



Post-Traumatic Growth and Meaning-Making among Flood Survivors in Pakistan

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Abstract

Despite such devastation, some survivors report positive psychological growth, known as Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG), following the loss and damage to life and property brought on by flooding and other natural disasters. Therefore, this study aims to explore post-traumatic growth in Pakistani flood survivors in light of meaning-making. More specifically, the aim was to analyze the impact of social support on PTG. The theoretical framework will relate to the Meaning-Making Model by Park & Folkman, 1997 and the Post-Traumatic Growth Theory by Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996. This non-experimental and quantitative approach utilized three validated measures: the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory, Meaning in Life Questionnaire, and Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. A total of 200 flood victims were analyzed using the methods of correlations, regression, and moderation approaches. Despite the devastating damage in the physical and economic environment and long-term psychological suffering as effects of the floods and other natural disasters, some survivors report positive psychological improvements. Called Post-Traumatic Growth or PTG, the current research investigates the relationship between meaning-making and PTG among Pakistani flood survivors, with particular attention to the effect of social support. Guided by the Meaning-Making Model - Park & Folkman (1997) - and the Post-Traumatic Growth Theory - Tedeschi & Calhoun (1996)-the quantitative approach was based on three internationally validated measures: the *Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory* - PTGI, the Meaning in Life Questionnaire - MLQ, and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support - MSPSS. Correlation, regression, and moderation approaches were applied to evaluate the data from 200 people affected by recent flooding. Counseling techniques can help survivors to reframe their horrific experiences as opportunities for growth rather than lifelong setbacks. Approaching social and cultural dimensions of support, such as community efforts, spiritual means of coping with stress, and extended family contacts, may enhance psychological healing after disasters. This study advances our understanding of post-traumatic adjustment in the Pakistani context by highlighting the importance of the interplay between cognitive and social elements in the process of healing.

Keywords: Flood survivors, counseling psychology, social assistance, meaning-making, post-traumatic growth, Pakistan

Article Details:

Received on 21 Oct 2025

Accepted on 23 Nov 2025

Published on 24 Nov 2025

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Introduction

Flooding is one of the most disastrous and frequent natural catastrophes that displaces millions of people in Pakistan and leaves them hard-pressed to begin life from scratch all over again. In 2022, more than 33 million people were affected, which resulted in immense loss of property, livelihood, and social stability. Besides their visible wounds, survivors face grave psychological trauma due to fear, anxiety, hopelessness, and loss. Yet, many have also reported undergoing a profound internal metamorphosis following adversity. Scholars call this process post-traumatic development-PTG-a beneficial psychological change that results from overcoming stressful circumstances. Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004

Spiritual change, personal strength, relating to others, appreciating life, and seeing new possibilities are the five key facets of PTG. These categories in their entirety show how a person reconstructs meaning after trauma. The process is all the more important in collectivist nations like Pakistan, where healing is influenced through family structures, religious beliefs, and communal solidarity. Meaning-making is a key component of PTG: how individuals make sense and integrate traumatic experiences into a coherent life narrative (Park, 2010). The reinstitution of Psychological stability through meaning-making often leads to a new sense of purpose or a shift in perspective. For instance, survivors may view surviving a disaster as an opportunity for empathy and service, and as a spiritual challenge.

Meaning-making in Pakistan could relate more to spiritual and social frameworks due to the strong religious traditions and collectivist culture. Cultural norms of interconnectedness in society may nurture bonding and collective rehabilitation, while faith-based interpretations could give a degree of existential solace and hope. PTG may look very different in this context, since meanings of trauma in Western cultures are more individualistic. It is important to understand these cultural nuances with a view to informing counseling strategies that would be effective and compatible with survivors' perspectives. Social support is another important moderating factor in trauma healing. In the case of survivors who belong to supportive networks, they have more opportunities to share and work through trauma by constructing shared narratives and receiving emotional validation. Examples of such networks include family members, religious authorities, neighbors, and peer groups. In the context of flood recovery, while material assistance such as housing and money constitutes social support, the emotional comfort derived from these networks ought to be included in this category. More specifically, whether trauma causes psychological growth or decline can depend on survivors' assessment of social affiliation.

Although the association of PTG with social support and meaning-making has been researched globally, very little work has been done in the South Asian context. The cognitive reconstruction of meaning by Pakistani flood survivors and the moderating influence of social support in this process of growth have not been studied empirically to any great extent. The present study fills this gap by examining the predictive function of meaning-making in PTG, and the moderating role of social support. The project therefore contributes to an understanding of how survivors find meaning in suffering and transform pain into individual and collective strength by focusing on a culturally diverse setting that is prone to disaster.

Objectives

1. Assess the levels of post-traumatic growth among Pakistani adults after surviving flooding.
2. To explore the relation between PTG and meaning-making.
3. To investigate how social support modifies this relationship.

