

A Qualitative Exploration of Post Traumatic Growth among Divorcees in India

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The study is an exploration of post traumatic growth experiences among divorcees. Although PTG has been studied in various settings, disruption of marital affairs has not been the subject of rigorous investigation in PTG. Especially, in the Indian context, where divorces have several social meanings and consequences unlike its manifestation in western countries, a study on PTG in this population would contribute to the theoretical framework at large and have social implications for an often-overlooked group in the society. A total of 10 participants were interviewed and the transcripts were analysed using Thematic Analysis, which generated 2 major themes and 10 subthemes. From the analysis, enhanced interpersonal relationships, changed perceptions about love, better management of emotions, prioritization of self, and better character strengths was found to be the most prominent positive shifts in the lives of divorcees. Factors like good relationships, professional support, work engagement, and time, were identified as facilitating PTG in the population. The insights garnered by the research have the potential to feed into intervention programs and policies for the empowerment and wellbeing of the population.

Keywords: Divorcees, meaning making, Post traumatic growth, Positive changes, Trauma, Family.

Marriages are socio-cultural unions grounded in love, partnership, reciprocity, and the shared journey of building a family. In the Indian context, marriage is characterized by the union of two families through arranged alliances, emphasizing filial commitment over spousal intimacy. It holds profound significance as a sacred event, with the expectation that the couple remains united until death (Madathil & Benshoff, 2008). In contrast to other interpersonal connections, marriage is distinguished by its legal bindings and validation, as articulated in Article 21 of the Indian constitution.

Like marriage, divorce is also influenced by various elements such as traditions, values, belief systems, social structures, and cultural norms. Acceptance of divorce varies across cultures and societies, and in the context of Indian culture, where marriages are often viewed as divine unions and considered sacred social institutions, divorce remains a societal taboo (Ariplackal & George, 2014). Many couples, due to legal, cultural, and property considerations, choose to remain married even when the relationship becomes unhealthy or unfulfilling (Thapalia & Subedee, 2006). Despite its legitimacy, divorce is often perceived as a failure in

sustaining marital life and is met with societal disapproval. However, for many, divorce is a viable solution to end an unhappy marriage (Jawad, 1998).

Divorce, a legal concept, unfolds when individuals, originally united through mutual consensus and agreements, opt to conclude their marital bond under legal jurisdiction. While divorce is often seen as a pathway to a potentially improved life for those who go through it (Guru, 2009), its prevalence in contemporary society does not diminish the intricate and stressful nature of the experience for the individuals involved (Oren & Hadomi, 2020). Indeed, divorce is regarded as a form of 'trauma,' a complex and undesirable social phenomenon that gives rise to various social problems (Trivedi et al., 2009). This significant life transition carries profound consequences across social, legal, personal, and economic domains (Price & McKenzie, 1988). The impact of divorce is particularly pronounced in the emotional and mental well-being of individuals. The traumatic nature of divorce is often associated with the termination of an intimate relationship, further emphasizing its status as one of the most stressful events in an individual's life (Feeney & Monin, 2008). The extant literature unequivocally indicates that divorce is a profoundly challenging life event.

The phenomenon of divorce is gaining heightened attention as a life crisis. Luxembourg and the United States boast the highest divorce rates at 87% and 50%, respectively. In stark contrast, India stands out with only 1% of marriages culminating in divorce, translating to just 13 out of every 1000 marriages (India Today, 2018). However, recent trends indicate a steady rise in divorce filings in India. In 2019, over 1,10,000 Facebook users in India openly declared their relationship status as 'divorced' (Bhatt, 2019, January 27),

suggesting a shifting cultural and social landscape in the nation. This surge in divorce cases prompts a critical inquiry into India's readiness to support individuals post-divorce, considering the potential traumatic impact of the experience. This study, takes it a step further, and investigates the positive aspects of having gone through the trauma of divorce and the factors that made it possible.

