



Eyes of the storm: Biographical disruption and political context of ocular trauma victims during the 2019 Chilean uprising

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the profound impact of ocular trauma on victims of police repression during Chile's social uprising in October 2019. The uprising led to an unprecedented number of ocular trauma cases, similar to those seen in wartime, often resulting in various degrees of blindness.

Utilizing the concept of biographical disruption, the study examines how the sudden onset of blindness disrupts daily life, compelling individuals to redefine their sense of self and their life narratives. A qualitative meta-analysis of testimonies reveals that this abrupt and violent loss of vision irrevocably alters daily life, forcing victims to confront a "new normal" and redefine their identity.

A key finding is that while ocular trauma often causes profound biographical disruption, many victims simultaneously experience biographical reinforcement. This involves reinterpreting the trauma within their existing life stories, frequently in the context of social inequality or political identity. Such reinterpretation can be empowering, leading to a reorientation of their lives, strengthened activism, and the transformation of their wounds into powerful symbols of collective resistance. The study highlights the diverse ways individuals process rupture, with some converting their pain into a meaningful struggle for justice and reparation.

Ultimately, the agency demonstrated by these survivors—through political activism, organizing for justice, and creative expression—is crucial for navigating the post-trauma experience and for shaping Chile's biographical and political history. The study underscores the critical need for tailored reparation policies that integrate human rights-based approaches, comprehensive psychosocial support, and public acknowledgment to facilitate true biographical healing and social transformation.

1. Introduction

Eye injuries, a leading cause of blindness worldwide, are typically unintentional and often result from accidents such as falls or exposure to mechanical forces in domestic or workplace settings. However, there has been a notable increase in the incidence of eye injuries related to police conflict in recent years (Negrel and Thylefors, 1998; Li et al., 2023). In this paper, we examine the impact of ocular trauma on the lives of victims affected by police repression during the Chilean social uprising of October 2019. Hundreds of eyes were damaged, producing various degrees of blindness in the victims as a result. The magnitude of these events was compared in frequency and severity to those acquired during warfare (Rodriguez et al., 2021).

As a disruptive event of the habitual body and behavior (Moya, 2014; Engman, 2019), the onset of monocular or binocular blindness triggered by the loss or damage of the eyes may be considered the starting point of a biographical disruption. This concept, first coined by Bury (1982), understands the onset of chronic illness or impairment as a critical and unexpected situation for the individual, "[a] kind of experience where the structures of everyday life and the forms of knowledge which underpin them are disrupted" (p.169). The sudden onset of chronic illness disrupts everyday life, creating uncertainty and prompting the individual to question previously taken-for-granted assumptions. Attention shifts to the body, leading to a rethinking of self and biography, and a mobilization of resources to adapt to the disruption.

Following Bury's conceptualization, most biographical disruption

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research has focused on chronic illness itself and the resulting changes to the individual's life (for a review, see Williams, 2000), taking the perspective to explore diverse chronic illnesses, including breast and prostate cancer, HIV, stroke, and mental health (Carricaburu and Pierret, 1995; Faircloth et al., 2004; Perry and Pescosolido, 2012; Schultze et al., 2020; Trusson et al., 2020). Critiqued from various angles, including various macro- and micro-contextual influences that modulate this biographical disruption (Lawton, 2003) studies have sought to explain how previous individuals' embodiments influence this disruption (Engman, 2019), including previous experiences lived as part of a particular gender, age, race and class (e.g. Williams, 2000; Clarke and Bennett, 2013; Campbell, 2021; Cluley et al., 2021; Morris et al., 2022). Recent work on biographical disruption explores how individuals reconstruct their sense of self after major life events. Campbell (2021) shows that HIV disclosure consequences were particularly influenced by persistent structural inequities, while Potter (2024) shows that recovery from depression and diabetes involves nonlinear redefinition. Cluley et al.'s concept (2023) of biographical dialectics emphasizes the creative effort in managing disruption and treatment burdens, and Becker (2023) highlights how people seek to create continuity after unexpected events. However, studies that examine the relationship between the impact of chronic illness or impairment on biographies and the state and societal responses remain largely unaddressed.

These various approaches are useful to better understand the biographical disruption caused by ocular trauma on a population simultaneously affected, within a few month's time frame, by state violence resulting from the social uprising that erupted in October 2019 in Chile. Our approach intends to examine how the lives of participants in the Chilean uprising were abruptly and violently altered through ocular trauma, an impairment resulting from state violence deployed as a tool of repression. The collective experience of ocular trauma inflicted by state agents is explored here through the trajectories of biographical disruption and reinforcement. The social and political context introduces issues of justice and social recognition as a conduit for reparation. We look into the repercussions of partial blindness in the day-to-day lives of these victims to assess the extent to which their biographies were differentially interfered and the influence of personal history, support systems, the meaning attributed to the event, and the potential for subsequent action. Supported by the concept of biographical dialectics (Cluley et al., 2023), we explore reparation as a possibility stemming from disruption and reinforcement. Significantly, victims of ocular trauma embrace activism and an array of other responses in a dialectical process that aims to deal with the burden of their conditions and, at the same time, achieve reparation. As we engage with the biographical disruption approach, we aim to understand the individual dimensions of the experience of ocular trauma. Also, we seek to incorporate the meanings ascribed by the victims to their injuries stemming from both the social and political contexts and their own social background.