Literature Review

Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG)

Post-traumatic growth is the positive personal growth that may occur as a result of one's struggle with major life obstacles or life-changing events. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), PTG arises from deliberate rumination and cognitive processing that changes the individual's perception of self, others, and life. Unlike resilience, which focuses on "bouncing back" to a previous state of functioning, PTG involves movement beyond the pre-trauma status quo-becoming stronger, wiser, and more appreciative of life. Studies conducted over the last couple of decades have identified PTG in conjunction with such life-altering events as natural disasters, illness, loss, and violence. For example, a meta-analysis by Shand et al. (2022) showed that if people were to experience hardship, it might lead principally through processes such as meaning reconstruction and emotional expression-to increased self-awareness and closer interpersonal relationships. Likewise, Zhou et al. (2021) found that Chinese earthquake survivors who could use cognitive reappraisal-a process through which the meaning of trauma is redefined-and benefit from significant social support reported higher levels of PTG. Put together, these observations suggest that while trauma is undoubtedly distressing, it can be a source of personal growth when individuals are able to find meaning and connection in the aftermath.

The Cognitive Process of Meaning-Making

Meaning-making is at the core of PTG. Drawing on the framework by Park and Folkman (1997), this model delineates how a person strives to make sense of their experiences by attempting to square the incongruence between the unsettling reality of a traumatic incident, such as "this disaster was unjust and arbitrary," against one's core beliefs about the world, for instance, "life is fair." In doing so, the cognitive effort might assume many forms, such as reconsidering one's perspective, re-telling one's story in some other way, or seeking spiritual meaning in suffering. As Park (2010) stated, there are two levels of meaning-making: situational meaning, referring to how a person understands a particular occurrence, and global meaning, referring to the geeral belief systems and values that guide one's life.

People naturally want to reestablish coherence and purpose when trauma upsets these frameworks. By doing this, they may not only lessen their suffering but also develop new priorities, a renewed respect for life, and a deeper understanding-all signs of PTG. Meaning-making in communities affected by natural calamities, like floods, sometimes include religious or existential concerns. Survivors may see the incident as a heavenly challenge, a humility lesson, or even an opportunity for compassion and togetherness among all. Spiritual interpretations of trauma have been linked with better emotional adjustment and coping mechanisms according to research from South Asia (Khursheed & Shahnawaz, 2020; Shaw et al., 2020). This is in tune with Viktor Frankl's timeless observation that people can tolerate almost any kind of hardship provided they can uncover meaning within it.

Role of Social Support

Social support is the consolation, counseling, and helpful assistance that we receive from others, which is crucial for a person's recovery and development after experiencing trauma. It acts as a psychological buffer that reduces the impact of distress and helps individuals process what happened. According to Kaniasty (2020), social support does not just reduce negative feelings but also helps survivors to make sense of their experiences by providing new insights and emotional validation. High levels of social support are always found to correspond with higher levels of PTG. For example, Chan et al. (2021) found that typhoon survivors who felt more supported by their communities had higher signs of growth and improvement.

In a similar fashion, Schroevers et al. (2010) demonstrated supportive relationships allow for reflective thought and emotional disclosure, key stages in the recovery process after trauma occurs.

Social support plays an even more significant role in the case of collectivist societies, such as Pakistan. More often than not, the local community, religious circles, and extended family networks provide essential practical lifelines and serve as emotional anchors. These communal spaces of care help survivors rebuild meaning together by turning personal suffering into a collective narrative of resiliency and healing. Trauma becomes a collective experience of healing and strength rather than a personal struggle through shared narratives and mutual support.

Integrated Conceptual Framework

According to the ideas and studies examined in the current paper, it can be suggested that social support is a crucial moderator in the relationship between meaning-making and post-traumatic growth, while survivors, considering adaptive meaning-making processes, will develop higher levels of PTG when they receive emotional, social, or spiritual support.

This integrated perspective highlights that rehabilitation concerns growth ensuing from trauma, rather than merely processing trauma. Indeed, post-trauma growth is usually not a solitary experience but the outcome of an interactive process between an individual's inner striving for meaning and the social network outside that provides solace, validation, and hope.

Research Methodology

It investigated the relationship that existed between meaning-making and PTG in using a quantitative correlational framework, with social support as a moderating element. The cross-sectional strategy allowed for contemporaneous collection of psychological data from survivors who had been affected by the flood.

Participants

A sample of 200 adult flood survivors from Pakistan's Sindh and Punjab provinces, aged between 18 and 60 ($M = 36.4$, $SD = 10.9$), were included in the study (106 males, 94 females). NGOs working on flood repair projects in 2022 and 2023 were used to find participants. Individuals had to be at least six months after the incident and have been directly exposed to displacement or property loss due to flooding in order to meet the inclusion criteria.

