in these participants is outlined in Table 1. The description related to the violent behavior received by the subjects in this study is described in Table 2. Table 2 will provide a description related to the history of cases of violence experienced by the subjects such as the intensity, location of violence and form of violence experienced by the research subjects.

Table 1. Participant Identity

	Subject 1	Subject 2
Name	T	R
Age	30 years	47 years
Length of marriage	7 years	22 years
Duration of violence	6 years	10 years

Table 2. Case History

	Subject T	Subject R
Intensity of violence	Almost every day	Almost every day
Location of violence	At home	At home
Forms of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal abuse such as cursing, swearing, and insults.</li> <li>• Physical violence such as throwing things, kicking, slapping and threats.</li> <li>• Psychic abuse such as not giving her the opportunity to spend time with herself.</li> <li>• Economic violence husband does not provide maintenance, always required to work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verbal abuse is daily hurling insults, curses, animal words.</li> <li>• Physical violence, threats of being killed and evicted,</li> <li>• Psychological abuse, not being given time for oneself.</li> <li>• Economic violence such as the husband not providing for the family,</li> </ul>
Hardness factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Husband caught cheating</li> <li>• Husband gambles</li> <li>• Husband takes out an online loan</li> <li>• Getting drunk</li> <li>• When the wife does not fulfill the husband's needs, violence will occur</li> <li>• Temperamental husband</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caught cheating,</li> <li>• Getting drunk</li> <li>• When the wife does not fulfill the husband's needs.</li> </ul>
Impact of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical injuries to the back and hands</li> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Feelings of distress</li> <li>• Social embarrassment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical injuries</li> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Desire to end life</li> <li>• Crying</li> <li>• Hurt feelings</li> <li>• Trauma with men</li> </ul>

Source: interview result

In this study, the dynamics of posttraumatic growth in the three victims of domestic violence showed various responses from each participant. The first participant (T) felt happier and grateful to God and interpreted the little things in his life. While the second participant (R) changed her life priorities to prioritize herself. Table 3 illustrates the differences in Appreciation of Life, Improved Relationships with Others, Personal Strength, Spiritual Change, New Life and Possibilities that affect the posttraumatic growth process in both participants.

Various factors that influence posttraumatic growth in both participants who are victims of domestic violence include distress, personality characteristics, coping strategies, social support, world assumptions, cognitive processing or rumination, spirituality, optimism. An overview of posttraumatic growth factors can be seen from Table 4.

Table 3. Posttraumatic Growth Dynamics

Posttraumatic Growth	Subject T	Subject R
Appreciation of Life	Appreciate myself and the little things, prioritize more and be aware of personal wellbeing, evaluate life priorities, plan a new career.	Giving more meaning to small moments with children, focusing more on personal happiness such as doing hobbies and strengthening relationships with friends, prioritizing myself more.
Improved Relationships with Others	Strengthening relationships with family and friends, expanding friendships by joining communities, building new relationships more selectively.	Keeping in touch with old friends, deepening relationships with children, active in social activities.
Personal Strength	Realizing that I have great resilience, being able to be independent without my husband, having the strength and ideas to continue my new life.	View themselves as capable of facing life's challenges, can handle conflict and emotions well.
Spiritual Change	Getting closer to Allah by increasing prayer and remembrance, feeling peaceful, calm and realizing to accept what has happened.	Surrendering herself to God and believing that God will help her in the future, spirituality has an impact on her emotional state such as feeling peaceful and calm.
New Life and Possibilities	Having the enthusiasm to do work that is of interest and explore places that have never been visited, building a better life by prioritizing self.	Working to support herself and her children only, doing activities that she enjoys without any restrictions.

