

Inhibition Theory: The Development of Subjective Happiness and Life Satisfaction After Experiencing Severe Traumatic Life Events (Paraplegia)

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Abstract : Studies and applied experiences evidence severe and traumatic accidents not only require physical rehabilitation and recovery but also necessitate a psychological adaption and reorganization to the changed living conditions. Neurobiological models underpinning the experience of happiness and satisfaction postulate life shocks to potentially enhance the experience of happiness and life satisfaction, i.e., posttraumatic growth (PTG). This present study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the underlying psychological processes of PTG and to outline its consequences on subjective happiness and life satisfaction. To explore the aforementioned, Esch's ABC Model was used as guidance for the development of a questionnaire assessing changes in happiness and life satisfaction and for a schematic model postulating the development of PTG in the context of paraplegia. Two-stage qualitative interview procedures explored participants' experiences of paraplegia. Specifically, narrative, semi-structured interviews (N=28) focused on the time before and after the accident, the availability of supportive resources, and potential changes in the perception of happiness and life satisfaction. Qualitative analysis (Grounded Theory) indicated an initial phase of reorganization was followed by a gradual psychological adaption to novel, albeit reduced, opportunities in life. Participants reportedly experienced a 'compelled' slowing down and elements of mindfulness, subsequently instilling a sense of gratitude and joy in relation to life's presumed trivialities. Despite physical limitations and difficulties, participants reported an enhanced ability to relate to oneself and others and a reduction of perceived everyday nuisances. Concluding, PTG can be experienced in response to severe, traumatic life events and has the potential to enrich the lives of affected persons in numerous, unexpected and yet challenging ways. PTG appears to be a spectrum comprised of an interplay of internal and external resources underpinned by neurobiological processes. Participants experienced PTG irrelevant of age, gender, marital status, income or level of education.

Keywords : post traumatic growth, happiness, life satisfaction, traumatic life events, paraplegia, ABC model, trauma

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