Measures

1. Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996)
2. The 21 elements in this assessment evaluate five aspects: spiritual transformation, relationships with others, personal strength, appreciation of life, and new opportunities. On a 6-point Likert scale (0 = not at all, 5 = very great degree), participants scored their answers. This study's Cronbach's α was .91.
3. Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ; Steger et al., 2006)
4. Ten items make up this scale, which assesses both the existence of meaning and the pursuit of meaning ($\alpha = .86$). A seven-point rating system was used to rate the responses (1 being completely false and 7 being completely true).
5. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet et al., 1988)
The MSPSS assesses perceived social support from family, friends, and significant others through 12 items ($\alpha = .90$). Participants used a 7-point Likert scale for their responses.

Procedure

Informed consent in writing was provided by the respondents after explaining the purpose of the study. Assessment tools were administered in both Urdu and English languages. Low reading ability participants were assisted through the tools. Ethical approval was obtained

from the Institutional Review Board of the university. Data collections were done from two relief camps and online Google Forms for the displaced people.

Data Analysis

The participants were informed about the goals of the study, after which they signed an agreement. The assessment tools were administered in both Urdu and English. Participants who were not good readers were assisted. Ethical permission was granted through the Institutional Review Board of the university. Data was collected through relief camps and by using an online Google Forms platform for the displaced persons..

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix*

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Meaning-Making	4.62	0.87	—	.61**	.59**
2. Social Support	4.89	1.01		—	.68**
3. Post-Traumatic Growth	4.75	0.85			—

Note. $N = 200$; $p < .01$.

Strong positive correlations between the three variables were found via correlation analysis. There was a positive correlation between meaning-making and PTG ($r = .59$, $p < .001$), indicating that people who perceived more significance in their experiences also reported greater growth. Additionally, there was a strong correlation between social support and both PTG ($r = .68$, $p < .001$) and meaning-making ($r = .61$, $p < .001$).

Regression and Moderation Analysis

A hierarchical multiple regression was performed to determine whether meaning-making predicted PTG and whether social support moderated this relationship.

Table 2: *Hierarchical Regression Predicting Post-Traumatic Growth*

Predictor	B	SE B	B	t	P
Step 1: Meaning-Making	0.46	0.08	.48	5.75	< .001
Step 2: Social Support	0.31	0.09	.35	4.12	< .001
Step 3: Interaction (MM x SS)	0.14	0.06	.19	2.39	.018

According to the findings, meaning-making is a significant predictor of PTG ($\beta = .48$, $p < .001$). The explained variation rose from 34% to 48% when social support was added. Additionally important was the interaction term, which demonstrated that those with greater levels of social support had a stronger correlation between meaning-making and PTG.

Summary of Findings

1. Among flood survivors, meaning-making strongly predicts PTG.
2. The connection between meaning-making and PTG is both moderated and directly predicted by social support.
3. The interaction implies that when people perceive more support from their family and community, they are more likely to make sense of their lives and grow.

Discussion

The findings of the study provide strong evidence that social support, coupled with the process of meaning-making, is a necessary component in fostering PTG among Pakistani flood survivors. The findings are consistent with worldwide research supporting the idea that trauma, though destructive, can yield significant personal growth once individuals actively seek to reinterpret their experiences (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Park, 2010). Following a disaster, survivors typically progress through an intra-psychic and affective process in which they can transform pain into meaning and despair into new hope. Recovery from trauma, according to this study, was an intentional, introspective process influenced by one's internal meaning frameworks and social networks.

Meaning-Making as a Predictor of Growth

Indeed, in line with previous findings from other trauma-related studies, the study identified meaning-making as a strong predictor of PTG. Survivors who were able to make sense of their losses by rendering them meaningful within a rational framework linked to their own beliefs and values demonstrated greater psychological resilience, more appreciation for life, and closer interpersonal relationships. This provides support for the Meaning-Making Model by Park & Folkman (1997), that trauma disrupts fundamental worldviews, which people then strive to rebuild in an attempt to restore inner balance. Meaning-making often assumes a spiritual dimension within the diverse religious and cultural context of Pakistan.

Many survivors interpreted their experiences as opportunities for compassion and service or tests of God's purpose. Such meanings can restore meaning and order in a situation that has been characterized by chaos. Spiritually framed suffering can grant the survivor stamina, humility, and gratitude that alter their life orientation. Correspondingly, Khursheed and Shahnawaz (2020) found that meaning-making driven by faith was a significant component of PTG among the South Asian survivors of floods. These findings illustrate that meaning-making is a means of recovering one's identity and hope rather than merely a coping strategy.