1.1. Ocular trauma during the Chilean social uprising

On October 18, 2019, Santiago, Chile's capital, awoke to an unprecedented social uprising. The slogan "Until dignity becomes custom" was the cry voiced and written on the walls (Marquez, 2020). Plaza Baquedano, located at the center of the city of Santiago, became the epicenter of the revolt (Marquez et al., 2023). These massive manifestations by thousands of young people have been interpreted as expressions of their discontent and anger at the rampant inequalities in health, education, housing and pensions observed in the country (Gonzalez and Marquez, 2019). The social uprising was a protest against the weakening of the democratic institutions in the country, associated with a generalized anomie among middle classes and dissatisfaction with the neoliberal system (Mayol, 2019). The uprising intended to destabilize the status quo through a social movement that challenged the hegemonic view of the country's development path, including the notion of

modernity seen as colonial, patriarchal, and entrenched in environmental exploitation (Woods, 2022). There were complex protest dynamics at play during the uprising. Some of them were peaceful, others were disruptive, and others involved violent acts, including the destruction of public infrastructure. All of these were met with forceful repression from the police (Fig. 1), which affected those engaged in violence, as well as peaceful demonstrators and bystanders (Somma et al., 2020).

For the subsequent five months (from October 18, 2019, to March 18, 2020), 3838 victims of state violence were recorded in different Chilean cities (INDH, 2020), as more and more cities became the scene of public demonstrations. There were 460 cases of ocular trauma (INDH, 2020), representing an incidence (as a fraction of non-fatal injuries) of 12 %, which is comparable to that attained by the US Army in the 1991 Arabian Gulf War (Scott, 2011, p.254). To put it in perspective, the number of victims of ocular trauma largely surpassed, in only a few weeks, those reached in longer conflicts, such as the first Intifada in Israel between 1987 and 1993 (157 cases) or the Yellow Vest demonstrations in France between 2016 and 2019 (43 cases) (Rodriguez et al., 2021, p.1669). The victims were predominantly young (18–35 years old) males living in the Metropolitan Region of Santiago, and 8.1 % of the total victims of ocular trauma were younger than 18 years old (Rodriguez et al., 2021). The cases were evenly spread across all the socioeconomic groups (INDH, 2020, p25; Rodriguez et al., 2021, p.1668; Varas et al., 2024a, p.4).

A significant issue among the victims was the high frequency of severe cases of ocular trauma. Rodriguez et al. (2021) found that in up to 71 % of these severe cases, the suspected cause of trauma was the kinetic impact projectiles fired by the Special Forces of the police, demonstrating that it was regularly used as a repressive strategy for the massive popular revolt. Forensic analyses showed that the composition of such projectiles was only 20 % rubber, with other elements including silica and lead. The hardness of these rubber bullets made them more likely to produce open eyeball injuries even if shot according to police protocols of safety and legality (Rodriguez et al., 2021). The victims of the kinetic impact projectiles were younger, more often lived outside Santiago and had a lower visual acuity than victims whose eye injuries were due to other causes (Rodriguez et al., 2021).

Various human rights and health organizations warned at the time about the rising epidemic of ocular trauma in Chile (OHCHR, 2020). Despite the alerts from the Chilean Medical and Ophthalmology Associations and the initial limitations and subsequent ban on certain mob control practices issued by the director of the National Police (Rodriguez et al., 2021, p.1670), the number of cases of ocular trauma continued to escalate until March 2020, when lockdown was introduced in the country in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. Materials and methods

This study presents a qualitative meta-analysis of two sources of victim accounts of ocular trauma sustained during the 2019 Chilean social uprising.

The first source analyzes testimonies from Varas et al. (2024b), which features three in-depth interviews with victims of ocular and/or maxillofacial injuries inflicted by state agents during the 2019 social uprising in Chile. This study aims to analyze the daily experiences of victims to inform their functional and psychosocial rehabilitation processes. For this meta-analysis, published extracts from one ocular trauma victim's interview (I2) were selected.

The second source examines testimonies compiled in "Ojos: Memoria de un Estallido" (Eyes: Memory of an Uprising)(CVTO, 2023). This collective work includes personal accounts and artistic expressions (poems, song lyrics, photographs, and drawings) by male and female victims of ocular trauma of various ages, as well as some direct family members. Of the 23 testimonies in this anthology, 18 written accounts were considered for this analysis. Two cases were excluded: one that did not directly



Fig. 1. Police conflict during the 2019 Chilean uprising. The images illustrate interactions between protestors and police: (left) protestors and a police tear gas vehicle, (top right) police with batons, and (bottom right) police firing gunshots. Credits: CVTO (2023).

reference ocular trauma and another detailing their experience of ocular trauma that occurred before the 2019 social uprising.

In total, these 17 narratives offer complementary perspectives for exploring experiences of victims following ocular trauma. Varas et al. (2024b) provide an analysis of the consequences of ocular trauma from a public health standpoint, while CVTO (2023) directly conveys the voices of victims as an act of memory and collective denunciation.

