

Posttraumatic Growth as a Positive Aspect of Professional Deformation in Law-Enforcement Officers

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Abstract

The reported study was funded by RFBR according to the research project No. 19-013-00517. The subject of posttraumatic growth is of topical interest because of the increasing amount of stress penetrating every area of our life. It is not a secret that traumatic events can produce many physical and psychological consequences. While interestingly, there are no posttraumatic stress disorders in survivors' psychic brought about by the calamities in their life. The posttraumatic growth is the phenomenon of positive personality change, caused by the efforts to survive through the most horrible sets of circumstances. There are many events that can work as a trigger of posttraumatic growth. In this paper we are describing posttraumatic growth as aspect of professional deformation in law-enforcement officers police in Circumpolar region. The subjects is high relevant for Circumpolar region because of additional influence of northern factors on human welfare. In this research we have based on qualitative analysis of data with applying of program OpenCode 4.02 [<http://www.umu.se/english/research>]. We have used phenomenal approach. On the base of analysis of literature data, we have prepared semi-structured interview. The points of interview allowed us find the answers for such research questions as: What kinds of positive changes in personality and in life of law-enforcement officers were caused by factors of police services in Circumpolar region? Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were the main ways of informant selection. We have examined 30 informants, men in middle adulthood, law-enforcement officers, who live and police in Circumpolar region

Keywords: posttraumatic growth, professional deformation, law-enforcement officers

Introduction

In contemporary world, the labor practices of law-enforcement officers are significantly complicating. First, this changes concern of requirements regarding the level of law-enforcement officer's expertises and prevention of corruption among personnel. This fact associates with lack of stability in economic situation all over the world, deterioration of situation regarding terrorism, crime characteristics of law-breakers and convicted persons, the changes of evaluation criterions for law-enforcement officers labor.

These factors determine the necessity of constant control for own behavior, feelings, emotions by law-enforcement officers for prevention of merger with criminal environment and professional deformation. Taking the above into consideration we may notice that the researches in the field of professional deformation are high relevant and there is a series of contributions for this topic [1-6]. However, currently, the exact and common concept of professional deformation, forecasts of this phenomenon in law-enforcement officers, features of professional deformation in law-enforcement officers are lack. Currently the emotional burnout syndrome as a kind of

professional deformation are described best of all. The changes of personality traits under the influence of professional activity factors are investigated in a less degree. During reading of scientific papers, we also found out those researchers as a rule pay attention to negative things of professional deformation in law-enforcement officers [1-6]. However, professional deformation may have a positive role for successful adjustment to professional activity in law-enforcement officers. Perhaps this fact associates with not enough descriptive possibilities of well-known approaches for investigation of professional deformation. In addition, there is no common theory, which allow revealing the complexity of phenomenon of professional deformation: reasons and mechanisms of development [7]. It was posttraumatic growth as a positive aspect of professional deformation in law-enforcement officers, which was described in this article.

At present, the subject of posttraumatic growth is of topical interest because of the increasing amount of stress penetrating every area of our life. There is hardly a single human life story without at least one significant loss or even calamity. It is not a secret that traumatic events can produce many physical and psychological consequences. While interestingly, there

are no posttraumatic stress disorders in survivors' psychic brought about by the calamities in their life. The concept of posttraumatic growth has only recently become a focus of interest for researchers and practitioners in Russia, while a number of investigations have been carried out abroad.

According to the opinion of our international colleagues [8], the posttraumatic growth is the phenomenon of positive personality change, caused by the efforts to survive through the most horrible sets of circumstances. People who have experienced it describe five general types of changes: relating to others, new possibilities, personal strength, spiritual change and appreciation of life.

