



The Relationship Between Posttraumatic Growth and Psychosocial Variables in Survivors of State Terrorism and Their Relatives

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Abstract

The present study explores reports of growth in survivors and family members of victims of state terrorism ($N = 254$) in Chile from 1973 to 1990. The results indicate the presence of reports of posttraumatic growth ($M = 4.69$) and a positive and statistically significant correlation with variables related to the life impact of the stressful events ($r = .46$), social sharing of emotions ($r = .32$), deliberate rumination ($r = .37$), positive reappraisal ($r = .35$), reconciliation ($r = .39$), spiritual practices ($r = .33$), and meaning in life ($r = .51$). The relationship between growth and forgiveness is not statistically significant. The variables that best predict posttraumatic growth are positive reappraisal ($\beta = .28$), life impact ($\beta = .24$), meaning in life ($\beta = .23$), and reconciliation ($\beta = .20$). The forward-method hierarchical model indicates that these variables are significant predictors of growth levels, $R^2 = .53$, $F(8, 210) = 30.08$, $p < .001$. The results indicate that a large proportion of the victims of state terrorism manage to grow after these experiences,

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and the redefinition of meaning in life and the positive reappraisal of the traumatic experiences are the elements that make it possible to create a new narrative about the past.

Keywords

violence exposure, spirituality and violence, memory and trauma

Introduction

In Chile, the effects of terrorism practiced by the military–civilian dictatorship are still visible more than 40 years after the Coup d'état that overthrew President Salvador Allende. The impact of the dictatorship is evident, not only among the survivors and their families but also in the society as a whole. This impact at a collective level translates into high levels of prejudice between the groups associated symbolically with the victims and the perpetrators, as well as an emotional climate where fear and institutional distrust prevail (Cárdenas, Páez, Rimé, & Arnosó, 2015). At an individual level, negative effects of the dictatorship have been found in various studies (Browne, 2003; Lira, 1996; Rojas, Barceló, & Reszczyński, 1991; Shaw, 2003; Wainryb & Posada, 2007). In addition, the transgenerational impact of state terrorism on children of victims and survivors has been well documented (Becker & Díaz, 1998; Brinkmann, Guzmán, Madariaga, & Sandoval, 2009; M. Díaz & Biedermann, 1991, 1995; Faúndez, Estrada, Balogi, & Hering, 1991), as well as the effect on their grandchildren (Faúndez, Cornejo, & Brackelaire, 2014; Faúndez & Hatibovic, 2016).

Some of the main objectives and effects of the military–civilian dictatorship were the physical and psychological destruction of its political adversaries, as well as the installation of fear in social relationships, to isolate the opposition and maintain control over the population. According to official numbers, more than 40,000 people suffered political prison and/or torture (Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión Política y Tortura, 2014; Comisión Presidencial Asesora para la Calificación de Detenidos Desaparecidos, Ejecutados Políticos y Víctimas de Prisión Política y Tortura, 2011), 3,197 were assassinated, and 1,193 are still missing (Comisión Nacional de Verdad y Reconciliación, 1991; Corporación Nacional de Reparación y Reconciliación, 1996). These numbers represent cases of people who voluntarily declared in the commissions.

This state violence can be classified as traumatic in the sense that it harshly violates an individual's boundaries, and she or he cannot neutralize this force. This violence produces destruction and exceeds individuals' capacity to respond.

The main consequences of this traumatic experience are a reduction in the functional capacity, the experience of intense pain that causes the sensation of being passively at the mercy of the perpetrator, and the sense of loss of control over our lives (Länge, 1992). At the social level, the trauma is displayed in polarized social relationships (Martin-Baró, 1989), a climate of lack of trust between groups, the presence of emotions of anger and sadness, and high levels of institutional distrust (Cárdenas, Páez, Rimé, Bilbao, & Asún, 2014)

The human capacity to identify benefits obtained from traumatic events or experiences of severe stress has been reported in a variety of populations and across many cultures (Cho & Park, 2013). Various concepts have been used to describe this phenomenon. Recently, attention has been focused on aspects linked to possibilities for growth (Calhoun, Cann, Tedeschi, & McMillan, 2000; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006), which, paradoxically, can even occur in exceptionally hostile conditions for individuals.