In general, positive personal changes that emerge after dealing with the adversities of life have been called post traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Posttraumatic growth emerges as individuals strive to adapt to highly adverse circumstances that often lead to significant psychological distress. In their groundbreaking research on Posttraumatic Growth (PTG), Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) identified five domains of growth: 'appreciation of life', 'relationship with others', 'personal strength', 'new possibilities in life', and 'spiritual change'. Subsequent studies have echoed these themes and factors in diverse populations, including victims of physical and sexual abuse, survivors of life-threatening diseases, and more (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006; Cho & Park, 2013). While there is a wealth of research on posttraumatic growth, there is limited understanding of its manifestation within the divorced population. Given that the population differs from those in previous studies on posttraumatic growth, there is a crucial need for comprehensive research to discern the nuances of posttraumatic growth expression in this specific group.

Research on Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) presents an alternative, positive outlook on traumatic experiences by examining how adversity can become a catalyst for finding meaning and fostering personal growth (Mehrabi et al, 2015). As divorce rates rise and the associated distress

and dysfunction show a steady increase, such studies hold potential to assist professionals in mental health, law, justice, NGOs, and policymakers in fostering growth among this population. Identifying the processes and factors associated with post traumatic growth during divorce and its associated factors in the Indian context would help NGOs who provide services in the area and psychotherapists who deal with divorcees to initiate activities that foster PTG in this population and might even lead to the introduction of programs targeted towards the same. The current study thus aimed to identify and evaluate the positive shifts in the lives of divorcees because of their experience and explore the different factors that contribute to these changes.

Method

Participants

A total of 10 subjects were interviewed for the current study. Criterion sampling and snowball sampling were used to recruit study subjects. Males/females who were divorced for more than 6 months were recruited. It was made sure that the participants were fluent either in English or Malayalam. Participants suffering from severe depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, or any other psychiatric disorders (as self-reported) were excluded from participation in the study. Since no new codes emerged after the 8th interview, theoretical saturation was assumed and the sample size was confined to ten. Table 1 outlines the basic demographic details of the participants collected during the interviews.

Table 1. Demographic details of the participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Duration elapsed after the divorce	Remarried	Children
Participant 1	Female	35	7 months	Y	N
Participant 2	Female	29	6 months	N	N
Participant 3	Male	36	5 years	Y	Y
Participant 4	Female	31	4 years	Y	Y
Participant 5	Female	28	2 years	Y	Y
Participant 6	Female	27	1.5 years	N	N
Participant 7	Female	26	6 years	N	Y
Participant 8	Female	28	7 months	N	N
Participant 9	Female	33	5 years	N	Y
Participant 10	Female	34	7 years	N	Y

Procedure

A flyer inviting participants for the study was shared via social media platforms and through the researchers' personal networks. From the responses received, subjects were filtered based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The candidates thus selected were sent an invitation letter briefly explaining the study and the interview process. They were

further contacted by one of the researchers to get informed consent and set a time for the interview.

An interview schedule was prepared by the researchers based on the research objectives of the study and the post traumatic growth theory by Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004). Accordingly, a total of 18 open ended questions were framed. Telephonic interviews

were conducted which could, to a large extent, circumvent the geographic and temporal restrictions, and as the participants testified, 'mitigated the potential discomfort of a face-to-face interaction', given the sensitive nature of the topic. The interviewers mostly took up the role of a naïve outsider, and adopted accommodating and encouraging tactics of probing. The interviews on average lasted for around 43 minutes. To minimize potential sensitivities, the interviewers deliberately excluded most identified trigger words from their questions and probes. The interactions were intentionally directed towards exploring the positive aspects of participants' experiences.

The audio recording of the interviews had to be translated first, since most of the interviews were done in Malayalam, and then transcribed, which were done in close succession by the researchers. The researchers followed a full verbatim orthographic transcription including false starts, verbal tics, stutters, and all other utterances. The data collection process incorporated member checks, involving ongoing communication with participants post-interview to seek clarifications as needed. Additionally, upon transcribing the recorded interviews, some of the transcripts were shared with participants, allowing them to verify accuracy and provide any additional information or adjustments they deemed necessary. We strictly adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration for ethical research conduct through the entirety of the study.