We applied a systematic protocol of coding and comparative synthesis (Becker, 2023), where qualitative data (CVTO, 2023; Varas et al., 2024b) were coded using thematic analysis. The central axis of our analysis is the categories of biographical disruption (Bury, 1982; Williams, 2000; Engman, 2019) and biographical reinforcement (Carricaburu and Pierret, 1995; Williams, 2000), which were conceptualized as an opposing extremes in a biographical dialectic (Cluley, 2023). From this axis, we also examined emergent categories arising from the accounts themselves, closely linked to biographical disruption: the body (bodily and health changes), identity (transformations in self-image and social role), justice (demands for truth, justice, and reparation), trauma (psychological and emotional impact), daily life (alterations in daily life), agency (forms of action and resistance of victims), and mourning (processes of pain and loss, including mourning for injured or deceased companions, as well as sadness for their loss). Textual quotes from the testimonies are used to illustrate each finding.

To perform the meta-analysis, the following stages were followed: 1) Exploratory reading of both corpora to become familiar with the accounts and context; 2) Initial thematic coding of the narratives, guided by the main categories of biographical disruption and biographical reinforcement. 3) Coding of the emergent categories of body, identity, justice, trauma, daily life, agency, and mourning; 4) Theoretical contextualization in light of relevant literature and studies on trauma, identity, and social movements.

A qualitative meta-synthesis approach is used to integrate the narrative evidence (Becker, 2023). Textual quotes extracted from the

accounts are used as illustrative evidence of the themes analyzed. The original wording of the victims, including colloquial expressions, has been preserved in the quoted material, as these are considered an essential part of their voices conveying their experiences. Each quote is referenced by indicating the source. Since a large part of the material from CVTO (2023) comes from first-person testimonies, we followed an ethical criterion of not altering their content and respecting anonymity when appropriate.

3. Findings: biographical dialectics of traumatic vision loss

Most previous research on the implications of blindness onset in the body and everyday life has been carried out in patients who lost eyesight as a comorbidity to illnesses such as diabetes or congenital disorders (e. g. Gall et al., 2013; Ptitto et al., 2021). Therefore, in many of these testimonies, losing sight was not necessarily presented as an unexpected event, either because of these pre-existing illnesses (Larsson and Jeppsson Grassman, 2012) or just because everyday sight problems were seen as a normal result of aging (Green et al., 2002). In contrast, a sudden loss of sight in one eye due to ocular trauma has been linked to a slower adaptation to a new level of visual function compared to patients with gradual sight loss, such as in glaucoma (Coday, 2002). Nonetheless, assessing the consequences of partial loss of sight in everyday life has been contentious. It was claimed that "*one-eyed individuals maintain perfectly normal lives and are not limited by their lack of binocularity*" (Steeves et al., 2008). Also, it was reported that most patients can resume their everyday activities within a year after a sudden loss of an eye (Lingberg et al., 1988). However, other studies have found considerable impacts on their quality of life, including more prevalent anxiety and depression, higher perceived stress and poorer self-rated health, as well as negative consequences on their relationships, occupation, and socioeconomic status (Rasmussen et al., 2012; Ye et al., 2015).

Varas et al. (2024a) asked the victims of severe ocular trauma, 80 %

of whom were clinically classified as blind in one eye, to qualify the level of difficulty experienced in several everyday activities. For example, they found that up to 61.2 % of the patients reported high or extreme difficulty performing educational and/or occupational duties. A lesser proportion (41.2 %) admitted an equivalent difficulty while performing hobbies and pastimes, and only 15.3 % found it highly or extremely difficult to get around independently on the street (Varas et al., 2024a). Additionally, patients were asked to auto-evaluate their visual acuity in the affected eye, revealing that a smaller-than-expected percentage of patients (72.9 %) assigned themselves to the category of blindness or extreme difficulty in visual acuity (Varas et al., 2024a). The gap between the auto-reported impairment and clinically assessed visual acuity of the affected eye among victims, in addition to the differences expressed in the reported levels of difficulty in everyday activities, suggests that the consequences of ocular trauma are experienced differently among these victims of state violence.

To further explore the consequences of ocular trauma, we analyzed the narratives associated with the experiences and biographies of the victims (CVTO, 2023; Varas et al., 2024b) using thematic analysis (Becker, 2023). The results suggest that there is a wide range of perspectives on the experience of ocular trauma.

Table 1 illustrates that among 17 testimonies analyzed, 11 describe both biographical disruption and reinforcement resulting from ocular trauma. Conversely, 3 victims reported only biographical disruption, and another 3 only biographical reinforcement. These data indicate that the violent loss of vision initiates processes of biographical disruption, manifested as interrupted life projects, bodily estrangement, and/or a rupture in the individual's life trajectory.

Concurrently with biographical disruption, narratives of biographical reinforcement emerge, where victims reinterpret trauma within their life story, often in the context of social inequality or political identity (Williams, 2000). This reinterpretation can empower them to reorient and rebuild their lives, strengthen their activism, and transform their wounds into symbols of collective resistance. For instance, the interviews conducted by Varas et al. (2024b) in a therapeutic setting reveal processes of biographical repair. Here, vital reconstruction is underpinned by collective action, the pursuit of justice, family support networks, and, despite limitations, access to rehabilitation.

3.1. Biographical disruption: rupture of the life trajectory

Ocular trauma profoundly disrupts the lives of victims, as evidenced by interviews (Varas et al., 2024b) and testimonies in *Ojos (Eyes)* (CVTO, 2023) (Table 2). This biographical disruption signifies a radical break in their life narrative and sense of self.

