

From a Traumatic Self to a Strong Self: Changes in Abused Women's Emotional World After Divorcing their Violent Husbands

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Abstract : Women abuse life after divorce is an important issue in understanding their recovery after leaving an intimate violent relationship. The aim of this study was to describe and analyze abused women's post-traumatic emotional changes following divorce. The study was based on semi-structured qualitative interviews, in Israel, with 12 women aged 33 to 55, at least five years after divorcing their violent husbands. The interviewees described a transformation process: from a damaged, hurting, powerless self, which coped with dissociation and emotional suppression, to a sense of recovery after the divorce. The sense of recovery was experienced as a strong self-connected to positive self-emotions, such as a sense of control and self-efficacy in coping with past pain and life's challenges. This transformational experience was related to initiating the divorce as a necessity and/or a choice. The interviewees described a continuous dialectic process in healing: first, continuous awareness of their damaged self (post-traumatic fears and negative emotions) and second recognizing their strengths as active choicer in the face of their everyday life and their biography. The discussion of the findings focuses on abused women's meaning-making as a basic process of healing from abusive intimate relationships.

Keywords : abused women, divorce, recovery, meaning making

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