There are many events that can work as a trigger of posttraumatic growth: transportation accidents (shipping disasters, plane crashes, and car accidents), natural disasters (hurricanes, earthquakes), interpersonal experiences (combat, rape, and sexual assault), medical problems (cancer, heart attack, brain injury, spinal cord injury, HIV / AIDS, leukemia) and other life experiences (relationship breakdown, parental divorce, bereavement, immigration). Further, experiences of posttraumatic growth have been shown in a variety of populations not directly suffering themselves, but exposed to the suffering of others, including counselors, therapists, clinical psychologists, funeral directors, disaster workers, parents of people with cancer as well as people who observed the events of September 11th on television [9].

There are two leading theories of posttraumatic positive change: organismic valuing theory and transformational model. Both theories are based on world assumptions theory by R. Janoff-Bulman.

According to organismic valuing theory, positive changes because of posttraumatic stress are viewed as normal natural state for any person [9]. Natural cognitive processes generate positive changes in any case. At present, the subject of posttraumatic growth is of process of world assumptions reconstruction. It is world assumptions, which respond with personality integration for a period of coping with trauma [10,11]. This process consists of two stages. At the first stage, the psychological defense mechanisms, such as ejection, numbing, avoidance, protect the person's mind from severe nerve excitation. At the second stage, a person aspires to the psychological comfort, which was before the trauma. That is why the positive reinterpretation occurs. The rumination plays an important role in this process. Tedeschi R. G., and Calhoun, L. G. [12] have noticed that involuntary ruminations are associated with posttraumatic stress disorders while intentional ruminations correlate with posttraumatic growth because recurring intentional ruminations allow the person to concentrate on not only negative aspects of traumatic event.

After reading of scientific papers, we have made conclusions that:

-Professional deformation may have a positive role for successful adjustment to professional activity in law-

enforcement officers. Posttraumatic personal growth is such positive side of professional deformation.

-The posttraumatic growth is the phenomenon of positive personality change, caused by the efforts to survive through the most horrible sets of circumstances. People who have experienced it describe five general types of changes: relating to others, new possibilities, personal strength, spiritual change and appreciation of life.

- There are many events that can work as a trigger of posttraumatic growth.

- There are two leading theories of posttraumatic positive change: organismic valuing theory and transformational model.

Taking the above into consideration, we have taken decision to research the posttraumatic growth as a side of professional deformation in law-enforcement officers. At this paper, we present the results of the first step of our research with applying quantitative approach.

The **theoretical worth of the study** may be proved by the further elaboration of the posttraumatic growth concept, as the papers on the subject are few. Even so, the data in them are conflicting.

The **practical application of the research** will be obvious when counseling. It is common knowledge that any mental therapy or psychocorrection must be based on person's resources. The posttraumatic growth is one of such resources. According to my colleagues' opinion, the posttraumatic growth is an adjusting process not a result. To encourage positive personality changes it is necessary to master the techniques of forecast of posttraumatic growth for the best adjustment.

The **goal of the research** is to study and describe posttraumatic growth as aspect of professional deformation in law-enforcement officers police in Circumpolar region with applying quantitative approach.

Materials and Methods

For achievement the goal of research, we have applied organization methods: method of cross sectional study; empiric methods: observational method (quantitative research with applying of semi-structured interview), the approaches of analysis of observations: quantitative data analysis, interpretative methods. We have used phenomenal approach. On the base of analysis of literature data, we have prepared semi-structured interview. The points of interview allowed us find the answers for such **research question** as: *What kinds of positive changes in personality and in life of law-enforcement officers were caused by factors of police services in Circumpolar region?* Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were the main ways of informant selection. «Purposive sampling» was made by choice the respondents according to pre-define characteristics. The "snowball method" mean that every informant recommend the other person for taking part in research.

We have examined 30 informants, men in middle adulthood, law-enforcement officers, who live and police in Circumpolar region. Data saturation was the main index of sample volume. It means that if next informant don't give us new information we may finish to continue data gathering. In our case the new information stop come from ten respondent of interview. We applied method of analytical triangulation for internal data validation. Three experts have taken part in our research. Every expert had analyzed data, then we have made comparison analyze and discuss obtained data.