Posttraumatic growth refers to all the positive psychological changes reported as stemming from individuals' battle with the adverse effects of trauma (Joseph & Linley, 2008; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). It is a process through which individuals try to restore their belief systems, which were damaged by the exposure to extreme violence. The life impact of the violence affects subjects' basic beliefs about themselves, others, and the world (Janoff-Bulman, 2006). These experiences must be systematically reviewed (Taku et al., 2007; Triplett, Tedeschi, Cann, Calhoun, & Reeve, 2012) and positively reappraised (Cárdenas, Arnosó, & Faúndez, 2016) to reconstruct anew their basic beliefs.

This process would involve an effort to adapt to unfavorable circumstances by attempting to construct a new narrative about who we are, about others, and about the place where the interaction with others takes place (Cárdenas et al., 2016; Tuval-Mashiach et al., 2004). Posttraumatic growth promotes changes in three areas: (a) in the self, by improving self-image and increasing self-confidence to cope with adversities; (b) relationship with others, by strengthening relationships, allowing feelings of compassion and empathy to emerge, along with an increase in social support and helping behaviors; and (c) spirituality and life philosophy, when people reassess what is really important and transcendent after the traumatic experience (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999; Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998).

Individuals can emerge stronger from this process for many reasons. They may discover previously unknown personal strengths, see themselves as capable of relating to others in a more intimate and careful way, develop an unexplored spiritual dimension, recognize new life facets and engage in reordering their life priorities, and/or experience a growing appreciation for life (Taku, Calhoun, Cann, & Tedeschi, 2008).

The development of posttraumatic growth occurs as a result of an extremely stressful event and not as a consequence of a lesser tension or as a natural phenomenon of the developmental process (Zoellner & Maercker, 2006). Posttraumatic growth is not universal; not everyone who experiences a trauma will find favorable changes (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999). For growth to occur, the activation of an experience elaboration process has to take place through a systematic review of the events, which must lead to the positive reappraisal of some of its aspects.

In the case of state terrorism situations, the body of evidence on growth reports is limited, mainly focusing on Palestinian ex-political prisoners (Salo, Quota, & Punamäki, 2005), holocaust survivors (Lev-Wiesel & Amir, 2006), refugees (Ai, Tice, Whitsett, Ishisaka, & Chim, 2007; Kroo & Nagy, 2011), and survivors of violence for political reasons (Dauber Konvisser, 2013; Simms, 2015). In all these cases, we can see how state terrorism has not achieved its objective of destroying individuals as subjects of political action and that somehow they have managed to resist, rearticulate sense, and even use the experience to grow. The above affirmation is very relevant as it demonstrates that even in situations of extreme cruelty, individuals are often able to face these experiences by supporting themselves either with their original belief systems, or by reconstructing new belief systems on the basis of the new world that they have to inhabit. The continued study of the conditions that make these processes possible is very important.

In the present study, our objective is to examine posttraumatic growth (PTG) reports in survivors of the state terrorism practiced in Chile between 1973 and 1990, as well as in family members of the victims (detained, missing, and political executions). In the same way, we intend to relate the growth reports to a set of variables that have been shown to be relevant predictors in the bibliography on PTG. Previous studies establish a relationship between PTG and social sharing of emotion (Rimé, Páez, Basabe, & Martínez, 2010), with high levels of social sharing being a good predictor of emotional arousal and rumination, which, in turn, would allow the emergence of growth reports and greater integration. Emotional experiences can only be clarified when they are shared with others. We need to talk about what happens to us, above all in situations of violence that exceed those habitual frameworks that allow us to give meaning to an experience (Rimé, 2005). This is the way to collectively establish consciousness and give meaning to emotional experiences.

In this way, deliberate rumination could constitute an indicator of attempts, by the survivors of the dictatorship, to try and elaborate their experiences through the reiteration of scenes of violence, as well as fulfill their need to talk about them, as that would entail a consequent emotional discharge. Similarly, it is very common to hear people who have suffered

from extreme violence talk about “a vital break,” that is, they say that after all their suffering, they do not consider themselves to be the same person that they were before the event (we have already spoken of the difficulty these people would have trying to integrate the experience). Consistent with this phenomenon, and in an attempt to recover the internal balance damaged by the violence and give continuity to the abruptly altered experience, people utilize strategies of reevaluation of the past experience, which allows them, in some cases, to reconsider it under a new point of view or to emotionally regulate the experience.