Analysis

The data analysis technique used for the study is the Braun and Clarke (2006) version of Thematic Analysis (TA). A combination of both inductive and deductive thematic analysis was opted for this research. The data analysis resulted in the creation of 51 initial codes, forming the foundation for the

overarching storybook themes. Through a process of merging, grouping, and synthesis, researchers identified 2 primary themes and 10 sub-themes. Throughout the analysis, the adherence to sound research practices was consistently verified using the 15-point checklist of criteria for good Thematic Analysis (TA) outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Findings & Discussion

The objective of this thematic study was to explore the post-traumatic growth experiences of individuals who have undergone divorce. Through in-depth interviews with participants, Thematic Analysis yielded 2 broad themes. To enhance the organization of content and to facilitate discussion within these themes, 10 sub-themes were identified across the two main themes. These themes and subthemes are listed below.

Theme 1: Positive Changes

1. Interpersonal Relationships
2. Perceptions about Love
3. Spiritual and Religious Transformations
4. Managing Emotions
5. Prioritizing Self
6. Character Strength

Theme 2: Tools for Change

7. Support system
8. Professional Support
9. Engaging Experiences
10. Time to Heal

The themes and sub-themes intertwine and connect, weaving together to construct a cohesive narrative that encapsulates the shared experiences of the interviewed participants. This collective narrative serves as a comprehensive response to the research questions posed in the study.

Positive Changes

Interpersonal Relationships

A prevalent pattern observed in the participants' narratives is a heightened perception of the significance of relationships with others. This enhancement was evident across various relationships, including romantic connections and parent-child dynamics. Additionally, many participants could articulate the reasons they believed contributed to this heightened importance.

The following is narrated by participant 2: "Now I have become closer to them. I have more time to spend with them. We are all well bonded now. Friends also have problems and we are all able to understand each other. I got more attached to my family..."

Something very much similar is also seen in the interview transcript of participant 5:

"Family importance... Now these people are my world. If they weren't there... I didn't really see their importance then... But now, I do."

In both instances, participants regard the support provided by their significant others as invaluable and crucial for their recovery post-divorce or trauma. This support during times of crisis has strengthened their bonds.

According to the Interpersonal Process Model of Intimacy (IPM; Reis & Shaver, 1988), intimacy grows when an individual discloses personal thoughts or emotions (self-disclosure), receives a supportive response, and perceives the response as validating and caring. Research has consistently shown that individuals who self-disclose and perceive supportive responses tend to experience increased intimacy with their closed ones (e.g., Laurenceau et al., 2005; Manne et al., 2004).

Another potential explanation for the improvement in relationships stems from

attachment theory, according to which adults are driven to form close relationships and engage with a partner to experience a sense of security and establish a safe base for personal growth (Hazan & Zeifman, 1999). Given the insecurity resulting from the trauma they endured, these divorcees likely sought a sense of security in their lives. Intimacy and feelings of security mutually reinforce each other; interactions with close partners can deepen intimacy, enhancing security. In turn, a sense of security encourages vulnerability, further strengthening intimacy (Cordova & Scott, 2001).

Perceptions about love

The participants' earlier perceptions (before the divorce) about love and marriage were largely based on the religious ideologies or societal teachings they grew up with.

The following quotation is from the interview of participant 1:

"And religion had a major part to play in my life. Like, we can only be attracted to one person- and we are only supposed to love and marry that one person. And after you marry that person, you should stay with that person forever no matter what."

Participant 4's statement below also reflects the same:

"In our society, in Kerala, the society has conditioned us to think like one partner, one marriage, and live with that person until your death."

Studies conducted in the Western cultures have indicated that development of romantic relationship among youth is a multi-factorial developmental phenomenon that is influenced by factors such as age, gender, attachment styles, changes within the relationship, and on the social and cultural contexts in which they occur (Furman & Collins, 2009). Romantic love is shaped by cultural context, as argued by Dion and Dion

(1996), and cross-cultural research suggests variations in romantic beliefs across cultures. Some of these perceptions are already studied at length in the Indian context. For instance, in a study by Desai, McCormick, & Gaeddert (1990), they observe that in India, a society often characterized as traditional, parent-approved and arranged marriages are the social norm, while premarital romantic relationships, regardless of marital intent, are widely resisted by parents and elders (Desai, McCormick, & Gaeddert, 1990).

However, as the interviews progressed, and participants were enquired about how their views on the concepts of love and marriage had evolved, their responses revealed distinct shifts. They moved beyond their initial, more conventional notions of love and crafted new perspectives that resonated with their current phase in life.