Data processing was made with applying the program OpenCode 4.03 [http://www.umu.se/english/research].

Results and Discussions

The audio recordings of 30 interviews was transferred into texts with follow data processing. First of all, the participants of interview made a note of main traumatic events associated with their police. The data are presented at **figure 1**.

It was revealed that law-enforcement officers have experienced such traumatic events as: car accidents (100%), anguish of body and mind in persons (100%), fires and explosions (70%), sudden death through violence (suicide or murder) (30%), assaults (20%), wounds and traumas received in action (20%). Interestingly, every law-enforcement officer has experienced more than one traumatic event in their life.

Respondents have noticed that they have positive sides of traumatic events experience besides negative consequences of traumatic events influence such as aggression attacks, high level of anxiety, sleep disturbances and so all. During the data analysis it was revealed that informants have noticed three categories of positive changes: relating to others, personal strength, appreciation of life, while Tedeschi and Calhoun [8] had described five general types of changes: relating to others, new possibilities, personal strength, spiritual change and appreciation of life. For explanation of this fact we have used data from scientific papers. Authors have written that persons with different character of traumatic events have different amount of posttraumatic growth factors.

The degree of posttraumatic growth categories incidence is presented at **figure 2**.

Category «Relating to others» (50%) include such positive changes as aspire to pay attention and time to friends and family more than before traumatic events. Participants of interview have noticed that relationships with family members and friends are more confidence than before trauma. In other words, respondents express the emotions more willingly and lay account with help of family and friends. The part of participants has noticed that they got rid of selfishness. We would like to an extract from interview of one of participants as an example: "I started to create relationships with my family more carefully only after traumatic events. Before these events I was *selfish person*. I have not noticed the needs of other people. I have been

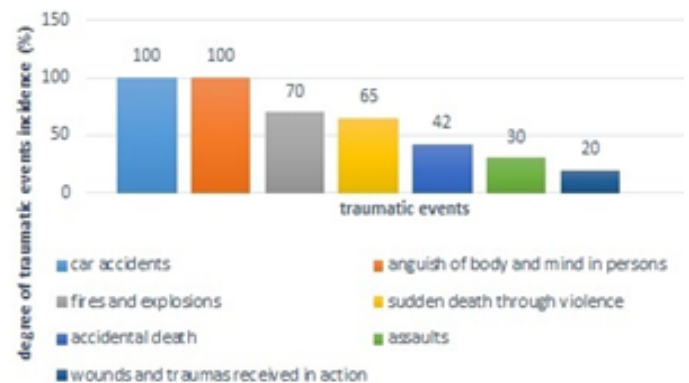


Figure 1. The degree of traumatic events incidence in law-enforcement officers (%).

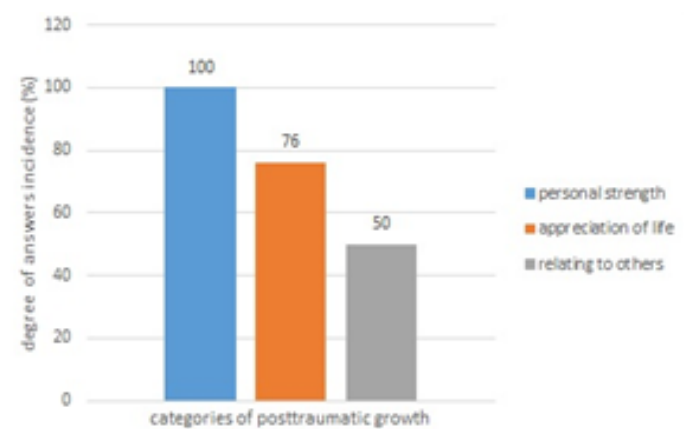


Figure 2. The degree of posttraumatic growth categories incidence in law-enforcement officers (%).

in a bad temper when my family or friends want more care from my side. Now I understand that human life is very tender and may finish in any time. That's why it is necessary to love and care about family and friends. It may be too late tomorrow."