The strategy involves finding personally relevant positive meaning from an experience in the face of its negative reality.

In addition, previous studies have found a relationship between PTG and meaning in life (Triplett et al., 2012), with the latter being a significant mediator between growth reports and life satisfaction. If we assume that violence affects our basic beliefs about the world (Janoff-Bulman, 1992), then it follows that those affected by violence must carry out the task of reconstructing their beliefs and trying to endow their experience with meaning once again. Violence calls into question the sense or meaning of our life trajectories, among other things, because the world where that experience made sense has been destroyed.

Moreover, the increase in spiritual practices appears as a result of the struggle with the effects of trauma, although it is also reported as a beneficial antecedent in people who are in treatment processes for the consequences of trauma (Shaw, Joseph, & Linley, 2007). These practices favor the creation of new narratives about the trauma (Pargament, Desai, & McConnell, 2006; Ramsay & Marderson, 2011) and the reconstruction of purpose in life (Bergamo & White, 2016; Hill et al., 2000), and the positive relationship between PTG and interpersonal forgiveness appears to be mediated by levels of spirituality (Hafnidar Chang & Lin, 2012; Schultz, Tallman, & Altmaier, 2010).

Finally, reconciliation (Williamson, 2014), understood as agency and communion processes, would be positively related to growth reports. In this way, reconciliation could be considered a healing or recovery index that could be related to reports of growth. We use these last two variables with caution as we know that, in our context, the ideas of forgiveness by survivors and reconciliation have been systematically used by institutional actors to try and give closure (forget) to a horrific past.

The predictive value of all these variables on PTG will be tested. A strategy of successive steps will be used that will allow for the incorporation of variables progressively, beginning with those at a “proximal” level to those at a “distal” level (or from those at an individual and interpersonal level to those at a social level).

Method

This research consisted of an ex post facto study of a correlational and descriptive nature.

Participants and Procedure

The sample was intentional and composed of 254 people, 106 men (41.8%) and 148 women (58.2%), who were survivors of state terrorism practiced in Chile from 1973 to 1990. The ages ranged from 20 to 98 years ($M = 60.85$ years and $SD = 13.40$ years). The data were collected in the cities of Santiago (48.8%), Valparaíso (25.8%), and Antofagasta (25.4%).

The events of violence experienced by the participants include the following: political prison (44.5%), torture (24.1%), direct family member of a political execution (37.4%), or relative of a missing detainee (57.7%). As is evident, many of the experiences of violence overlap, making it possible for one person to have experienced several of them. It is a common pattern during the dictatorship that affected not only a subject but also his or her entire family environment. Among the participants, 63.9% gave their testimony in one of the commissions set up in Chile to shed light on the main human rights violations committed by the military–civilian dictatorship (“National Truth and Reconciliation Commission” or “National Commission on Political Prison and Torture”).

Snowball sampling was used, selecting seeds in each city and contacting the participants who emerged from these seeds. The seeds corresponded to people with a recognized trajectory in the area of the defense and promotion of human rights or who belonged to one of the groups of families of victims or survivors and, therefore, had a broad network of contacts (four seeds were selected in Santiago, two in Valparaíso, and two in Antofagasta). Participants were recruited only in urban areas of these cities.

The instrument was filled out in the participants’ homes or in other places they chose, and it was applied by specially trained personnel for this purpose. Once the participants had been contacted and agreed to participate in the study, they signed an informed consent letter before the instrument was applied. This letter explained the study objectives and guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

Instrument

The instrument included a series of sociodemographic measures (sex, age, city of resident, educational level, and type of repressive situation experienced)

and the measures used as dependent variables. Given the type of people who we work with, many of whom still show severe consequences of trauma and for whom it is very difficult to answer long questionnaires, we have decided to use shortened versions of the measures of interest for this study: Posttraumatic Growth Scale–Short Form (Cann et al., 2010). The version adapted and validated in Chile was used (Cárdenas, Barrientos, Ricci, & Páez, 2015). It is composed of 10 items with a Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 6 (*completely agree*). Higher scores indicate greater reports of growth. The reliability coefficient for this application was .86 (item-total correlations between .47 and .70).

