

# **The Importance of Work Rehabilitation for Post-traumatic Growth: A Phenomenological Study**

## **Abstract**

Research on the effects of trauma have so far largely focused on the negative consequences of that experience. To better understand psychological trauma it is necessary to explore the positive effects following trauma as well. The purpose of this study was to increase knowledge and deepen understanding of psychological trauma, how people learn to live with such experience and achieve posttraumatic growth. The research question was: *What is the experience of suffering psychological trauma, its personal effects and the path to posttraumatic growth?*

To answer the research question the Vancouver School of doing phenomenology was used as a research approach. Data were collected in 14 interviews with 12 individuals who had experienced posttraumatic growth following psychological trauma.

The over-arching theme of the study was: "Like going down a black slope and then come up the green hillside" which describes the participants' experience of posttraumatic growth following psychological trauma. The participants' background and history of psychological trauma differed. They described the symptoms of trauma, how they processed the trauma and their path to posttraumatic growth as well as how their personal factors and internal need for change started the process of posttraumatic growth. Work rehabilitation was a key element in attaining post-traumatic growth. However, some heard of that possibility only after a long period of lonesome suffering. Despite experiencing posttraumatic growth participants described experiencing negative posttraumatic factors such as "heavy days", diminished work capacity and inner insecurity.

The results of this research indicate that more attention should be paid to people suffering psychological trauma so that serious long-term consequences can be minimized or prevented. Early detection and intervention, long term support and guidance, as well as work rehabilitation are of paramount importance for people on the path to post-traumatic growth.

**Keywords:** Psychological trauma, posttraumatic growth, work-rehabilitation, traumatic stress, PTSD, life satisfaction, psychoneuroimmunology.

*The Importance of Work Rehabilitation for Post-traumatic Growth: A Phenomenological study*  
Hulda Sædís Bryngeirsdóttir  
Sigríður Halldórsdóttir