

## Resilience as Correlates of Posttraumatic Growth among Silent Victims: A Study on Widows

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### Abstract:

Widows all over the world are the “invisible forgotten sufferers” who are highly affected by the “sin of omission”, as they are hardly visible in the record of many developing countries. There is a scant literature exploring especially the major psychological capital i.e. resilience among widows which intrinsically motivate them to grow aftermath trauma of demise of a husband. With these notions in mind, the current researchers initiated to assess “resilience and posttraumatic growth” among widows and to find out the link of resilience with posttraumatic growth (PTG). A group of 300 rural widows within the age range of 30 – 50 years was selected from the rural areas of Haryana and Punjab states (India). Standardized tools such as Wagnild and Young’s (1993), Resilience Scale and “Tedeschi and Calhoun’s (1996) Posttraumatic Growth Inventory” were used. “Descriptive statistics” and correlational analysis were calculated to find out the “level of resilience and posttraumatic growth” (overall and its various domains) and link of resilience with PTG. The findings indicated a very low level of resilience and an above average level of PTG among rural widows. Correlational analysis indicated the highly significant positive association of PTG (overall and its various domains) with resilience, thereby indicating that resilience facilitates growth in terms of establishing cordial relationships, searching out new possibilities, enhancing positive strength, boosting spirituality and by appreciating the minor gifts of life. The current findings have indicated that widows can flourish and thrive in their life after the demise spouse with the help of their own personal assets which may act as a resource of their growth. The current findings have implications for the counselor for counselling of widows for providing interventions based on strength-based perspective.

**Keywords:** Posttraumatic Growth, Resilience, Widows, Psychological Asset, Trauma.

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## Introduction

Death is an inevitable event as every living organism is mortal, even after knowing this fact the pain and sufferings after the demise of anyone especially the husband is insurmountable for the widows, who are the “silent victims”. They are regarded as “invisible forgotten sufferers”. They are treated as if they have committed sin. This heart-rending pathetic situation of widows is prevalent all over the world. In India, their plight is worst because of patriarchal society, where their existence is known through their husband’s status only. No doubt from last few decades their status is being improved. Through multitudinous sufferings, they become iron women. Thus the traumatic event of the demise of the spouse may be considered as blessings in disguise when widows get an opportunity to capitalize on their potential, hence helpful in building resilience among them. Resilience is regarded as a psychological capacity that exhibits positive adaptation during adversity. As **Arrington and Wilson (2000)** defined resilience simply as “adaptation despite risk”. **Masten and Powel (2003)** also defined it in the terms of “positive adaptation”, towards contextually significant risk to adversity.

There are mainly two perspectives to explain resilience such as developmental (i.e. through struggles of life, one gets an opportunity to evaluate one’s own potentials to overcome these threatening challenges (**Masten, 2001; Ryff and Singer, 2003**), and clinical (i.e. resilience helps in coping with stressful events). This capability of “bounce back” helps in psychological growth after facing trauma which is termed as “posttraumatic growth” (**Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1996**).

It may be defined as a positive transformation after experiencing the utmost terrible events of life. In other words, it may be stated that after trauma when one experiences meaninglessness in life, triggers one to find the essence and aim of life through evaluating one’s own potential thereby turning tragedy into triumph. There are various models which have emphasized higher mental processes in the rebuilding of shattered cognitive schema **Tedeschi and Calhoun’s** model of PTG, 1996; “**Janoff-Bulman’s** theory of shattered assumptions, 1992” resulting in nurturing new schemas through transformational coping (**Aldwin, 1994**), where environmental determinants namely social networking, family aid also plays a primary role in nurturing PTG.