Abbreviated Coping Styles Scale: COPE–28. The scale (Carver, 1997) consists of 28 items with response options from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 6 (*completely agree*). It measures coping styles, but in this article, we used the data from the items referring to positive reappraisal strategies (active attempts to change one's point of view about the stressful situation, with the intention of seeing it from a positive perspective). The Spanish version adapted and validated in Chile was used (Páez, Velasco, & Campos, 2004). The reliability coefficient for the application was .85 (item-total correlations between .39 and .65). We asked participants about the strategies used immediately after the violence.

Event-Related Rumination Inventory. This scale (Cann et al., 2011) includes 10 items with a Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 6 (*completely agree*) to assess deliberate thinking about the traumatic event. The deliberate rumination items gauge whether, during the months immediately after the event, survivors had intentionally reflected on and thought about the event. The scale has been translated and validated for use with a Chilean sample (Cárdenas, Barrientos, et al., 2015). The reliability coefficient for this application was .88 (item-total correlations between .47 and .72).

Life impact of stressful events. This single item is designed to quantify the impact the experience had on their lives and their beliefs. The item is presented in a graduated response format ranging from 1 (*very little impact*) to 6 (*very great impact*).

Social sharing of emotions. Six questions adapted from studies on the social sharing of emotion (Rimé, 2005) asked about the extent to which respondents talk about past events. The response scales ranged from 1 (*not at all*) to 6 (*a great deal*). Reliability was satisfactory ($\alpha = .83$; item-total correlations between .47 and .62). Examples of items on this scale are as follows: “Have you spoken to others about the events of violence that you or a member of

your family experienced during the dictatorship?” and “Are there some aspects of the violence that you would like to talk about, but haven’t been able to discuss with anyone?”

Meaning in Life Questionnaire–Short Form. Six items measure the presence of meaning in life (three items) and the search for meaning in life (three items; Steger & Samman, 2012). Items were rated from 1 (*not at all true*) to 6 (*completely true*). The reliability coefficient for this application was .76 (item-total correlations between .34 and .71). This scale has a Spanish version and was validated in several cross-national contexts, including Chilean samples.

Scale of spiritual practices. We used an adaptation and validation for the national population (Ceruti, Cárdenas, & Arancibia, 2017) of the spiritual practices dimension of The Spirituality Questionnaire by Parsian and Dunning (2009), based on the Columbian translation of this scale (Díaz, Muñoz, & De Vargas, 2012). It includes seven items with a Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). High scores reflect greater adoption of spiritual practices. The reliability coefficient for this application was .84 (item-total correlations vary between .39 and .75). Examples of items for this scale are “I try to live in harmony with nature” and “I use silence to get in touch with my inner self.”

Intergroup Forgiveness Scale. A six-item Intergroup Forgiveness Scale was developed. Response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The reliability coefficient for this application was .90 (item-total correlations between .52 and .77). The fit indexes for the confirmatory factorial analysis were the following: $\chi^2 = 66.76$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .96, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .98; root mean residual (RMR) = .76; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .163. Examples of items on this scale are, “It is possible for me to forgive the actions of those who caused harm during the military dictatorship” and “I do not have negative feelings toward the aggressors.”

Reconciliation Attitudes Scale. A six-item scale (Halloran, 2007) was used with a Likert-type response format ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). The scale was adapted for the Chilean case and validated for use in a national sample (Arancibia & Cárdenas, 2017). The reliability coefficient for this application was .84 (item-total correlations between .42 and .80). “Reconciliation is an important question for all Chileans” and “I don’t believe in the possibility of reconciliation among the different groups in dispute during the period of violence.”

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations Among Variables.

