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Posttraumatic growth and posttraumatic stress symptoms: the role of ethnocultural identity in a South African student sample

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ABSTRACT

Posttraumatic growth has been an ongoing area of interest in the field of positive psychology. In recent years posttraumatic growth has been linked with the presence of posttraumatic stress symptomatology. The existence of posttraumatic growth has been validated in a number of cultures. There are certain domains that have been implicated in the construction of the phenomenon which taps into different aspects of people's lives like relating to others, personal strength, new possibilities and appreciation of life. Particular interest has risen with regard to whether this phenomenon develops as a function of ethnic and cultural influences. This study aimed to investigate whether there are differences in posttraumatic growth and posttraumatic stress symptoms as a function of ethnocultural identity. This was investigated by the use of self-report measures of MEIM (Phinney, 1992), Traumatic Stress Schedule (Norris, 1990), Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) and the Impact of Events Scale Revised (Weiss & Marmar, 1997). The sample consisted of 80 students from the Faculty of Humanities and the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, at the University of Witwatersrand. Results of the multivariate analysis showed that ethnocultural identity interacts with ethnicity to moderate posttraumatic stress symptoms. Specifically, findings suggested that Black South African and Indian students who identified with their ethnocultural heritage, reported fewer PTSD symptoms. Whereas the converse was true for White South Africans and Black Africans from other countries. The more they adopted ethnoculturally informed beliefs, the more likely they were to report symptoms of PTSD. There were no significant findings regarding ethnocultural identity in relation to posttraumatic growth. Implications for further research and clinical intervention are discussed.

Keywords: Ethnocultural identity, ethnic identity, posttraumatic growth, posttraumatic stress symptoms.