

research snapshot

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The Silver Lining of Heart Disease: What Type of Patients Will Be More Likely To Experience It?

What is this research about?

“What does not kill you only makes you stronger!” Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche

Heart disease is the leading cause of disability and death worldwide. Up to one in five heart patients report a wide variety of negative emotions after having heart attack. Examples of negative emotions include sadness, anxiety, hopelessness, and depression. On the other hand, more than half of heart patients experience positive change after struggling with the heart disease. The term ‘Post-traumatic growth (PTG)’ is used to describe this phenomenon. Typically, patients report: being grateful about life, feeling stronger, getting closer to their families, and reorganizing their life priorities. PTG has been widely studied in survivors of traumatic event such as assault victims, cancers and HIV/AIDS. To date, a few studies studied PTG among heart patients. This study aimed to assess the predictors of PTG in a large sample of people recently diagnosed with heart disease.

What did the researchers do?

The researchers carried out a follow-up study to find out what type of heart patients experienced

What you need to know:

After successfully coping with a life threatening event, people tend to look at the brighter side of life.

PTG after coping with heart disease. At the beginning of the study, 1496 heart patients were mailed the first survey to ask about their personal information. Information includes the patient’s age, sex, income, marital status, and a brief medical history. The survey also included measures that looked into the degree of patient’s mental health and social support. Nine months later, 1262 participants were mailed a second survey. This second survey included a scale that assessed positive change after facing a highly stressful life event. The scale has 21 items and measured 5 areas of positive change. These areas include increased personal strength, increased appreciation of life, spiritual change, relationships and finding new possibilities. The scale yields a score from 0-105, with a higher score meaning greater positive change.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers found that patients who reported higher levels of PTG were the ones with the following qualities:

- being younger
- having a minority cultural background
- lower family income
- poorer health
- less depressed mood
- more positive illness perception
- greater social support

How can you use this research?

This study has supported previous research that PTG is linked to a less depressed mood. Also, a greater threat and more social support may lead to the feeling of growth after a crisis. The findings could help in designing counseling and support group programs within cardiac rehabilitation, especially among patients with a different cultural background. Finally, given PTG may be protective for patients' outcome, future research is needed to test different ways to increase psychological growth after having heart disease.

About the Researchers

This research was supported by Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

Yvonne Leung is a doctoral student in the School of Kinesiology and Health Science at

York University. Yvonne is supported by Canada Graduate Scholarship of CIHR.

yleung@yorku.ca

Sherry Grace is an Assistant Professor with the Faculty of Health at York University. Dr. Grace is funded by CIHR.

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Posttraumatic growth, Coronary artery disease, Positive psychological change, Correlates.

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kmbunit@yorku.ca

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