The statement by participant 5 below reflects the dramatic change in the perception of love after the divorce.

“...the idea that you can only love just one person in your lifetime is idiotic. Not one, you can fall for a minimum of ten, twenty people [chuckles]. If your first relationship doesn't work out, go for the second, if that doesn't work out, go for the third. We have only one life- and every one of us deserves to experience a good relationship at some point.”

The divorce shattered the participants' conventional notions of love and marriage. Consequently, they found it necessary to revise and reframe their understanding of love to make sense of their situation and navigate subsequent interpersonal relationships.

A shift in life philosophy is one of the three key areas of positive outcomes following trauma, as identified in the Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) literature (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 1996). The above

narratives certainly indicate growth in this regard among the participants.

Among the participants interviewed for the study, four out of ten had remarried. Exploring how they approached their second marriage (given that all participants had experienced divorce only once) provides an intriguing avenue to trace the evolution in their perspectives on love and marriage.

Participant 3 said the following about his relationship with his new partner:

“We felt that our companionship was right, because of our intellectual similarity. We are both of the same 'wave length'- intellectually. That has influenced a lot of our decisions. Even a lot of our interests and hobbies overlap.”

A similar comment was made by participant 4 when asked about her ideas on marriage:

“Don't marry just for the sake of others, marry only the one who you think you are emotionally, intellectually and even physically compatible with.”

Participant 8 used fewer words to convey the same:

“One should marry someone only after getting to know that person really well.”

The divorce, particularly among those who had remarried, has evidently led to a more pragmatic view of marriage for the participants. They now perceive marriage as a companionship founded on trust and understanding, elements they believed were lacking in their previous marital relationships.

Spiritual and religious Transformations

In response to trauma, individuals strive to make sense of their experiences by evaluating their meaning. For those who are religious, this process may involve interpreting the events through a religious lens, potentially leading to shifts in their

religious beliefs (McIntosh, 1995; Schaefer, Blazer, & Koenig, 2008). While the spiritual and religious transformations in the interviewed participants were not highly pronounced, with none identifying as highly religious, there were discernible changes in this domain, albeit not uniform across participants.

As anticipated and consistent with prior literature on religiosity/spirituality and Posttraumatic Growth (PTG), some participants have exhibited a slight increase in religiosity.

In the words of participant 8:

“I pray more often now. I used to pray before as well. But now I pray more.”

Participant 9 also shared the same opinion:

“I think I might be stronger in terms of religiosity now.”

In the case of these participants, it is observed that religiosity has slightly improved and that they found it a positive coping strategy to deal with the stress and pressures of the trauma. It also helped them make sense of the trauma they went through.

Individuals who can reconcile the apparent paradox between a benevolent God and human suffering are less likely to experience challenges to their beliefs during traumatic events. Without such explanations, individuals may perceive negative events as indications that God cannot protect them, the world is unsafe, and life lacks meaning (Janoff-Bulman, 1992). This perception may prompt them to modify or abandon religious beliefs that conflict with these interpretations (Kuile & Ehring, 2014). This pattern was also observed in some participants.

According to participant 1:

“Well, I’m no more religious”

Participant 6 says the following:

“I don’t do anything that is considered religious now.”

However, in these scenarios as well, participants perceived the changes to be positive. It aided them in making sense of the trauma, showcasing newfound courage to break conventions, or finding comfort in unburdening their thoughts and being part of a community.

Managing Emotions

Another positive change perceived by the participants is the improved management of emotions. Many participants reported being overly emotional or sensitive before the trauma but found themselves better at controlling and managing their emotions afterward.

Participant 1 shares her experience as follows:

“I have literally washed his legs with my tears... Literally, cried and cried on his legs... So, I’d cry and cry... But now that has totally changed in my life.”

Participant 6 and participant 9 also felt the same way:

“I used to be very sensitive before... Used to get very emotional- very excited at times, sad, hurt... But now I can control my emotions...”

“... it taught me to control my emotions. Otherwise, I was kind of an emotional fool. But now I can, practically think about these stuffs.”

The data clearly indicates that improved emotional management is a positive shift in the lives of divorcees. The experience of divorce served as a learning opportunity for the participants, exposing them to emotional distress and heightening their awareness of the range of their emotional expressions. This awareness may have afforded them the opportunity to monitor and take control of the ways they express their emotions.