Ariel's testimony encapsulates this rupture: "Life has been difficult for me and my family. Nothing is the same anymore" (CVTO, 2023, p.28). His inability to resume work and severe psychological sequelae illustrate how physical trauma extends to mental health and occupational roles.

Similarly, María Rebolledo, whose son lost an eye, recounts: "On October 20, 2019, my life changed completely" (CVTO, 2023, p.66). This emphasizes the permanent nature of biographical disruption for families, transforming their priorities, routines, and emotions.

Table 1
Number of testimonies according to biographical disruption and/or reinforcement.

Source	Biographical Disruption N	Biographical Reinforcement N	Biographical Disruption and Reinforcement N
Varas et al. (2024b)	1	0	0
CVTO (2023)	2	3	11
Total	3	3	11

Table 2
Biographical disruption, quotes from three testimonies.

Ariel Alvear	"Life has been difficult for me and my family. Nothing is the same anymore ... People look at you strangely ... it has me in a great depression" (CVTO, 2023, p.28)
Natalia Aravena	"Living the social uprising changed my life completely" (CVTO, 2023, p.58) "they have treated me as an offender and said that I deserved what happened to me ... They screwed up my life forever" (CVTO, 2023, p.64)
Interviewee 2	"but I always, always, always liked my eyes ... so for me having lost like one of my eyes was a blow like ... directly to my self-esteem" (Varas et al., 2024b, p.14). "I was determined to continue fighting ... I forgot how to look at myself and stop to think" (Varas et al., 2024b, p.10)

3.2. Biographical reinforcement: Anticipation

Ocular injury profoundly disrupts a victim's life, though the degree and interpretation of this disruption vary (Table 3). Not all lives are altered uniformly. For some, particularly those with a history of violence or marginalization, the trauma reinforces an existing life trajectory rather than representing an unexpected turning point. As one victim, Maite, stated: "I am broken, the cops broke me in October 2019, but I already was for a long time" (CVTO, 2023, p.36).

Therefore, for some victims, ocular trauma served as the singular event dividing their lives into a "before" and "after". For others, however, it became another link in a chain of already endured vulnerabilities, solidifying a life narrative marked by injustice.

Narrative comparisons highlight the varied ways individuals experience and process rupture. For most, it signifies an abrupt collapse of normality, a stark contrast between a happy "before" and a dark "after". However, for some, this rupture intertwines with prior experiences of pain. While some react with impotent rage, others strive to transform it into a meaningful struggle.

This variability underscores the need to examine the distinct dimensions emerging from these narratives. In the context of biographical disruption, the "body", "daily life", and "frustrated reparation" emerge as pivotal to the rupture in their lives. Conversely, narratives of biographical reparation reveal dimensions of "identity", "motivation for protest", and "context of repressive violence".

Ultimately, victims committed to biographical restoration or reparation utilize "agency, justice" and "trauma and grief" to navigate the post-ocular trauma experience.

3.3. Biographical disruption: The wounded body, daily life interfered, and frustration

a) The bodily dimension is a central theme in accounts of biographical disruption, particularly concerning traumatic vision loss (Table 4). The injuries sustained by the victims can cause chronic effects on visual perception because of lesions in the photosensitive, optical and/or other structural components of the ocular globe (Kuhn and Pieramici, 2002, pp.89-332), which impose functional limitations in everyday activities, such as difficulty in judging distance and spatial orientation (Steeves et al., 2008). Victims describe in detail the lasting bodily and sensory effects, including pain, surgeries, the use of ocular prostheses, altered visual perception, and changes in appearance. These narratives highlight a "new experience of the body", where the familiar suddenly becomes strange, limited, and marked by violence. The body, no longer a source of security or self-esteem, becomes one of vulnerability and insecurity (Rasmussen et al., 2012; Ye et al., 2015).

For instance, a participant in the study by Varas et al. (2024b) shared how ocular trauma impacted her self-esteem: "I always, always, always liked my eyes ... if I had something pretty it was my eyes, so for me having lost like one of my eyes was a blow like ... directly to my self-esteem" (Varas et al., 2024b, p.14). She further explained that her gaze was once very expressive, and now she feels that this was "taken away with the ocular

Table 3
Biographical reinforcement, quotes from three cases (CVTO, 2023).

Pablo Montiel	"Thereafter, my life changed; I never saw out of my left eye again" (p.20)	"I was born in a dictatorship ... I saw the inequality that is still present in our society" (p.19)
Pedro Guerrero	"on behalf of all those who have fallen, we walk the wide path ... justice to all the dead and mutilated" (p.23)	"My port is full of hardworking people ... neither fire nor pandemic stopped our movement" (p.22)
LLDS		"We are just residents, dreaming workers who only want better days ... But they only see consumers" (p.50)

Table 4
Dimensions of biographical disruption narratives: Body, daily life, and frustrated reparation.