	N	M (SD)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Posttraumatic growth	250	4.69 (1.05)	.46**	.32**	.37**	.35**	.51**	.33**	.39**	.02
Life impact (2)	244	5.32 (1.15)		.28**	.32**	.25**	.10	.11	.13	-.14
Social sharing of emotion (3)	254	4.58 (1.11)			.14	.26**	.13*	.23*	.03	-.15
Deliberate rumination (4)	241	4.13 (1.27)				.40**	.26**	.31**	.03	.26**
Positive reappraisal (5)	248	4.59 (1.37)					.15	.26**	.21*	-.14
Meaning in life (6)	251	4.76 (1.08)						.32**	.07	-.08
Spiritual practices (7)	243	5.09 (0.90)							.24*	-.01
Reconciliation (8)	254	2.12 (1.29)								.44**
Forgiveness (9)	254	4.13 (1.13)								

Note. Correlations are significant at * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$.

Data Analysis

The descriptive statistics were calculated for each scale (mean and standard deviation), partial correlations analyses were performed, and a forward stepwise multiple regression analysis was carried out (calculation of levels of tolerance, diagnosis of collinearity, and calculation of statistical power). For all the analyses, the statistical program SPSS (version 20.0) was used.

For both correlations and regression analyzes, the variables of socioeconomic level and sex were controlled. We estimated that both variables could have had important effects, given that in the context of this study, the first variable could have established differential levels of cultural capital and social support, which could have affected the capacity to elaborate the experiences of the people. In the same way, sex was an important variable in a context where the roles associated with sex were strongly prescribed, including the possibilities of emotional expression. This is to say, the normative nature of the rules of the emotional sharing in our culture meant that in most cases, the victims felt limited regarding their possibilities of sharing their emotional experiences (overestimation of the figure of the hero or the demands of protection of family members).

Results

The results indicated that the survivors of state terrorism or the family members of its victims reported, as is expected in these types of situations, high levels of life impact of the traumatic events that they had to go through. Likewise, they reported high levels of posttraumatic growth. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the variables incorporated in the subsequent analyses and the correlations among the different variables included in the analyses.

Table 2. Hierarchical Regression Analysis (Forward Method).

	B	β	SE β	t	p	R ²	ΔR^2
Step 1							
Life impact	.34	.36	.06	5.72	<.001	.13	
Step 2							
Life impact	.25	.26	.06	4.68	<.001		
Social sharing of emotion	.10	.11	.05	1.83	.001	.37	.25
Deliberate rumination	.15	.18	.05	2.92	<.001		
Positive reappraisal	.27	.35	.05	5.76			
Step 3							
Life impact	.23	.24	.05	4.66	<.001		
Social sharing of emotion	.09	.09	.05	1.83	.068		
Deliberate rumination	.06	.08	.05	1.34	.183	.48	.11
Positive reappraisal	.25	.32	.04	5.58	<.001		
Meaning in life	.23	.23	.06	4.10	<.001		
Spiritual practices	.21	.18	.06	3.30	.001		
Step 4							
Life impact	.23	.24	.05	4.82	<.001		
Social sharing of emotion	.10	.11	.05	2.16	.032		
Deliberate rumination	.08	.10	.05	1.72	.087		
Positive reappraisal	.22	.28	.04	5.15	<.001	.53	.05
Meaning in life	.24	.23	.05	4.46	<.001		
Spiritual practices	.18	.16	.06	2.98	.003		
Reconciliation	.19	.20	.05	3.79	<.001		
Forgiveness	.05	.07	.04	1.22	.224		

The participants obtained moderate or high scores on all the variables measured, except the one referring to interpersonal forgiveness.

After detecting the relationship among the variables, we incorporated them as predictors of posttraumatic growth in a forward stepwise hierarchical regression analysis (see Table 2). The final model fitted in four steps and significantly explained the dependent variable, $R^2 = .53$, $F(8, 210) = 30.08$, $p < .001$. The analysis of the model's proposals confirmed the assumptions of independence (Durvin–Watson = 1.64) and noncollinearity (all the tolerance values were above .75). In addition, the same size showed high statistical power ($1 - \beta = 1.00$), so that we could state that small effects in the regression analysis would be detected satisfactorily.