Source: interview result

Table 4. Posttraumatic growth factors

Posttraumatic Growth	Subject T	Subject R
Distress	The violence experienced made her realize her life goals and priorities.	The violence she experienced made her a more resilient person. By finding a new life goal that will make her and her children happier.
Personality Characteristics	Has a positive personality, is able to bounce back from difficult situations and is optimistic that her future will be happier.	A positive personality gives her the strength to rise from her difficult times, believing she will get a better life and making traumatic experiences a learning experience.
Coping Strategies	Doing fun things, such as travelling to places she hasn't visited and spending time with loved ones.	Doing night prayers, participating in social activities and doing her hobbies.
Social Support	The support of family and friends is a source of strength.	Support from family, community and friends helps her to move on from trauma.
World Assumptions	Believes he can create a new and better life. Confident that she can achieve her goals.	Believes she can be happy without a partner and is able to support herself and her children.
Cognitive Processing or Rumination	The violence experienced is used as learning for her new life.	The traumatic experience made her think to save herself first, by saving herself then the children feel good things.
Spirituality	Gives a sense of peace, calm, and grateful for what God has give.	There is a feeling of calm and more peaceful living.
Optimism	Having an optimistic personality makes it easier to rise from trauma.	A sense of optimism that they will find a better life

Source: interview result



### Discussion

The results of the research that have been conducted provide an overview of the forms of domestic violence on women while building a household including physical violence, verbal violence, psychological violence, and economic violence. physical violence experienced such as throwing things, kicking, hitting to cause injury. Psychological violence experienced by victims such as not being given time for themselves, and threats to be killed and expelled. Physical violence is an act that causes pain and injury, while psychological violence is an act that can cause fear, loss of confidence, severe psychological suffering [13], [14] Verbal violence experienced by the subject such as diatribes, curses, threatening words, harsh words and animal words. In addition, economic violence experienced such as not being provided for daily life, being required to work while the husband does not work. Verbal violence is carried out in the form of diatribes, curses, insults while economic violence is the behavior of forcing to work, not providing income for family needs [1], [15]. The factors that trigger domestic violence include infidelity, alcohol, gambling, patriarchal culture, and temperament [15], [14] Infidelity, feeling betrayed and hurt by seeing your husband in a relationship with another woman can trigger domestic violence. Gambling and alcohol consumption can reduce self-control and trigger aggressive behavior that can lead to violence [16]. In addition, patriarchal culture, where men are the dominant party in the family, uses violence as a way to solve problems, especially when women's rights are considered inferior. Temperamental or irritable factors trigger domestic violence [17].

Domestic violence has a significant impact on victims, both physically, psychologically, and socially. The physical impact felt by victims is in the form of injuries, the psychological impact felt such as, heartache, stress, trauma, desire to end life while social impacts such as embarrassment to interact with the surrounding environment. Domestic violence is any act against a person, especially women, which results in physical, sexual, psychological, and/or domestic neglect, including threats to commit acts, coercion, or unlawful deprivation of independence within the scope of the household [13]. The impact of violence can be divided into two categories, namely first, short-term impacts which are usually direct in nature such as physical injury, disability, loss of work, and so on. Second, long-term impacts such as psychological disorders, self-isolation, trauma, fear and depression [14], [5].

The results showed that the two of victims of domestic violence experienced posttraumatic growth in the form of, first, Appreciation of Life. Subject T reported increased feelings of happiness, gratitude, and appreciation for the seemingly mundane aspects of their lives, which they now perceived as more meaningful. Meanwhile, Subject R make more meaning of small moments with her children and focus on personal happiness by strengthening relationships with friends. This change is part of the cognitive development process in dealing with trauma, whereby subjects experience significant alterations in their perception of life [6]. Priorities that were previously considered important undergo a shift, with things that were once taken for

granted acquiring greater meaning. This process demonstrates how trauma can prompt a person to reassess their values. The experience of trauma triggers changes in perception and meaning, making the simple aspects of life more valued [9].

Second, Improved relationships with other, Subject T experience of domestic violence led to a strengthening of relationships with family and friends, an expansion of her social network through joining communities, and a greater selectivity in forming new relationships. In contrast, Subject R experience resulted in the reinforcement of existing friendships and a deeper connection with her children. During the trauma recovery process, emotional support from close individuals, such as family and friends, is of significant importance. The formation of closer interpersonal relationships provides victims with a sense of security and moral support in dealing with the effects of trauma [18]. Active engagement in social activities has been shown to strengthen the recovery process, with positive interactions providing the strength to cope with the challenges that arise. Support from others can positively influence the comfort and security experienced during the coping process, which in turn can facilitate posttraumatic growth [19].