Prioritizing Self

As previously discussed, the participants' traumatic experiences could have taught them to be more understanding and kind towards others. Another positive outcome of the trauma was that participants became more understanding and kinder towards themselves. They began prioritizing their own well-being, caring about others and valuing relationships without compromising their own health and happiness.

Participant 2 talked about loving herself more:

"I have learned to love myself more. Before, I haven't prioritized myself. Like my health, mental health and all."

Participants also reported being more assertive after the experience:

Participant 7: "After that I learned to say 'No' to whatever I am not interested in."

Participant 9: "But now, I learnt how to say 'no' and depend on myself."

This pattern is consistently observed in the narratives of various participants, aligning with the PTG domain of appreciation of life, where they realize the value of life in general and themselves. This awareness likely emerged from the traumatic experience, teaching them the importance of voicing concerns, being assertive, and taking initiative to avoid failure and prevent others from taking advantage of them.

Character strengths

The interview transcripts reveal that all participants experienced positive emotions and acquired positive qualities as a result of the trauma, leading to significant personality changes or developments. The identified positive qualities and emotions, ranging from resilience to hope, fall under the categories of personal strength, appreciation of life, and new possibilities - domains of PTG established by Tedeschi and Calhoun.

Participant 2 talks about her growth after the separation in the following lines:

"...Energy, the courage and enthusiasm to do everything... Not to fear anyone. Now it is like I don't have any fear. I was a person who lived with a lot off fear earlier. I was worried about my image. I used to sacrifice a lot of things as to avoid problems. But now, it's like, let it be. Now I have a feeling that I am truly living my life."

Likewise, a lot of the participants reported being bolder after the experience.

Participant 3 narrated his experience as follows:

"But inside, I was growing bolder and even more rebellious. These events have actually made me stronger and bolder."

Basic hope is understood as a person's generalized and complex beliefs about the higher order and meaningfulness of the surrounding world and its general positivity toward people (Trzebiński et al, 2004). Participants reported having experienced an increase in their level of hope after their divorce.

Participant 1 talked about hope at multiple parts in her interview:

"In the initial time, I was a bit numb- kind of like selfless. After that, my level of hope escalated."

"I was very hopeful for my second marriage, there weren't any negative thoughts that came up."

Most of the participants also mentioned a new found sense of independence and courage as a result of their traumatic experience.

In the words of participant 8:

"I feel more independent now. I already had a job- but I didn't feel that I could do things on my own. But now, I feel like I can- I'm not afraid of anything anymore."

Some of the participants described their traumatic experience as an opportunity to grow as a person.

This is clearly evident in the quotation below by participant 2:

“By taking this decision I see more opportunities for myself. This is freedom for me.”

It is established that the perception of new opportunities is a significant part of the experience of post traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). It is an indicator that the participants have grown to see past the negative effects of the trauma and consider it as an opportunity for improvement and growth.

Adverse experiences, such as divorce, can foster wisdom-related character strengths, including intellectual humility, openness to diverse perspectives, the ability to understand complex situations, and empathy (Grossmann, 2017).

Participant 3 said he became more intellectual after having gone through the divorce:

“And, I also became more intellectual, I think. I started responding to things more intellectually.”

Participants also talked about having broader world views as a result of the trauma.

Participant 1 stated the following:

“It taught me to view the world differently. A depth in everything- see everyone as humans and humans alone. These changes actually reflected in my own life.”

Participant 4 also shared the same:

“I came to the realization that the world is wider and my world views also grew wider.”

This development of virtue of wisdom can be likely attributed to the exercise of coping with and overcoming adversity

(Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2016; Weststrate & Glück, 2017).

Participants also displayed heightened prosocial behavior, particularly towards those experiencing the same trauma of divorce. This increased altruism, stemming from their own suffering, aligns with the concept of “altruism born of suffering” (ABS; Frazier et al., 2013; Vollhardt, 2009). ABS characterizes individuals who, having experienced adversity, are uniquely motivated to assist others.

Participant 2 articulated this change as follows:

“I felt like giving a lot, like a lot of love remains. I used to cook food for my loved ones. I still do that. I have thought about joining some NGO’s where I can cook food for people. I think from now on, I will be of some service to people.”