Category «Personal strength» (100%) is presented by such characteristic as self-confidence. The respondents have noticed that after traumatic events they became more stronger. Also they have found out that can cope with such situations. Extract from interview: "I have never thought that I can cope with such situations. I have thought that it is over my head. But now I am thinking that if I may cope with such events I can manage with other situations". Category «Appreciation of life» (76%) consists of such characteristics as change of life priorities, the best understanding of own life. The persons have acquired ability to enjoy of simple things such as seasons, good weather, the beauty of nature etc. Extract from interview: *"I am aware that the life is just a bowl of cherries! There are many amazing things which I've never noticed before: the trees under the snow, sunshine, laughing of children and so on. I've never noticed that before. But now I understand that life and happiness consist of these small points. Before calamities we have sure that job and money are most important things but after traumatic event you start understand that most important things are not things,"*

During interview we also asked question: «How do you think, which factors predict this positive changes?»

The degree of forecasts of posttraumatic growth incidence in answers of law-enforcement officers is presented at **figure 3**.

During carrying out of research we have found out seven forecasts of posttraumatic growth in law-enforcement:

- The emergency preparedness is the first forecast of posttraumatic growth in law-enforcement officers (100%). Extract from interview: *“We are professionals and we are aware of police consequences. I guess that awareness is very important factor for positive changes.”*

- The support from side of family and friends (100%). Extract from interview: *«My family helped me to cope with difficulties of adjustment. They did not leave me despite all my problems. I am grateful to them for patience and support.»*

- The examples of other people (30%). Extract from interview: *«I have decided, if it is not I cope with my problems after events while other people can do this?»*

- Optimism (30%). Extract from interview: *«I always believe in the best outcome in any situation. If I live it is not end. And in any situation I try to find something good.»*

- Belief in God (30%). Extract from interview: *«I am spiritual. I believe that everything is in the God’s hands.»*

- The level of education (10%). Extract from interview: *“I have a good education. The level of my education allows me to think globally, to analyze and make correct conclusions.”*

- The counseling (3%). Extract from interview: *“The psychologist helped me to cope with my situation. He helped me to look at traumatic events from other side, find positive aspects in negative experience.”*

The next question we asked regarding possibility to apply the positive experience of traumatic stress in future life of respondents. The informants have noticed that this positive experience may be applied in (**Figure 4**):

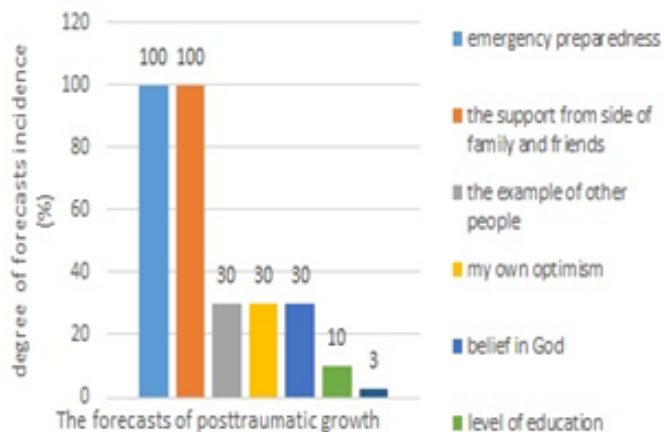


Figure 3. The degree of forecasts of posttraumatic growth incidence in answers of law-enforcement officers (%).