There is a wealth of literature which has highlighted the contribution of resilience in the growth aftermath of various types of trauma such as loss of spouse (**Bonanno et al; 1995; O’Rourke, 2004; Coifman et**

**al; 2007; Bonanno et al; 2010)** siblings or friends (**Johnsen and Afgun; 2020**), child (**Waugh et al., 2018**).

On the conventionally a study by **Levine et al., (2009)** reported an inverse link of resilience with growth aftermath terror trauma. Based on the above findings, it may be inferred that pain and growth are experienced simultaneously. Some bereaved people showed resilience as being their innate tendency, so they are called “resilient grievers”. (**Bonanno et al., 1995; O’Rourke, 2004; Coifman et al., 2007; Clements, 2014; McGurl et al., 2015; Zhang et al., 2016; Jaaniste et al., 2017**). After reviewing the literature related to “resilience and posttraumatic growth”, it was observed that there is scant literature related to exploring the growth after the trauma of the death of the husband, particularly with reference to widows living in rural areas. So the current research work is an attempt to assess the “level of resilience and posttraumatic growth” among rural widows and to explore the association between these two constructs. By choosing this research problem the following objectives were formulated.

## Objectives

To assess “resilience and posttraumatic growth” (overall and its various domains) among rural widows. To find out the link between resilience with posttraumatic growth among rural widows.

## Methodology

**Design:** A correlational design was used.

**Sample:** A group of 300 widows within the age range of 30 – 50 years was selected from the rural areas of Haryana and Punjab states (India).

## Tool

### 1. “Post traumatic Growth Inventory” (PTGI) (**Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1996**)

It has 21 items, to be answered on a 6-point scale ranging from 0 (i.e. do not experience this change as a result of my crisis) to 5 (i.e. experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis). It consists of five major domains i. e. Relation to others (7items), New possibilities (5items), Personal strength (4 items), Spiritual changes (2 items), and Appreciation of life (3 items). The range of scores is 0-5, where scores up to 2 indicates low growth, scores > 2 to 3 indicates average growth whereas scores > 3 to 4, high and > 4 to 5 refer very high level of post-traumatic growth. The internal consistency is indicate found be .90 and test-

retest reliability is found to be  $r = .71$ . The positive average level of correlation with optimism, extroversion, openness and religious participation and negative correlation with neuroticism indicate that the inventory has quite good concurrent and discriminate validity. In the current research work, the Hindi version of PTGI was used. English version of PTGI was translated into Hindi by the current researcher by using the back-translation technique. The Cronbach's alpha was found to be .85.

**2. Resilience Scale (Wagnild and Young, 1993)**

It has 25 items to be responded on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 - 7 (*strongly disagree to strongly agree*) respectively. The range of scores is 25 - 175. As per norms of the scale the scores lying between 25-100, 101-115, 116-130, 131-145, 146-160, 161-175 reveal very low, low, moderate low, moderate high, high and very high level of resilience respectively. The reliability is found to be 70. In the present study Hindi version of the above scale by **Rani and Midha, (2018)** was used. They used the back translation technique to convert the scale in the Hindi language from the English language. Cronbach alpha of this scale in the Hindi version is found to be within the range of .934 to .939 thereby indicating the good internal consistency of the scale.

**Results and Discussion**

The main objective of the research work was to assess “resilience and posttraumatic growth” (overall and its various domains) among rural widows. The scores obtained on the measures of resilience and posttraumatic growth were analysed statistically by using descriptive statistics and have been shown in Table No. 1.

**Table No. 1: Mean and SD (Standard Deviation) of Scores obtained on Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth**

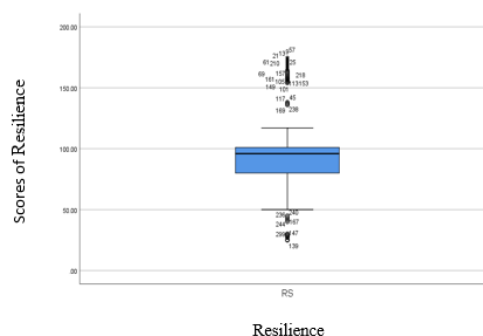
Variables	Mean	SD	Range of Scores
<b>Resilience</b>	96.7133	36.5095	25-175
<b>PTG (overall)</b>	3.5485	.4004	0 – 5
<b>RTO</b>	3.5543	.6061	
<b>NP</b>	3.4640	.4549	
<b>PS</b>	3.4560	.5959	
<b>SC</b>	3.6650	.5350	
<b>AFL</b>	3.7066	.3930	

**Note** – PTG (overall)– “Posttraumatic Growth”, RTO– “Relation to Others”, NP – “New Possibilities”,

PS- “Personal Strength”, SC– “Spiritual Change”, AF – “Appreciation of Life”.