Participant 4 shared her confidence in raising her voice for the divorcees:

“I am very much confident now that I can raise my voice for a lot of people against the social stigma. When I post something and all, some girls would often come up and text me, asking for advice.”

Participant 5 shared a similar view:

“I do wanna contribute to the society... To help the poor... I am already doing that, and I’d like to keep doing it more.... Help the society. I think that is very important...”

This aligns with the PTG domains of relating with others and personal strength, as participants discovered their capacity and desire to assist individuals undergoing similar traumas.

Tools for changes

Support System : During their interviews, several participants highlighted the importance of the support they received during their traumatic experiences. They

emphasized how this support played a crucial role in overcoming negative effects, enabling them to move forward in life, and even fostering a more positive outlook after the trauma.

Participant 1 felt that the support from her family was a necessary factor in her growth:

“Especially my dad and my sister, I could overcome this situation only because they supported me throughout.”

For participant 2, friends played the part of listeners:

“Only my close friends knew my exact problems because when I couldn’t carry all the pain alone, I used to open up with 3-4 of my close friends. I used to go and meet some of them and talk.”

The support that they received came in many different forms. Irrespective of their forms, they all helped the participants feel more at ease and understood.

Participant 4 highlights the importance of even virtual conversations in this part:

“At times, I was not even able to voice call them, but just chat with them. But even with those texts, the kind of mental support that they gave me was very valuable.”

This perceived assistance from individuals within social ties, groups, and the broader community, has been affirmed to play a significant and direct role in the cultivation of Posttraumatic Growth (Balaban et al., 2017).

Another pattern observed is the participants’ discovery of new role models - individuals they aspire to emulate. This admiration marked the inception of a meaningful friendship or served as the gateway to a new romantic relationship.

Participant 4 talks about one of her colleagues as being everything she herself wishes to be:

“It was more of my interactions with the colleague that I mentioned before, that helped me more. She was very positive, very bold.”

Participant 1 found her new companion to be a source of positivity for her:

“In this time, I got to meet a lot of people who looks at the world very differently. Including XXXXXX [Husband]. That really imparted a lot of positivity in me.”

Interdependence theory defines relationships as the extent to which two or more individuals consistently exert strong, frequent, and diverse effects on each other (Magnusson, 1990). In contrast to transient interactions with strangers, individuals in close relationships engage in repeated interactions, leading to both profoundly positive and negative outcomes (Hartup & Stevens, 1997; Kelley et al., 2003). Inherent to the interdependence framework is the “transformation process,” which gauges the extent to which considerations beyond immediate self-interest influence thoughts, feelings, and behaviors (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2008; Van Lange & Balliet, 2015). Consequently, the outcome of an interaction is shaped not only by the situation itself, such as each person’s immediate needs, but also by the interaction partner’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in relation to the shared situation. For instance, post-divorce, Participant 1 will be influenced not only by her own coping and growth perspectives (Barskova & Oesterreich, 2009) but also by how her friends and family respond to her evolving needs (Cohen, 2004; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Kaniasty et al., 1990; Lakey & Orehek, 2011). Similarly, when Participant 4 faces discrimination at work, the adverse experience not only impacts her personal well-being but also affects her husband’s well-being as he vicariously experiences and responds to her discrimination.

The extent to which people transform through trauma and adversity is therefore not only dependent on intra-personal processes but also on the relationship structure in which they exist and how the (real or perceived) thoughts, feelings, and actions of close others influence how the event is experienced and interpreted.

Professional support

While only a minority of participants sought professional psychological support following their trauma, those who did, reported varying degrees of benefit from the experience.

Participant 3 shared his experience with counselling as follows:

“It took me at least three years to get over the trauma. I attended a lot of therapies and counselling sessions. So, I could overcome this because of the help of some really good counsellors and support from people.”

Participant 6 said the following on the importance of psychological help:

“Yes, it did help at that time. And I think it is really required... Especially, when we are in academics, we know the solutions to many things... But based on our situation, we might not necessarily be able to apply it. We need an outsider for that. In that situation, I certainly got that help-in a very positive way, I'd say.”

