

The Influence of Experiencing Multiple Stressful Events on Posttraumatic Growth

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to validate the association between multiple stressful life occurrences and posttraumatic growth (PTG) in an American sample. Regression analyses showed total events predicted PTG and in two of the five domains. Results suggest multiple stressors account for growth, potentially beyond the one focal event.

Introduction

Posttraumatic Growth (PTG; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) is the positive changes that may occur as a result of the psychological struggle with a stressful event.

PTG is often analyzed in samples of victims from **one triggering event** such as breast cancer patients (Cordova et al., 2001), refugees (Kroo & Nagy, 2011), or the bereaved (Taku, Tedeschi, & Cann, 2015).

Little research has analyzed the predictive nature of experiencing **multiple triggering events** on PTG.

- Increased exposure to trauma is associated with higher reports of character strengths that associate with PTG such as (Peterson et al., 2008): kindness, perseverance, and curiosity.
- In Palestinian refugees, cumulative trauma occurrences positively associated with the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) overall score, and three of the five PTGI subscales (Kira et al., 2013): **Appreciation of Life, New Possibilities, and Personal Strength**.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to validate the number of stressful life events experienced can associate with PTG.

Hypotheses: (1) We hypothesize the number of events experienced will predict overall PTGI scores, (2) and three of the five PTGI subscales: appreciation of life, new possibilities, and personal strength.

Method

Table 1.

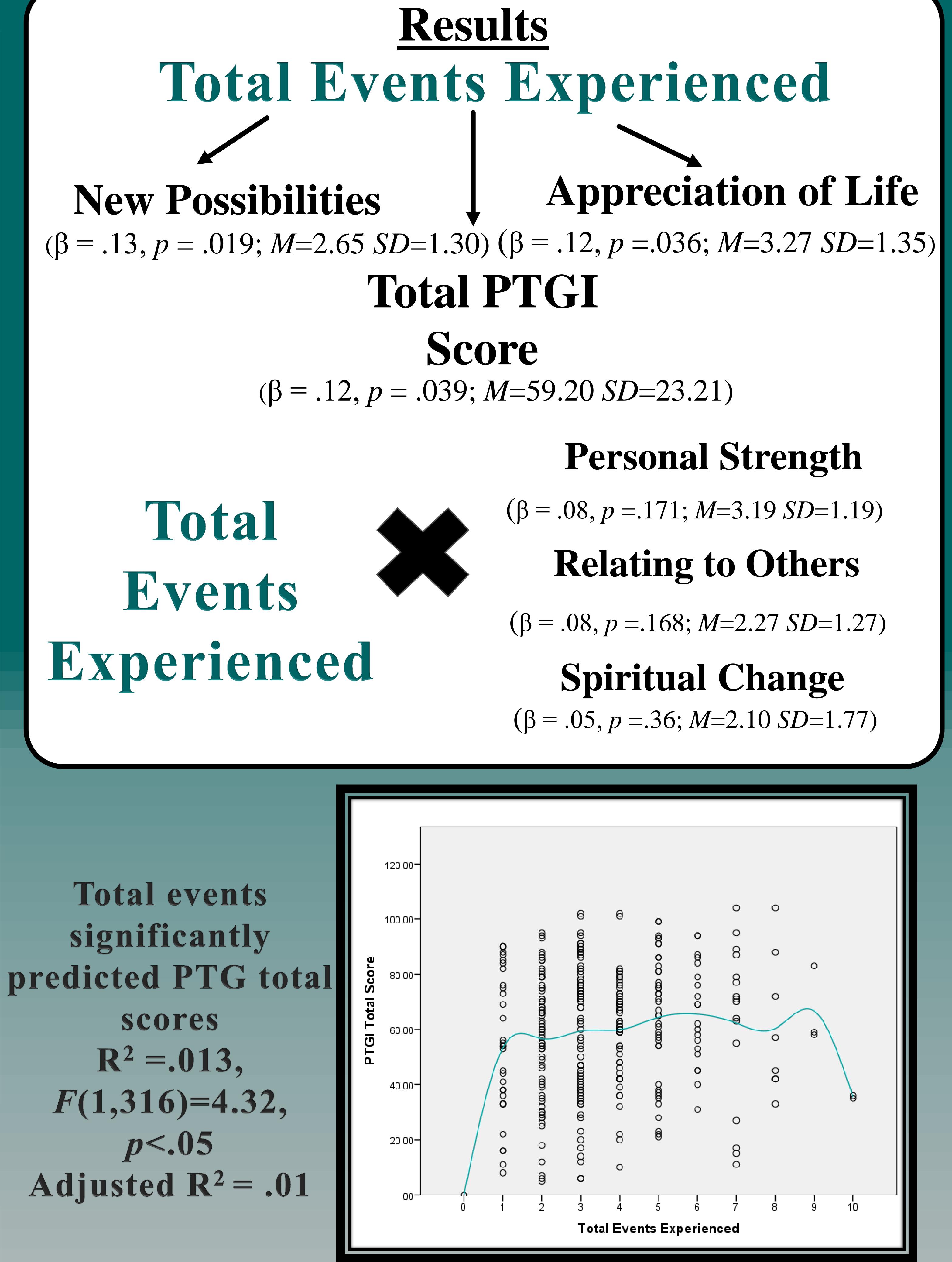
Participant Demographic Characteristics (N=337)