The most relevant variables in explaining the posttraumatic growth were positive reappraisal ($\beta = .28$, $p < .001$) and life impact ($\beta = .24$, $p < .001$), followed by meaning in life ($\beta = .23$, $p < .001$), reconciliation ($\beta = .20$, $p < .001$), and spiritual

practices ($\beta = .16, p = .003$). The variables forgiveness ($\beta = .05, p > .05$), deliberate rumination ($\beta = .08, p > .05$), and social sharing of emotion ($\beta = .10, p > .05$) were not significant predictors of PTG.

Discussion

The results indicate that, in spite of the impact that state terrorism has had on the lives of survivors or family members of victims in Chile, the participants report high levels of growth after this experience. The majority of them have been able to make their emotional experience clearer by sharing their experiences with other people and systematically reviewing them, managing to positively reappraise certain aspects by constructing a new narrative about the events and reestablishing meaning in life.

The elaboration of the experience and the new narration that emerges from the work of reviewing the experience gives meaning to people's lives. The process that may explain these results could be to compose new narratives about themselves that grant continuity to their experience and put into words the events that previously overwhelmed their symbolization possibilities. This process involves the creation of a new narrative plot that synthetically integrates the experience, giving it meaning. Narrative gives shape to world events and awards them true existence (Bruner, 2013). The exercise of spiritual practices could also be contributing to this reconstruction of meaning, allowing its in-depth exploration through dialogue with others and with the self.

These results are relevant because they indicate that, in spite of the efforts of the military–civilian dictatorship implemented in Chile to destroy its political adversaries through assassination, the systematic practice of torture, or the jailing of those who opposed the regime, many of them have managed to overcome the effects of the trauma. That is, in the fight against the traumatic consequences of the experiences, they have discovered previously unknown strengths in themselves, and they have been capable of recomposing the basic beliefs (about themselves, others, and the world) damaged by the violence.

Posttraumatic growth is significantly related to all the variables incorporated in the analysis, those of a cognitive nature (deliberate rumination, positive reappraisal) and those of an emotional nature (social sharing of emotions), as well as spiritual practices and meaning in life. These results are consistent with findings reported in the literature on PTG (Calhoun et al., 2000; Cárdenas et al., 2016; Rimé et al., 2010; Triplett et al., 2012). The growth process is not related to the intention to forgive because, although the participants agree with the need for reconciliation between the opposing groups at a social level, few of them are willing to forgive at a personal level. This result confirms the possibility of a reconciliation model that takes place without the need for

interpersonal forgiveness, which would allow the survivors and relatives of victims to advance in their own processes of reconstruction and individual growth, without denying a necessary agreement implying that society can progress. In fact, openness toward this societal agreement that the term *reconciliation* invokes is a good predictor of growth.

It is important to mention that in Chile the concept of reconciliation is quite distinctive and has been criticized by victims because it is part of the rhetoric used by those who have managed the political process during the postdictatorship. In this rhetoric, reconciliation has involved the idea of a mythical community that denies the memory of the political conflicts of the past and has tried to legally ensure its suppression and the lack of justice for the perpetrators of crimes against humanity. When referring to the concept of reconciliation in this study, we simply intend to investigate the belief that it is necessary, in spite of the victims' pain and suffering, to reconstruct the society on new foundations that lead to a stable and permanent government ruled by law, with the recognition of dignity and rights for all as the basis for democratic coexistence (Lira, 2013).

Likewise, the fact that there are growth reports does not mean that the survivors and families of victims do not have negative feelings and emotions due to the harm done to them. A person can grow and yet live with the negative consequences of the damage. Therefore, the experience of growth in some areas of life does not protect people from the negative effects of the trauma, above all in contexts where recognition of victims is still insufficient. In fact, some studies report that, for growth to be possible, it is necessary for negative and positive emotions to coexist in individuals (Vázquez, Castilla, & Hervás, 2009).

The results for spiritual practices are relevant because the short version of the Posttraumatic Growth Scale includes items that are supposed to refer to this dimension, but in reality refer to religiosity, a concept usually equated erroneously with spirituality. In our case, most of the people participating in the sample stated that they were not religious, so that a different measure of spirituality becomes relevant. Thus, we can state that there is a spiritual dimension that has developed independently from religious beliefs (one of the possible forms of expression of spirituality) and allowed the victims to reconstruct meaning and grow.