A substantial number of individuals who undergo trauma report experiencing positive life changes, including posttraumatic growth (PTG), even without psychological intervention (Sawyer et al., 2010; Sumalla et al., 2009). The impact of psychological treatment on PTG is also not fully understood and warrants further research (Roepke, 2014). Additionally, it is reasonable to question whether the professional help received by participants may have functioned as another form of social support.

Engaging experiences

Most participants were actively involved in various activities following the trauma. These engagements not only assisted them in coping with stress but also infused meaning into their lives. Like interpersonal relationships, these activities are both outcomes and catalysts of post-traumatic growth.

Participant 8 reported that music helped her after her trauma:

“During those times, I used to listen to music. Especially when I had mood swings, I listened to music of the opposite genre or moods. It helped me a lot”

Participant 5 felt she became more creative afterwards:

“Mmm...I used to write quite a bit during that time. Not a lot...But yes...it is when we start feeling pain that the creative soul in us awakens.”

Aldwin and Sutton (1998) suggested that individuals exposed to early-life adversity might develop the ability to “step outside of social conventions”. Kim, Vincent, and Goncalo (2012) demonstrated that social rejection could enhance creative thinking, especially in individuals with independent self-concepts. Besides considering creativity as a positive outcome of trauma, it can also be viewed as a factor contributing to post-traumatic growth by providing meaning to individuals who have experienced divorce or separation.

According to participant 4: “So my thoughts shifted to going outside, travelling around, meeting new people. That is when I think I started becoming more positive. Creative inputs, I think I started watching more movies and started taking an interest in movies.”

Participant 9 said the following: “Aah...I mentioned nah? Church activities...Choir...I

was fond of it...And I usually like doing paintings, fabric painting, cooking, and embroidery. But it was mainly the church activities-because it provided the social life that I lost due to the divorce. That got me back into the society.”

Participant 5 talked about how it was her job that saved her: “I feel like it was my job that actually saved me. Without a proper job, I would have been done-totally destroyed.”

Time to heal

In the foundational work on the Core Beliefs Inventory (CBI; Cann et al., 2010), time emerged as a significant predictor of post-traumatic growth (PTG), indicating that longer durations since the event were linked to greater growth. While Sears, Stanton, and Danoff-Burg (2003) also observed higher reports of PTG with more time since diagnosis, other studies have yielded mixed results regarding the association between time since the event and PTG (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996; Bellizzi et al., 2006; Brunet et al., 2010).

The present study did not identify significant variations in posttraumatic growth experiences among divorcees based on the time elapsed since the divorce. However, the data gleaned from the interviews show that the positive changes observed in participants were gradual rather than abrupt.

As participant 8 reports: *“it was a sudden shock at first. But the rest of the changes were all gradual.”*

Participant 6 also reports the same: “In the last sitting -quite recently, she told me that I have changed a lot- that I am not even the same person anymore. But it was a gradual change.”

Implications & Limitations

The current study sheds light on the experiences of divorcees within the cultural context of India. By emphasizing the positive

dimensions of their experiences, the research explores the phenomenon of Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) among divorcees. Given the limited exploration of PTG in the context of divorcees, this study contributes to the broader literature on post-traumatic growth as well. The findings provide valuable insights into the factors influencing PTG in divorcees, offering a foundation for the development of programs, interventions, and support services. The discussions as part of the current study can be particularly beneficial for counsellors, therapists, and advocates working with divorce cases.

The current study is intentionally constrained to a narrow space for exploration – although it assures a clean sweep of the allotted territory, it is quite likely that it might have missed out on details that are outside the purview of the interview questions and probes. Future studies can widen the scope of their investigation and use the findings here to navigate the traumatic terrain. A quantitative study might be able to compensate for some of the inadequacies of this research and possibly validate some of the findings as well. The study also had to find a balance between being extensive and being comprehensive – in the pursuit of reporting all the major points discovered in the investigation, a thorough exploration of some of the points discussed had to be compromised.

Conclusion

The study conclusively demonstrated that divorcees experienced positive transformations in their lives following the traumatic experience. The identified positive shifts and the contributing factors uncovered in this research hold promise for empowering and enhancing the well-being of both individuals and society. As one of the pioneering studies exploring Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) among divorcees in the Indian context, we anticipate that this research will

inspire future investigations to build upon and expand our understanding of this important phenomenon.

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