Third, the subject's positive personal strength enables them to achieve a state of happiness, and the traumatic experience provides insights and strategies for continuing life and resilience in the face of adversity. Subject T realized that he had great resilience and was able to be independent. Subject R sees herself as able to face life's challenges for the next life and can be confident that he can deal well with conflict and emotions. The capacity to emerge from traumatic experiences with robust self-belief and the capacity to effect change in situations that require it. Individuals with strong self-belief are able to perceive traumatic experiences as opportunities for personal growth rather than obstacles [20]. Traumatic events often give rise to new ideas and innovations that facilitate the restoration of happiness. This resilience enables individuals to adapt to the pressures of life and transform themselves for the better. As a result of this process, individuals not only recover from trauma but also construct a more meaningful life [9].

Fourth, spiritual change, both subjects experienced spiritual changes where the domestic violence that happened to them made the subjects get closer to God. The difference between the two subjects is in the way they get closer to God. Subject T by increasing prayer, dhikr and reading the Al-Quran. Subject R by praying at night and surrendering his life to God. Spirituality serves as an efficacious coping mechanism, whereby an individual experiences a sense of calm and peace despite being under pressure due to trauma [21]. Spirituality provides a context in which victims can acknowledge and accept their traumatic experiences, facilitating the process of self-forgiveness and the capacity to forgive the perpetrator [20]. Furthermore, spirituality offers a sense of connection to a higher power, providing a sense of purpose and meaning to life, which is crucial in the recovery process [22].

Fifth, new life and possibilities, the new life aspect that emerges after a traumatic experience provides an opportunity for the subject to build a better life. Subject T has



the enthusiasm to build her new career and explore unvisited places. Subject R focused on work to support himself and her children. Through this process, individuals not only concentrate on recuperating from trauma, but also play an active role in forging a more optimistic and promising future [9].

The results of research on factors that influence posttraumatic growth,

1. Distress, the suffering experienced due to domestic violence makes the subject feel sad, stressed, depressed. The suffering experienced motivated the subject to create a new life and change her life priorities. But, the suffering experienced not only affects the emotional aspect, but also changes the cognitive process. The suffering experienced by the subject motivates her to create a better life and change the direction of her life goals and appreciate the little things that were ignored in her previous life. This process leads to the discovery of personal strengths and new wisdom as a foundation for achieving posttraumatic growth [20].
2. Personality Characteristics subject has a positive personality, Subject T has a positive and optimistic personality and shows strong resilience. Subject T believes that he is able to achieve happiness after the trauma experienced. Meanwhile, Subject R has a positive personality as a source of her strength to get up. The experience of domestic violence experienced is used as a lesson for a better life. They was able to get up and continue his life better, showing a progression from trauma to recovery. The posttraumatic growth process is influenced by the personality characteristics of individuals who are open to new experiences and optimistic. Factors such as openness, extroversion and optimism have a significant positive impact on accelerating and strengthening PTG. In this case, individuals who have positive character traits tend to adapt more quickly and achieve better psychological growth after experiencing trauma [20], [23].
3. Strategic coping, the coping strategies carried out by the two subjects to assist in the posttraumatic growth process, Subject T by doing fun activities and spending time with loved ones. While Subject R by getting closer to God and participating in social activities. These coping strategies are related to the cognitive processes experienced by individuals, where the way a person processes their thoughts can determine how much potential post-traumatic growth has. The better the coping strategies used, the greater the chances of an individual achieving PTG. This suggests that the way a person deals with stress greatly influences the psychological outcomes they experience after trauma [23].
4. Social support, the subject was given support from family, friends and the community. The support provided played an important role in the subject's recovery. Family was always present and supported every decision the subject made while friends provided emotional support which was very meaningful in the recovery process. This social support not only helped the subject feel more valued and understood, but also accelerated the posttraumatic growth process by improving the

quality of life. The existence of consistent social support can provide a sense of security and higher self-confidence [19].