Thematic category	Source 1 (Varas et al., 2024b)	Source 2 (CVTO, 2023)
a) Body experience/self-image	"Apart from depth perception problems, things always happen to me because I can't reach, I try to grab something and I don't grab it because it was further away or it was nearer here" (I2)(p.12)	"I've had to adapt to doing a lot of things without looking [at myself] in the mirror ... I hate looking at myself in the mirror" (Anonymous)(p.17); "my mutilated body and my mental health deteriorating every day" (Natalia Aravena)(p.64)
b) Daily life interfered	"Later, with time, I was able to start going out alone but it is still difficult for me" (I2) (p.12)	"Nothing is the same anymore ... I haven't been able to work as before" (Ariel Alvear) (p.28)
c) Expectations of reparation	"Because I thought that ... I was going to get an implant ... I was going to live my normal life ... but it wasn't" (I2) (p.16)	"There has been no real help ... leaving us in total abandonment" (Anonymous) (p.17); "We want justice ... we will continue demanding true justice" (Gloria Moraga) (p.84)

trauma", hindering her ability to communicate emotions as before. This vividly demonstrates how physical damage, beyond just the functional aspect of sight, inflicts an identity wound, affecting self-perception and how one presents to others.

Many victims express feelings of rejection or strangeness toward their own bodies post-injury, evident in daily actions like avoiding mirrors or photographs. An anonymous account describes that "As time went by, I couldn't look at myself in the mirror. I remembered again what I suffered at the time" (CVTO, 2023, p.15). Shame, pain, and bodily grief intertwine, forcing a renegotiation of their relationship with their physicality (Cluley et al., 2023) and bringing a clash between old and new practices (Lubi, 2019). An anonymous account explained that "I've had to adapt to doing a lot of things without looking [at myself] in the mirror so as not to relive the trauma, such as shaving. At the end of this exercise [of shaving without looking at himself], I always ask my partner how I turned out since I shave with touch" (CVTO, 2023, pp.16-17).

A significant aspect is the perception of the "mutilated body" as a symbol of the injustice experienced. Natalia, a victim, summarized her situation by stating she must carry "my mutilated body and my mental health deteriorating every day" (CVTO, 2023, p.64). Her use of "mutilated" emphasizes that her body was harmed by a brutal state repression, making her incomplete physical condition a permanent testament to the violence endured.

In essence, the narratives portray the body of ocular trauma victims as a source of pain, diminished self-esteem, and practical limitations (Charmaz, 1983; Ye et al., 2015). However, it also serves as a canvas where the suffered violence is inscribed, simultaneously symbolizing the strength of survival. Biographical disruption, therefore, inherently has a physical embodiment (Engman, 2019; Becker, 2023).

b) *interfered daily life* is a recurring theme, the drastic alteration of daily life after ocular trauma (Rasmussen et al., 2012). Testimonies describe how activities previously performed routinely—working, studying, moving around the city, caring for the family—were

interrupted or hindered due to physical and psychological sequelae. Varas et al. (2024b) coined the concept of "*interfered daily life*" to refer to "a series of interferences and repercussions in their daily lives" experienced by victims due to trauma. Interferences can be external (having to attend innumerable medical check-ups, legal procedures, and rehabilitations) or internal (episodes of flashbacks, depression, and loss of functionality) that prevent resuming the previous routine. After the injury, many victims became unemployed or incapacitated for work for long periods.

c) *The demand for justice* is present in many victims and marks a turning point in their lives. Expressions such as "*day by day, [we continue] demanding justice for what was taken from us*" abound in the accounts. The path has been frustrating; most judicial cases remain unpunished. "*Today ... I feel the weight of injustice more than ever ... I see no light of justice*", laments Natalia (CVTO, 2023, pp. 63–64). She recounts that the investigating police officer who shot her has not even been identified, that the PDI (Investigations Police) took more than a year to interrogate suspects, and that, meanwhile, hate speech and fake news grew, labelling her (a medical nurse student) as a "*criminal who deserved what happened to her*".

3.4. Biographical reinforcement: Mobilization and struggle, political violence, identity and stigma

Biographical disruption due to illness or injury is not universally experienced with the same intensity, as individual contexts and previous embodiments play a significant role (Lawton, 2003; Engman, 2019). Our analysis of narratives indicates that not all biographies "break" equally. Testimonies like Maite's, "I was already broken before", suggest that for individuals with prior experiences of suffering and inequality, trauma can reinforce an existing trajectory of adversity rather than being an unexpected rupture. Some victims even state they actively managed the disruption, integrating it into a narrative of personal growth or social activism, leveraging their past experiences with adversity (Becker, 2023).

While most cases analyzed involve traumatic rupture, there is significant room for "re-significant", such as self-identifying as a resilient "survivor" rather than a passive "victim". Our findings affirm a nuanced, non-monolithic approach. Disruption exists on a spectrum, influenced by factors such as personal history, support systems, the meaning attributed to the event, and the potential for subsequent action.

Three key dimensions contribute to this process of biographical reinforcement (see Table 5).

- a) **Protest and Mobilization:** For many victims, losing an eye within the context of a social movement and struggle validates their participation, with the trauma reinforcing their courage during this historical period. Hector Gana reveals that despite the ocular trauma, the loss of part of his skull and his epilepsy, there is no regret; the injury did not disrupt a life mobilized by political convictions: "*I got up and walked long distances every day, I believe empathy was the main driving force behind my fight ... I understood that was my place ... I was left with half a skull and epilepsy, but the fight keeps on going*" (CVTO, 2023, p.34).
- b) **Violence and Police Repression:** The widespread nature of eye mutilations during five months of social protest (Rodriguez et al., 2021) allows many victims to recognize themselves as targets of excessive

Table 5
Dimensions of biographical reinforcement: Mobilization and struggle, Political violence, Identity and stigma.