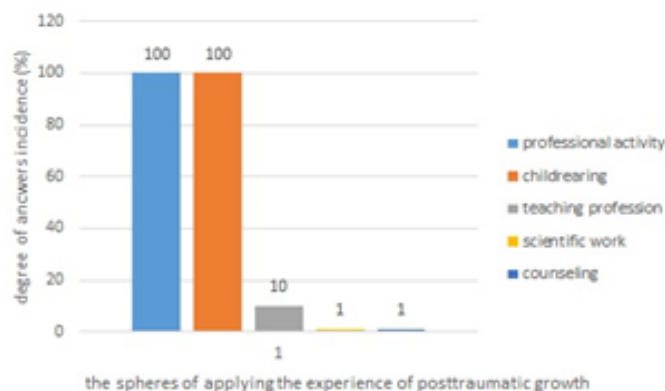


Figure 4. The degree of answers incidence in law-enforcement officers regarding possibility to apply the positive experience in future life (%).

- Professional activity (100%). Extract from interview: *“This experience is invaluable for my job. For example, I have to make sure of myself for taking decisions. And assurance in my strength and ability to cope with different situations help me. But besides assurance I have caution because, for instance, I think about my family. Caution is also positive side of traumatic experience, I guess.”*

- Childrearing (100%). Extract from interview: *“My experience helps me to explain my children that any situation has each of negative and positive sides.”*

- In teaching (10%). Extract from interview: *“I teach at university and talk to my students that law-enforcement officers has not only negative but positive sides of professional deformation. And my own experience helps me in that.”*

- In scientific work (1%). Extract from interview: *“You are writing scientific paper. You ask me the questions. You need in my experience.”*

- In job of psychologists (1%). Extract from interview: *“I think that my experience may help my psychologist in his work with traumatic situations and he may apply my experience of positive personal changes.”*

We have compared our results with data from scientific papers of our colleagues. We have found out that other authors have noticed that:

- the number of factors varies (from 1 to 7) according to the character of trauma. In other words, with veterans, for example, it is one set of factors, while with people, suffering from somatic diseases, a different one;

- the papers devoted to studying the predictors and dynamics of the growth are few and their data are conflicting. However, having studied and generalized the international experience of investigation of posttraumatic growth we have decided all the predictors can be divided into three large groups: sociodemographic markers, personality and degree of posttraumatic stress. Sociodemographic markers include: gender, age, socioeconomic status and religious beliefs [13-19]. Personality traits, such as extraversion, openness to experience,

optimism, a high level of self-esteem and sense of purpose positively correlate with the level of the growth. An additional point is that such factors as searching of social support, positive reappraisal of values, admission of responsibility, planning also give rise to growth [4,8,20-22]. As for degree of posttraumatic stress, there are three points of view on this matter. One group of researchers do not associate posttraumatic stress with posttraumatic growth [10]. Another group of scientists [23,24] have written that posttraumatic stress has an inverse correlation with growth. The third group of investigators have established that an initially high level of posttraumatic stress predicts a subsequent PTG above and beyond PTG stability, but not vice versa [22,25,26] (**Figure 4**).

-in other scientific papers we have not found out results regarding posttraumatic growth in law-enforcement officers and applying of positive sides of traumatic experience in adjustment to life after traumatic events.

Conclusions

The quantitative approach is the first step for further research of different sides of professional deformation and posttraumatic growth phenomenon with applying pf quantitative approach. We have made conclusions that:

1. The law-enforcement officers' psychic is not afflicted by any posttraumatic stress disorders caused by the calamities in their life. The posttraumatic growth is the phenomenon of positive personality change, caused by the efforts to survive through the most horrible sets of circumstances.
2. Law-enforcement officers have experienced such traumatic events as: car accidents, anguish of body and mind in persons, fires and explosions, sudden death through violence (suicide or murder), assaults, wounds and traumas received in action. Interestingly, every law-enforcement officer has experienced more than one traumatic event in their life.
3. Officers who have experienced traumatic event for a period of police describe three general types of changes: relating to others, personal strength and appreciation of life.
4. We have found out seven forecasts of posttraumatic growth in law-enforcement: the emergency preparedness, the support from side of family and friends, the examples of other people, optimism, belief in God, level of education, counseling.
5. The law-enforcement officers have noticed that this positive experience may be applied in professional activity, childrearing, in teaching, in scientific work, inn job of psychologists.

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