It is relevant to understand that the meaning recovered by the participants, which they express through a new narrative, is not arbitrary and does not merely consist of a subjective attribution. It represents a difficult task of systematically reviewing the experience, reconstructing meaning alongside others, without contradicting the experience or altering the facts. Meaning cannot be arbitrarily invented. Instead, it emerges as part of a laborious

process that involves reviewing the past, connecting facts, and analyzing new possibilities. These new stories must provide continuity and coherence to the experience of the people involved.

The findings of this study are limited by the specific and homogeneous sample used, and by the great distance that separates the events of violence from the growth reports, which means that we cannot infer causality in this relationship. In the same way, the cross-sectional nature of the study seriously limits the interpretation of the findings. In addition, as it is not a representative sample, the possibilities of generalizing the results are limited. Moreover, there are well-known criticisms of self-report measures, such as people's different capacity to be aware of their own attitudes and internal states, the social desirability of the responses, the fact that they try to present themselves positively (whether to others or to themselves, to preserve a positive self-image), or attempts to modify their opinions on questions where they detect what is supposed to be measured (Petty & Wegener, 1998). Likewise, working with measurement scales limits the possibility of investigating the shape of the narratives and their associated contents. Therefore, future studies must work with the individuals' accounts to capture the shape of these narratives, their content, and the process through which they were constructed.

In general, the results support the idea that, even after experiencing events of extreme violence, decidedly difficult to elaborate, and in the struggle against the adverse effects of the trauma, people have a capacity to increase or improve their well-being. These growth experiences would be possible, thanks to victims' active attempt to find meaning in what occurred and construct a new narrative that gives coherence to their identity experience. This systematic effort allows them to make the emotional experience clearer by narrating their experience to others (which is often difficult given the extent of the violence and because the ability to listen is impaired), who can validate the experience, accompany them in the arduous and painful process of reliving the trauma, and contribute to searching for new possibilities.

The role of human rights defense groups during the dictatorship, professionals and institutions that attended to victims during this period, and the need to look for the missing and see justice done undoubtedly drive the struggle to give meaning to the experience and restore the lost meaning in life. Without a doubt, these experiences have to be studied because we can draw profound lessons from them for our current work.

The use of the narrative method is important because it responds to individuals' need to understand the events and their ways of coping with them, so that they can be used in the future as clinical intervention tools. The emotional release involved in telling about hidden events from the past, the intersubjective validation, the creation of a story of trauma that uses the

individuals' information (and what they are capable of actively seeking), as well as the cognitive processing that allows them to reappraise the experience can help people to assign a personal meaning to past events and place them in the story of their lives, returning continuity to the experience. One of the things survivors and family members of victims tell us is that these events interrupted their paths in life. Narratives can serve as a bridge that reconciles the people they were with who they are now, restoring them as political subjects and allowing them to appreciate the areas where they have been able to grow and flourish.

The findings of this study can be used to make some interesting and pertinent suggestions for the clinical process when working with survivors of state terrorism and the family members of the victims of violence. First, it is important to note that the changes produced by the use of political violence have undermined people's basic assumptions, and therefore, trust in others. Hence, clinicians must accompany the clinic process through interested and active listening and a "committed bond" (Lira & Becker, 1989), which implies an ethically nonneutral attitude in the face of the other's suffering, and involves understanding their situation as a result of a traumatic experience, inflicted deliberately. Here, both professional competence and human fellowship are crucial. That is to say, the clinician should be seen as a "facilitator" rather than as a "creator" of growth (Tedeschi, Calhoun, & Groleau, 2015), and someone who allows the person to share his or her emotional experience through a listening approach more oriented toward aspects of struggle against the aftermath of the trauma than the traumatic events themselves. This approach would allow clinicians to center their work on the strengths of the people, validating their experiences and their progress in the recovery process. Other relevant elements of therapy that could lead to growth experiences (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2013) are the development of emotional regulation strategies that allow for deliberate rumination and positive reassessment, as well as the creation of a new life narrative with elements of posttraumatic growth.

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