Thematic category	Source 1 (Varas et al., 2024b)	Source 2 (CVTO, 2023)
a) Protest and mobilization	"I have to be part of this too because I can't just watch" (I2)(p.8)	"November 12th of 2019, national strike day ... I head towards Plaza Italia [former official and popular name of Plaza Baquedano], as I always did, alone and with a very big heart, being one more among many, there I was" (Carlos Cirano)(p.46) "I recovered from the pain in a few days and continued [manifesting] on the streets non-stop for months." (Pablo Montiel)(p.20)
b) Political/police violence, justice and impunity	"I think it is very unfair, how it happened and the fact that there is no justice yet" (I2) (p.11)	"Justice for the fallen and freedom for political prisoners" (Alvaro Silva) (p.39); "it's the time to fight for justice and dignity" (Totopunk)(p.43)
c) Identity and stigma	"I also made a criticism that they almost put us as martyrs or heroes ... I don't know, why they should light a candle for me" (I2)(p.10)	"I am a survivor of state terrorism" (Pablo Montiel) (p.19) "I am broken, the cops broke me ... but I was already broken a long time ago" (Maite Castillo)(p.36)

force by law enforcement, reinforcing the understanding that their injury confirms the violence they endured. Natalia remembers that "Multiple videos of repression and seriously injured people began to circulate. Military, Police, and Investigations Police officers shooting at people" (CVTO, 2023, p.60).

c) Identity and Stigma: Ocular trauma significantly transforms and challenges victims' identities, encompassing both self-perception and socially imposed labels. Victims often self-identify as "survivors" or "victims of ocular trauma", integrating the event into their personal definition and asserting a political identity as victims of human rights violations, highlighting the aggression as of an intentional nature (state terrorism). However, not all victims are comfortable with labels like "victim" or "hero" imposed by society or media, preferring to be recognized simply as individuals whose rights were violated. Furthermore, negative stigma is a burden. Many accounts reveal the societal perception, post-uprising, that those with eye injuries "must have done something" or deserved their fate for protesting. Ariel's comment, "People look at you strangely. Those who claim to be friends give you nicknames" (CVTO, 2023, p.28), sadly illustrates this stigmatization.

3.5. Biographical reparation: Agency, trauma and collective mourning

Despite profound adversity, a striking element of the accounts is the emergence of survivor agency and resistance (Table 6). Far from being passive victims, many actively pursued justice and mutual support, transforming their painful experiences into a catalyst for collective action. This "victim to activist" transformation is a clear finding in the journey toward biographical reparation.

Varas et al. (2024b) highlight how individuals adopted "new roles and actions, such as political activism and organizing for justice needs", deeming this "necessary in a context that maintains impunity". Some survivors, instead of being paralyzed by disruption, found an opportunity for agency, redefining their identities, e.g., a rapper becoming a "messenger of the people" (CVTO, 2023). This reclamation of a more authentic, less instrumentalized identity is crucial, demonstrating agency in how they wish to be perceived.

Many grapple with the tension between fighting for collective justice

Table 6
Dimensions of biographical restoration: agency, trauma and collective mourning.

Thematic category	Source 1 (Varas et al., 2024b)	Source 2 (CVTO, 2023)
a) Agency, organization and activism	"I had met with people with ocular trauma and told them we have to fight for this" (I2) (p.10)	"I started documenting my own pains and those of my peers as a way of healing" (Nicole Kramm)(p.89); "I joined the Coordinator of Victims of Ocular Trauma" (Natalia Aravena)(p.63)
b) Personal and collective trauma and grief	"I lost my eye because I was in a protest ... that no longer allows me to lead my normal life" (I2)(p.10)	"It's exhausting to live with post-traumatic stress, but still we keep getting up" (Alvaro Silva) (p.39); "That leaves me with a great depression" (Ariel Alvear) (p.28); "My soul is broken, just as broken as those thousands of leaves that fall every year" (Maite Castillo)(p.36); "In memory of our companions who are no longer physically with us" (Prologue)(p.5)

and their personal need to process trauma. Nevertheless, the conviction persists that "action is essential" to give meaning to their experiences. Natalia Aravena exemplifies this, stating, "I quickly began to publicize my case, gave all the interviews offered to me, joined human rights organizations, and began to participate in the Coordinator of Victims of Ocular Trauma", all driven by "the hunger for justice" (CVTO, 2023, p.63). This reparatory journey encompasses three recognized dimensions.

a) Survivors demonstrate agency through various forms of social change. They actively commit to ensuring that past hardships are not repeated, emphasizing collective responsibility: "it depends on us to ensure that, never again, living in Chile costs us an arm and a leg" (CVTO, 2023, p.3). Personal agency is also evident in daily resilience, such as choosing to live despite despair and adhering to therapeutic routines to combat depression.

A significant form of emerging agency is creative and narrative. Some survivors transform their experiences into art, including poetry, songs, paintings, and photographs, with several authors in Ojos (CVTO, 2023) presenting their stories through poems or drawings. Artistic creation serves as both a personal catharsis and a tool for public awareness of ocular trauma (Marquez et al., 2025). These creative endeavors highlight that agency extends beyond street protests, encompassing the reappropriation of personal history through art and communication, thereby overcoming silence and oblivion (Becker, 2023).

b) Ocular trauma inflicts profound, invisible wounds, leaving psychological scars as deep as the physical ones (Rasmussen et al., 2012; Ye et al., 2015). The accounts analyzed consistently reveal psychological sequelae persisting years after the traumatic event. A significant component of grief emerges, mourning the loss of an organ, a former way of life, and fallen companions. Clinically, many victims meet the criteria for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Natalia, for instance, describes her period after losing an eye as "weeks of ... suffering post-traumatic stress and requiring psychological rehabilitation" (CVTO, 2023, p.63).

