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This is Psychological Frontiers: Exploring Human Behavior. I’m Dawn Albertson.

Lead:
Psychologists have recently discovered that traumatic experiences may, in some cases, have positive effects on health and well-being.

Content:
It is no surprise when people who experience combat, accidents, sexual abuse, or the loss of a loved one have negative emotional and physical reactions. However, a number of trauma researchers have started to study the positive effects of traumatic events. These positive consequences are called *posttraumatic growth*. Researchers have found that after a person experiences a traumatic event, they may feel more self-reliant, have an increased appreciation for life, and their relationships with others can improve.

An interesting finding is that women experience more posttraumatic growth than men. Until recently, it was unclear why this was the case. Drs. Rhonda Swickert and James Hittner from the College of Charleston in South Carolina noticed that people who have more social support in their lives also have more growth after traumatic experiences. They noted that women tend to have more social support in their lives and utilize them in times of stress. This begged the question, do women experience more posttraumatic growth simply because they are women, or is the effect due to women’s use of social support?

Drs. Swickert and Hittner found that social support, not gender, is what truly affects posttraumatic growth. Women seem to have more growth because they usually have more social support.

In other words, *toughing-it-out* by burying one’s feelings, avoiding others, and secluding oneself makes healing after trauma less likely while sharing your feelings after a traumatic event can help lead to growth.

This information can be extremely helpful for veterans, first-responders, and those who experience natural disasters, showing that it is possible to not only survive a traumatic event, but bloom from it.

Content contributed by Adam Mills.


Psychological Frontiers is produced by the Psychology Department at Minnesota State University, Mankato. I’m Dr. Dawn Albertson.