	n or M (SD)	%
Male	87	25.82
Female	249	73.89
Missing	1	.003
Mean Age	19.52 (3.67)	
Mean Number of Events	3.56 (1.94)	
Mean PTGI Overall Score	59.20 (23.21)	

Procedures and Measures:

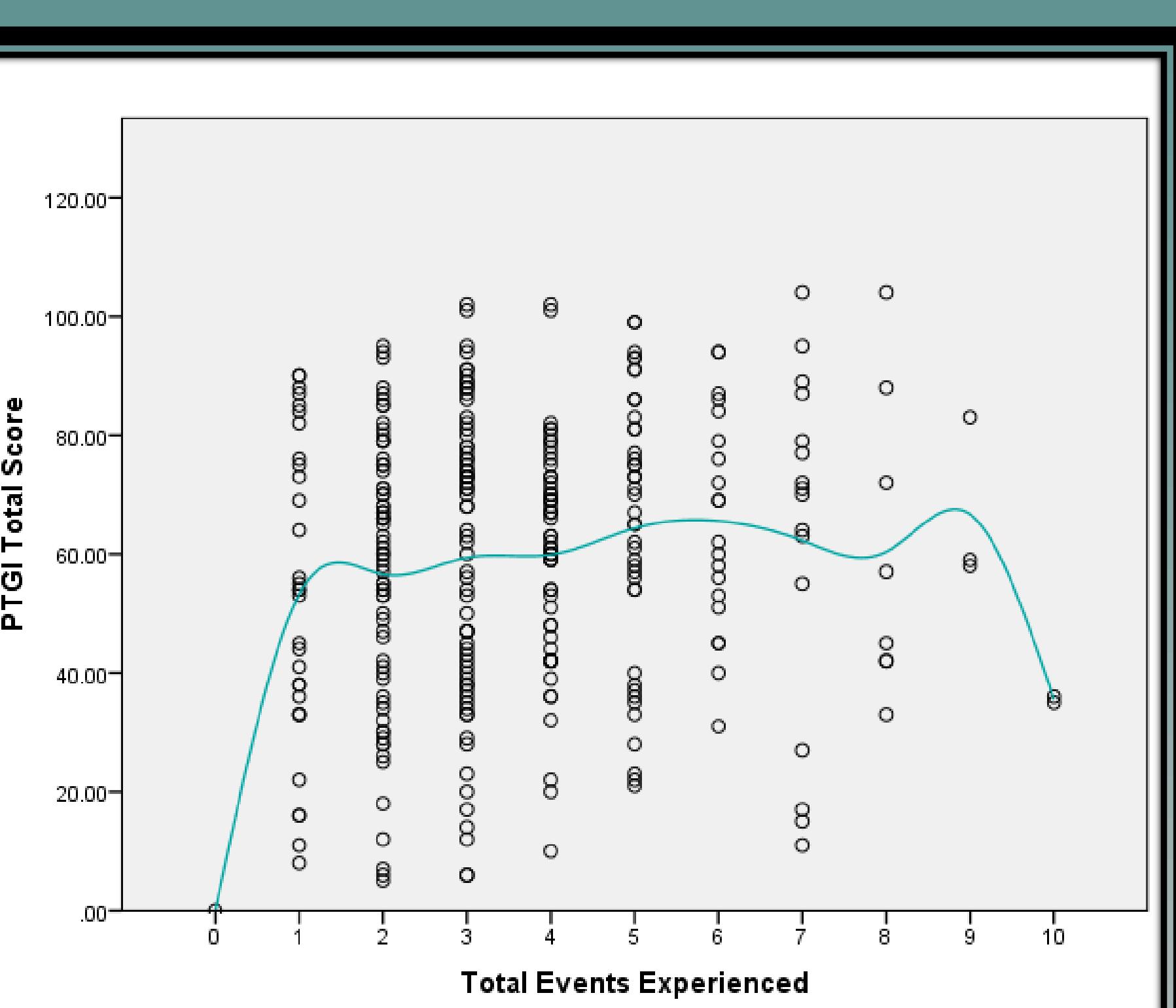
- Paper and pencil questionnaire.
- Self-reported stressful life events in the last five years.
- PTGI: 21-item scale with five subscales (0 = *not at all* to 5 = *very great degree*; Cronbach's Alpha = .94).