The psychological grief experienced by victims is multifaceted, encompassing the loss of physical integrity, their old identity, and mourning for comrades who succumbed to repression. The solidarity initially forged in the streets evolved into strong bonds within victim groups, where members referred to each other as "compas" (buddies) or "brothers in struggle". The death of one individual deeply affects the

entire group.

Ojos (CVTO, 2023) honors Patricio, Jorge, Jonathan, and NN, "forever in our memory", acknowledging four individuals from the ocular trauma community who died from injuries, complications, or suicide. The book acts as collective mourning: "In memory of us and our companions who are no longer physically with us. We don't want anyone else to have to lose an organ, their mental health, or their life for seeking a better world" (CVTO, 2023, p.5). Each testimony serves as a monument and promise of remembrance.

Victims experience profound grief, including a loss of trust in state institutions and society (Mayol, 2019), shifting from belief to distrust and fear due to societal indifference. However, healing emerges; writing stories is therapeutic, with many testimonies conclude with hope or gratitude, highlighting resilience.

Mutual support within the Coordinator of Victims of Ocular Trauma (CVTO) is crucial for managing grief. Connecting with companions sharing similar experiences provides invaluable emotional support, as only those who have lost an eye can truly comprehend their rage and sadness. This empathetic bond is key to group organization.

In synthesis, biographical disruption is expressed in phrases of radical breakage ("nothing is the same anymore", "they screwed up my life", "I am not myself"). While biographical reinforcement appears in narratives that frame the mutilation as a confirmation of a previous trajectory of precarity, stigmatization, or activism ("I was already broken", "they have always oppressed us", "my mission is to fight"). Together, the narratives show that ocular trauma oscillates between two poles: abrupt rupture and continuity of a life already marked by structural violence. In this exercise, life trajectories seek paths to restore their own dignity and place in the world.

4. Discussion

Bury's 1982 conceptualization of biographical disruption, linked to chronic illness, highlighted how individuals navigate the upheaval of daily routines, redefine their identities, and gather resources. He also acknowledged the crucial role of context, asserting that meaning and context are inseparable in the notion of biography (Bury, 1991, p. 453).

Our research extended this concept to understand biographical disruptions within a political context: the 2019 social uprising in Chile. We specifically examined the individual experiences of victims of state violence, particularly ocular trauma. The thematic analysis explored how these socially contextualized injuries were experienced as biographical disruptions and how those affected interpreted them in relation to their hopes for societal change stemming from the uprising. By focusing on the biographies of individuals with ocular trauma—considering narratives of biographical disruption and reinforcement, as well as emerging categories, such as body, identity, agency and grief—we aimed to understand the entanglement of a major political event with personal narratives and the diverse ways these impairments shaped their lives.

Our findings suggest that sudden vision loss, particularly the ocular trauma experienced by many young Chileans during the 2019 social uprising, profoundly disrupts individuals' lives (Bury, 1982). Victims often report a life "changed forever", marked by an irreconcilable "before and after" that interrupts daily life and personal projects. Beyond physical limitations, this trauma fractures the self, establishing a "new normal" of loss and uncertainty (Charmaz, 1983). In Chile, the potential for state-inflicted injuries adds a moral and political dimension, making the damaged body a testament to injustice and intensifying the feeling of an irreversibly split biography where "nothing will ever be the same".

This study reveals that ocular trauma often causes biographical disruption, but its extent varies, with many cases showing biographical reinforcement—a confirmation or accentuation of one's life trajectory, as proposed by Carricaburu and Pierret (1995). A biographical reinforcement is more evident among individuals from marginalized backgrounds or with prior trauma may perceive ocular injury not as a

definitive life-altering event, but as reinforcement of a life consistently exposed to adversity and violence. This contrasts sharply with young, middle-class individuals without prior political violence exposure, for whom the injury marks an absolute turning point, shifting them from a "normal" life to one of darkness and uncertainty, embodying biographical disruption in its full magnitude (Williams, 2000). This finding supports recent approaches emphasizing that biographical disruption is not a universal absolute but a spectrum modulated by contextual and structural factors (Engman, 2019; Campbell, 2021). Sudden impairment amidst pre-existing broken biographies challenges Bury's (1982) paradigm, highlighting how prior inequality or trauma affects integrating new catastrophic events. Not all lives are "broken" with equal intensity, and recognizing this variability is crucial for understanding diverse victim needs.

Comparing accounts reveals varying trauma: for some, an abrupt collapse of normality; in contrast, for others, it is intertwined with a painful past. Our thematic analysis of narratives suggests that many victims may live with the disruptive effects of ocular trauma as an additional burden on top of a life plagued with past and present violence. These contradictory experiences, disruption and reinforcement, may be interpreted through the dialectical biographical perspective proposed by Cluley et al. (2023), a "dialectical logic for understanding motion and change that is drawn on to make sense of the ongoing problem". In this dialectic logic, the "issue" is the traumatic biographical disruption happening to a life previously traumatized, which is the "problem".