Moderating Role of Social Support

Social support appeared to be a substantial predictor and mediator of PTG, a finding which makes sense since development after trauma occurs within a network of compassion, understanding, and empathy. The greater the practical and emotional assistance survivors perceived from friends, family, and community members, the more PTG they reported. The moderation analysis further showed that it was under high levels of social support that the effect of meaning-making on PTG became more salient, indicating again the relational nature of the search for meaning. Individuals make sense of their experiences dialogically, through the affirmation and group introspection, rather than alone.

These findings are in line with the findings of Kaniasty, 2020, and Chan et al., 2021, who argue that social support facilitates integrating painful experiences into coherent personal narratives and encourages emotional disclosure. Neighborhood solidarity, extended family structures, and religious organizations based within the community amplify such dynamics in collectivist countries like Pakistan. It is through these networks that culturally situated explanations and shared coping mechanisms, such as storytelling, praying, or socializing, transform pain into group healing. In this way, social support acts as both a psychological safety net and the foundation for the co-creation of meaning and development.

Cultural Implications

The findings indicate that the interpretation of PTG needs to be made through frameworks appropriate to culture and religion. Whereas individualist cognitive retraining is commonly

highlighted within Western models of growth, South Asian contexts reflect a more communal and spiritually embedded approach. Here, religious worldviews, family structures, and collective beliefs are inextricably linked in processes of meaning-making. A resilient and collective set of rituals, faith, and continued sense of divine purpose serve to provide comfort for many Pakistani survivors.

Understanding such cultural factors can help develop counseling and rehabilitation programs which genuinely reach the local populations. Mental health practitioners should be aware of how recovery is shaped by these kinds of cultural myths, such as the belief that hardship is a test from God or an opportunity for moral growth. Matching interventions to these belief systems can help counselors enhance participation and effectiveness. This kind of culturally sensitive understanding of PTG, by drawing on indigenous coping strategies and collective healing practices, works toward decolonizing psychological concepts.

Practical Implications for Counseling Psychology

Several significant ramifications for community mental health and therapy stem from the conclusions of this study. First, meaning-centered therapeutic approaches can help clients consider how trauma has changed their worldviews, values, and sense of self. Encouraging survivors to construct new life narratives can transform distress into purpose. Second, utilizing Pakistan's robust social networks, group counseling interventions can establish forums wherein survivors can exchange narratives, offer mutual support, and jointly derive significance from their experiences.

Third, incorporating spirituality into the treatment, especially in faith-driven countries, raises client participation and makes the practice more culturally relevant. Traditional treatment options may be complemented by interventions such as prayer reflection, exercises of gratitude, or an examination of religious coping beliefs. Finally, community-based outreach programs operated by social workers, professional counselors, and spiritual leaders can reinforce the group resilience that underpins long-term recovery. By embedding psychological support within pre-existing social and spiritual structures, practitioners can construct holistic models of care aimed at more than symptom reduction and focused on growth, purpose, and connectedness.

Limitations and Future Research

This study does have its limitations, despite the insight that the findings provided. The cross-sectional design that has been utilized makes it more difficult to establish whether meaning-making, social support, and PTG are causally related. Future long-term research could monitor survivors over time to see how development develops and stabilizes in the months or years after trauma. Further, the use of self-report measures raises the possibility of biases pertaining to memory recall and social desirability. Therefore, adding behavioral or physiological growth indicators to data collection could enhance validity.

The study's geographic focus on just two regions limits its generalizability to a wide array of cultural contexts in Pakistan. Future studies should also investigate differences in PTG among socioeconomic classes, ethnic groups, and geographical areas. Richer insight into how survivors construct and express meaning can be gained by supplementing the research design with qualitative methods such as storytelling, interviewing, and ethnographic observation. Moreover, testing for gender differences, age-related factors, and levels of religiosity could reveal more subtle patterns of growth. Mixed-methods approaches that integrate quantitative and narrative data would provide a fuller understanding of how trauma changes people's lives.

Conclusion

The study shows that flood survivors in Pakistan experience post-traumatic growth through the process of meaning-making and social support. Not only are people healing, but they are also changing when they reframe traumatic events through frameworks of faith, purpose, and community connection. Through the process of recreating meaning, which is bolstered by emotional and social ties, survivors can find purpose in tragedy and strength in vulnerability. Understanding PTG is of utmost importance from a psychological and social perspective for a country that goes through environmental disasters quite frequently. It provides recommendations for policies related to building localized resilience, humanitarian initiatives, and treatments of mental health. Counselors and legislators can help survivors rebuild not just their homes but their sense of self and community by using cognitive, cultural, and relational perspectives. After all, PTG represents the extraordinary human capacity to turn loss into new beginnings, suffering into wisdom, and despair into compassion.

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