Inclusion Criteria: (a) experienced one or more stressful life event(s) in the last five years (b) and completed the PTGI inventory.



Participant Event Demographics (N=328)	1 (n=33)	2 (n=71)	3 (n=74)	4 or More (n=150)
Natural Disaster	0%	1.4%	4.1%	9.3%
Accident/Injury	24.2%	21.1%	33.8%	55.3%
Illness	9.1%	9.9%	17.6%	28%
Academic Problems	9.1%	8.5%	10.8%	26.7%
Family Problems	15.2%	36.6%	37.8%	66.7%
Financial Issues	6.1%	14.1%	25.7%	44.9%
Death of a Loved One	9.1%	36.6%	47.3%	60%
Physical/Sexual Assault	0%	2.8%	6.8%	18.7%
Moving	3%	21.1%	25.7%	55.3%
Bullying	0%	1.4%	2.7%	17.3%
Friendship Troubles	9.1%	14.1%	32.4%	56.7%
Romantic Problems	6.1%	28.2%	48.6%	74.7%
Other Event	9.1%	4.2%	8.1%	11.3%

Total events significantly predicted PTG total scores
 $R^2 = .013, F(1,316)=4.32, p<.05$
Adjusted $R^2 = .01$



Discussion

Conclusions: Results demonstrated the number of stressful life events experienced accounts for variation in the level of PTG experienced, specifically in the Appreciation of Life and New Possibilities domains. The positive relationship between multiple events and overall PTG is salient in an American population. However, not in three of the five PTGI domains. Growth in Personal Strength, Relationships with Others, and Spiritual Change may be dependent on other variables that are characteristics of the multiple events such as time since events, stressfulness of the event, and the combination of the events experienced.

Interpretation: Growth after struggling with multiple events could be explained by the increased probability to experience growth and increased opportunities for beliefs to be shaken. Other factors such as social support may be increased in those that experienced multiple stressful events opposed to those that only experience one event.

Limitations: The following study consists mostly of females and the differences between the types of events are not analyzed.

Future Directions: Future studies should analyze how experiencing multiple events leads to increased perceptions of positive changes.

Clinical Significance: Clinicians should be aware of the possibility for increased positive changes in clients that experience multiple tragedies.

References

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