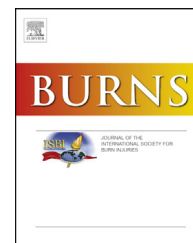


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## Review

# Posttraumatic growth after burn in adults: An integrative literature review

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## ABSTRACT

Posttraumatic growth after burn is a relatively new area of study with only a small number of studies that have examined this phenomenon. It is important to understand the presentation of posttraumatic growth and coping in burn survivors, how it changes over time and the components which influence growth so that we can understand how to promote posttraumatic growth in burn survivors. The aim of this review was to assess these three parameters. Studies were identified through multiple databases with specific search terms to identify posttraumatic growth after burn. From the 813 articles found, 57 were identified as potentially useful, and 8 as eligible for review; three qualitative, one mixed methods, two quantitative, one discussion paper and part of a review which assessed all psychosocial outcomes. Growth presented as realising personal strength, reprioritising, spirituality, humanity, changed relationships, and compassion and altruism. Styles of coping included feelings of gratefulness and downward comparison, humour and planning. Suddenness of the event, and the severity and location of injury might affect the amount of growth experienced. Overall function, quality of life, social support and optimism, hope and new opportunities are influences on growth after burn, all of which have the potential for improvement through targeted intervention strategies. Further research is indicated in many areas related to growth, intervention and measurement.

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## 1. Introduction

Surviving a burn is associated with long-term physical and psychosocial impacts. Most psychosocial research for burns has focussed on psychopathology and quality of life [1] and thus the focus has been on problems and deficits brought about through burn. It is important to identify, measure and treat the impact of these appropriately to guide intervention. However, trauma has been known to promote psychological growth [2] and change our outlook [3] with little attention provided to this phenomenon after burn.

An important distinction needs to be made between the two constructs of posttraumatic growth and resilience. Posttraumatic growth (PTG) is positive change which occurs *beyond* the pre-trauma condition and was first described in 1995 [2,4]. Resilience is an attribute which allows a person to remain unchanged by the trauma, or to “bounce back” to the pre-trauma condition. However, definitions of resilience vary and there is a lack of consensus in the literature [5]. Historically growth was seen to be part of resilience, more recently growth has been identified as a separate construct. Resilience has been described as a ‘lower bar’ in comparison to growth. However, it is a complex area and it also should be noted that those who report growth may also do worse over all [6].

The focus of this review is on how posttraumatic growth has been documented within the research literature specifically in relation to burn. The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) was designed by Tedeschi and Calhoun [7] to measure this construct, and has been used widely within general PTG research literature. There are other measures of positive outcomes in health such as the Benefit Finding Scale [8,9], the Changes in Outlook Questionnaire [10] and the Stress-related Growth Scale [11], however these measures have not been reported in detail within the burn literature.

Although quality of life after burn survival has been widely explored within the research literature, the assessment tools used to measure quality of life after burn focuses on problem identification with the aim of restoring normal physical and psychological function [12–14]. Therefore the quality of life assessment tools identify and evaluate negative health states in order to return to pre-burn functioning, rather than assessing progress beyond the pre-burn level. Thus quality of life measures will not be the focus of this review.

It is important that we understand the presentation, process and progression of posttraumatic growth (PTG) across time after burn, and the factors that influence its evolution. The clinical implications of understanding this better will mean that we can advise and support our patients towards growth, and deliver and assess programs designed to promote growth. Potentially, this will ensure that we do not just aim to return our patients to a new normal, but that we can encourage them to progress beyond their previous level of psychosocial and physical functioning.

The overall aim of this integrative review is to explore the literature which explicitly describes posttraumatic after burn and discuss how this relates to other literature about psychosocial recovery. The specific aim is to identify and

critique the current literature with respect to posttraumatic growth or positive change following burn in relation to its (1) presentation and coping (2) temporal changes and (3) associated factors in order to synthesise new insights, implications for practice and areas for investigation and research.

## 2. Method

An integrative review builds a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon to inform clinical practice, future research and policy [15]. It is a useful method to use for this subject area because it can assess quantitative, qualitative and mixed method research together. Evidence based practice is essential to drive quality care, and literature reviews play an important part in compiling and assessing the current evidence to understand the current position, identify the gaps that need to be bridged, and reveal future directions [16].

The search strategy was guided by the process detailed in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement [17] and is summarised in Fig. 1. The databases Cinahl Plus; Medline; Embase; PsycINFO; Proquest; Pubmed; Cochrane; Scopus were searched in March 2016 using specific search terms. In addition to this search strategy, citation searches were completed on key papers which specifically investigated PTG after burn to ensure completeness. Hand searches of linked citations of relevant papers were conducted, and a search of the grey literature via the Trove database conducted. The results are shown in Fig. 1.

### 2.1. Identification of relevant papers for inclusion

#### 2.1.1. Search terms

1. Burn and
2. Posttraumatic growth; psychological growth; adversarial growth; positive change; adaptation; adjustment; thriving; benefit finding; resilience.

#### 2.1.2. Population studied

Burn in adults only. The rationale: For children, psychological growth is hard to differentiate from normal maturation, and in fact, it could be argued that the burn becomes integrated into this growth process.

### 2.2. Screening criteria for papers

These were screened for inclusion by an initial review of the title and abstract.

#### 2.2.1. Included papers limited to

1. English language papers or papers translated to English.
2. Since 1990.
3. Full text only.
4. Peer reviewed journal articles.
5. All study designs—qualitative and quantitative.

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