While observing Table 1 it is quite apparent that widows have obtained mean scores (96.7133) on the scale of resilience, thereby indicating their low level of resilience, which may be caused by their surroundings, as they are living in rural areas, where the opportunities to face the challenges seemed to be grim. Further as per the developmental viewpoint of resilience their low level of inadequate psychological resources such as lack of liberty, less environmental mastery and lacking of sense of competence (**Wagnild and Young, 1990**). It may be due to lack of both external as well as internal protective factors, which may have caused a low level of resilience, (**Werner and Smith, 1982; Masten et al; 1990**). Another reason may be attributed to their stage of life span i.e. adulthood when resilience is usually disruptive as compared to childhood resilience (**Bonanno, 2004**). It may be due to their adaptation of maladaptive coping strategies to overcome risks and adversity (**Rutter, 1987**). As the psychology capital of resilience is contingent upon both personal and environmental factors which may serve as a protective shield from being broken.

While observing Table 1 the high value of standard deviation (SD = 36.5095) is clearly noticeable, thereby revealing the heterogeneity among widows as far as resilience is concerned. These findings are apparent in Figure No. 1.



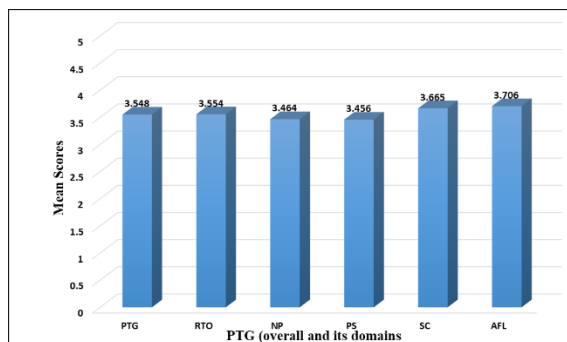
**Figure No. 1: Distribution of scores obtained on Resilience**

The highly negative skewed scores in Figure No. 1, clearly revealed that maximum widows are less resilient. The heterogeneity among widows is quite visible through the large number of outliers lying at both upward and downward whiskers of the box plot.

While a look at Table No. 1 it is evident that widows have obtained 3.5485 mean scores on overall PTG,

which indicates that they have an above-average level of growth. The current findings revealed that the experience of untold sufferings in the life of widows has pushed them to witness their unique hidden potentials which ultimately turned their predicament into their achievement. It also indicates that the trauma of the demise of the husband has prepared them to know the meaning of life which paves the way for their growth. Thus grief may be viewed as a learning experience which not only reaps sorrows but latent joys also.

As per **Kubler-Ross (1969)** stages of bereavement (i.e. denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance), widows might have reached at the last stage i.e. “acceptance” within the tenure of one year after the death of their husband. Hence they appeared to be in a state of “let go” of emotional attachment to the deceased husband. In other words, their shattered assumptions up to now may have been repaired (**Janoff-Bulman, 1992**) through the rebuilding of cognitive schemas (**Tedeschi and Calhoun, 1996; Carver, 1998**). This growth has been quite visible in its various domains such as maximally in the domain of “appreciation of life” followed by “spiritual change”, “relation to others”, “new possibilities” and least in the domain of “personal strength”. (As shown in Figure No. 2).