5. World Assumption, both subjects believe that they have the ability to create a better life, including achieving goals and happiness, even without a partner. This belief is reflected in their efforts to support themselves and their children independently. The traumatic events experienced may have damaged the individual's initial beliefs about the world, but in the end, the subject managed to rebuild her outlook on life more positively. This narrative reconstruction process allows the subject to see new opportunities and view trauma as part of the journey towards growth. Thus, trauma actually paves the way for the achievement of posttraumatic growth [20].
6. Rumination factor the violence experienced led the subject to reflect on his experience and to make it a lesson for her new life and to realise his wellbeing. Subject T reinterpreted the experience of domestic violence into learning. Subject R experience of domestic violence made her think about making himself happy first, because if he is happy, her children will be happy too. The subject's reflection is part of the cognitive process of thinking about solutions to the problems he faces. The violence experienced made the subject contemplate the steps that needed to be taken in order to get out of the situation and live a happier life. This rumination process plays an important role in the development of posttraumatic growth, as through deep thinking, individuals are able to identify better solutions. An adaptive and positive style of rumination can help individuals achieve better psychological growth in the future. However, if rumination is negative, it can slow down the recovery process [9].
7. Spiritual factors traumatic experiences encourage subjects to draw closer to God, making spirituality a source of strength in dealing with difficult situations. By getting closer to God, both subjects felt that spirituality provided a sense of calm, peace and gratitude. This process also helped the subjects to learn to forgive, accept and be grateful for existing circumstances, which ultimately supported post-traumatic growth. Spirituality provides meaning, a sense of control, and comfort, thus helping individuals to make sense of their traumatic experiences [23].
8. Optimism, both subject shows strong optimism in dealing with their lives after trauma. Subject T optimistic personality makes it easier for her to recover from the trauma. Meanwhile, subject R optimistic feelings become motivation and hope for herself to find a better life. They keep trying to see the future with the belief that there will be better things. This optimism is reflected in his efforts to create a new life that is better, hopeful, and full of purpose. The belief that a better future can be realized, accompanied by real effort, is the essence of optimism. Optimism also helps individuals persevere and move forward despite adversity [24].

The results showed that domestic violence experienced by individuals in both early and late adulthood categories has the potential to foster growth through the process of

post-traumatic growth (PTG). However, this process varies depending on age, personal characteristics, and social support. Both subjects demonstrated positive changes, such as finding meaning in life, strengthening relationships with others, discovering inner strength, and deepening spirituality. The implications for supporting the PTG process in victims of domestic violence include providing social support, fostering spirituality, and encouraging positive coping strategies. These approaches help victims overcome trauma, build emotional resilience, and lead more meaningful lives. Coping strategies also accelerate recovery and enhance psychological well-being. This development illustrates the victims' ability to adapt, overcome trauma, and create a more meaningful life. Women can move forward and achieve success after leaving a violent relationship, even if the violence has persisted for a long time [9].

## Conclusion

Based on the results of the research conducted, it can be concluded that both early and late adult victims of domestic violence experience domestic violence in the form of physical, psychological, verbal and economic violence. The effects of domestic violence include physical injuries, stress, shame, feelings of hurt and the desire to end life. There are several differences in the process of posttraumatic growth; in the early years, the subject is more focused on developing themselves, exploring new careers, expanding their network of friends and showing their independence and personal resilience. In contrast, the late adulthood category emphasizes happiness in small moments with family, deepening existing relationships, the ability to deal with conflict and higher spiritual changes. This difference in focus reflects the influence of age phase on priorities and coping strategies in achieving post-traumatic growth, with early adulthood tending to seek change and exploration, whereas late adulthood prioritizes emotional stability and acceptance of life. This research is still limited to two subjects, for future research the number of participants can be increased and explored in subjects of different genders.

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