Completing the triad of Hegel's dialectic method, the victims' agency may be interpreted as the "solution" (Cluley et al., 2023). Both the interviews with victims of ocular trauma (Varas et al., 2024b) and their collective narratives (CVTO, 2023) highlight the agency of these survivors in taking on new roles like political activism and organizing for justice, finding meaning and coping with trauma. Their agency manifests publicly through marches and advocacy, and personally through daily acts of resilience, forming a "dialectic biography" (Cluley et al., 2023). This dialectic involves answering issues and problems through various means, such as resisting despair, diligently complying with therapies, or channeling pain through art, all answers that constitute "a landscape where dissimilarities can meet" (Fagerstrom and Bergbom, 2009).

Similar to Charmaz (1995) and Potter (2024), this perspective reframes ocular trauma not merely as a disruption or loss but as an opportunity for self-discovery, redefinition, and recovery. This also aligns with Frank's (1997) concept of "Illness as a moral occasion", which views illness as sociological, where moral possibilities are constructed within organizational and cultural parameters. Frank (1997, p.135) posits that morality arises from care and mutual obligation, viewing it as a crucial aspect of an ill person's construction of intersubjective reality. Thus, the moral dimension of widespread ocular trauma becomes a call for accountability, justice, and societal recognition, signalling a path toward biographical reparation, and at the same time constitutes a condition of the dialectical answer to the ongoing problem, complicating binary concepts of before and after the ocular trauma (Cluley et al., 2023). The transition from 'victim to activist' is a central component of this biographical reparation, empowering those affected to reclaim their history and transform personal pain into collective action and social change.

Although we still need to understand the full extent of the biographical disruption in the lives of victims of ocular trauma, many of them have decided to remain outside of the *public eye*. This study analyzed the narratives of a small fraction of the victims of ocular trauma during the Chilean uprising, i.e. 17 out of 460 reported cases (INDH, 2020). Furthermore, many of them come from coordinated victims who wanted to share their experiences in a self-published book (CVTO, 2023). That is to say, these are survivors who have decided to speak out, denounce, and make visible what happened. Also, many of these testimonies stem from individuals deeply committed to social change and their lives are shaped by marginalization. A demand for

social justice permeates their accounts, revealing that mutilation reinforces their exclusion while fueling their social and political struggle, alongside biographical disruption. Therefore, considering that cases of police violence resulting in ocular trauma occurred in a large and diverse population (INDH, 2020:25; Rodríguez et al., 2021:1668; Varas et al., 2024a:4), more transversal and longitudinal studies may be needed to fully describe the impact of ocular trauma during the 2019 social uprising in Chile.

5. Conclusions

The extent to which biographies are interfered or reinforced significantly impacts the necessary reparation and psychosocial support. While those with pre-existing precariousness may experience less disruption, they often have accumulated trauma and institutional distrust, hindering rehabilitation. Conversely, individuals facing a complete life collapse require specialized support to rebuild identity and meaning after sudden loss. This demands specialized support to manage the sudden loss of functions, roles, and life meaning.

Evidence suggests that reparation policies must be tailored to these diverse experiences. Health and judicial systems need human rights-based approaches to integrate psychosocial injury, prevent revictimization, and ensure comprehensive rehabilitation. The state's inadequate or delayed response intensifies helplessness. 'Interfered daily life' (Varas et al., 2024b) accurately describes obstacles disrupting victims' routines, increasing frustration and thwarting reparation. The futile pursuit of justice perpetuates rupture and exacerbates emotional damage, as victims feel "the weight of injustice". Therefore, biographical reparation requires justice, truth, and public acknowledgment for victims to "heal the wound" and rebuild lives.

Victims of ocular trauma experience a deep biographical rupture, yet they also engage in processes of redefinition and agency, forging complex, active life trajectories. Many young victims have transformed into active survivors, reinventing their biographies through a lens of reparation. Their narratives demonstrate how pain can fuel struggle, with physical injury becoming a symbol of collective resistance and the memory of trauma driving social change.

The potential for ocular trauma to become a reparative biography depends on its framing within social justice goals, particularly during social uprisings. Despite the lack of justice, survivors resist normalising narratives, striving for continuity in their interfered lives (Becker, 2023). Many identify as 'survivors of human rights violations,' reframing their identity through denunciation and historical memory, taking responsibility for life continuity.

As survivors unite demanding truth, justice, and non-repetition, they are shaping Chile's biographical and political history. Sustained support from the state, academia, and civil society is crucial for their comprehensive reparation, requiring empathetic, differentiated approaches. This includes physical and psychological rehabilitation, public acknowledgment, and guarantees of non-repetition.

True biographical healing can only be achieved by integrating these dimensions. This healing allows victims, transformed into agents of change, to restore a dignified life project without forgetting their experiences, ultimately converting loss into a path of personal and social transformation.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Carlos A. Salas: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Lorena Nunez Carrasco:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Resources, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Francisca Marquez:** Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

Ethics statement

The original wording of the victims, including colloquial expressions, has been preserved in the quoted material, as these are considered an essential part of their voices conveying their experiences. Each quote is referenced by indicating the source. Since a large part of the material from CVTO (2023) comes from first-person testimonies, we followed an ethical criterion of not altering their content and respecting anonymity when appropriate.

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Data availability

Only secondary (published) data was used for the research described in the article

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