**Figure No. 2: A comparative view of PTG (overall and its various domains)**

The current findings supported the previous findings of **Parkes (1998); Cadell et al. (2003); Bonanno et al. (2004); Mathews and Servaty-Seib. (2007); Taku et al. (2014); Jamadar et al. (2015); Waugh et al. (2018); Zięba, et al. (2019)**.

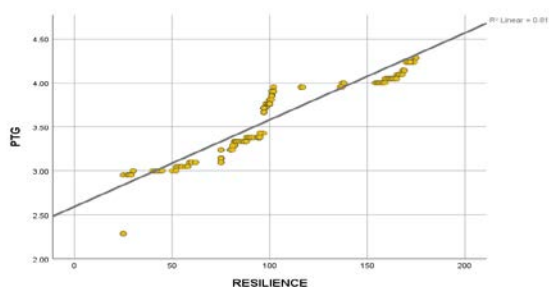
In order to pursue the second objective i.e. “To find out the link of resilience with posttraumatic growth among rural widows” the correlation between resilience and PTG (overall and its various domains) has been computed with the help of the Pearson Product moment method and has been shown in Table No. 2.

**Table No. 2: Intercorrelation matrix resilience and posttraumatic growth (overall and its various domains among widows)**

	PTG	RTO	NP	PS	SC	AFL	RS
PTG	1	.981**	.938**	.802**	.921**	.938**	.902**
RTO		1	.934**	.820**	.921**	.962**	.929**
NP			1	.795**	.855**	.921**	.875**
PS				1	.701**	.787**	.774**
SC					1	.859**	.858**
AFL						1	.921**
RS							1

**Note** – \*\* p > .01, PTG – “Post-traumatic Growth”, RTO – “Relation to Others”, NP - “New Possibilities”, PS - “Personal Strength”, SC - “Spiritual Change”, AFL - “Appreciation of Life”, RS – “Resilience”.

From Table No. 2 it is clearly apparent that there existed a very significant positive high correlation ( $r = .902, p < .01$ ), between resilience and PTG (overall and its various domains) thereby indicating that due to being perseverant, optimistic, self-efficacious, control over events, highly adaptive and tolerant face the threatening terrific situations of life with the potential of remedies resulting in moving upward as is visible in Figure No. 3.



**Figure No. 3: Relationship between Resilience and Posttraumatic Growth (overall)**

Figure No. 3 clearly shows the positive linear relationship between resilience and PTG. The death of the husband might have shattered the core elements of widows’ assumptive world, where their resilience might have helped them to experience transformation and qualitative changes in their life. Thus it may be inferred that it is not the traumatic event rather their struggle to handle this situation is indeed crucial for PTG. This positive relation of resilience with various domains of PTG such as “relation to others” ( $r = .921$ ), “new possibilities” ( $r = .875$ ), “spiritual change” ( $r = .858$ ), “personal strength” ( $r = .774$ ), clearly indicate that the capability of resilience helped them to maintain harmonious relationships with others and to realize the minor good things in life, to explore new

pathways to further accomplish the goals of life and enhanced a sense of meaning and purpose (Rogers *et al.*, 2008) and hope level.

In a nutshell, the findings may be summarized as widows with a low level of resilience may be due to their lack of assistance from external factors, as being residents of rural areas where facilities for further growth are lacking. Widows have shown still above-average levels of posttraumatic growth with the boosting effect of their intrinsic strengths. In essence, it may be stated that the experience of loss, however, might have led resilient widows to perceive themselves as “vulnerable”, yet stronger as they appeared to have accepted the challenge to adjust and

adapt in the context of adversity.

## Conclusion

The current study has some implications such as the experience of the death of loved ones leads to personal growth in terms of giving meaning to life where the gain is experienced after loss and triumph in tears. Current findings would be helpful in changing the mindset of the society where people focused on the dark side of the life of widows, it may lead to benefit findings. These findings are helpful in the counselling process for clinicians/counsellors to provide interventions by focusing on enhancing their hope level, resulting in positive adaptation after the demise of loved ones.

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