

Self-Regulation, Healing Processes, and Post-Traumatic Growth Among Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse: A Multiple Case Study

Princess Marie A. Buncag

Graduate School, Lyceum of the Philippines University – Batangas
buncagprincessmarie@gmail.com

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Abstract – *The study investigates how self-regulation aids in processing their abuse, the mechanisms of their healing journey, and the impact of post-traumatic growth on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse with different elaboration of their attitudes, managing themselves, and their positive disposition. Qualitative research is designed to comprehend phenomena in context-specific settings, such as a real-world setting, where the researcher refrains from attempting to manipulate the phenomenon of interest. The researcher entails a multiple-case study that focuses on the examination of numerous individual cases within a single study to acquire a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. By capturing diverse perspectives and contexts through the analysis of multiple cases, the researcher enhances the richness and validity of their findings. Data were obtained from interviews and documentary analysis. The adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse shared common experiences of initial negative emotions but demonstrated significant self-regulation over time, reframing their perspectives positively. The proposed intervention plan integrates principles from positive psychology, aiming to enhance participants' resilience and maintain their psychological well-being. This proposed intervention plan not only supports ongoing healing but also aims to inspire a positive outlook and improve self-esteem among survivors and victims' alike. The findings emphasize the importance of social support and personal agency in the healing journey from CSA, highlighting the nonlinear nature of recovery and the enduring impact survivors can have in supporting others within their communities.*

Keywords – *Adult Survivors, Childhood sexual abuse (CSA), Healing Processes, Self-regulation, Post-traumatic growth*

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INTRODUCTION

Scholars have thoroughly documented childhood sexual abuse (CSA), recognizing its severe, multifaceted impact on survivors. The psychological effects, including deep emotional trauma and social difficulties, are significant and long-lasting. In cultures with strong purity norms, like the Philippines, survivors often face intensified feelings of guilt. This paper explores how CSA continues to affect individuals, with a focus on self-regulation, the healing journey, and post-traumatic growth among adult survivors. Since the 1970s, increased awareness has highlighted CSA as a major factor in various mental health issues and personality disorders, impacting people from all backgrounds and profoundly affecting their emotional and behavioral development. Self-regulation—the ability to manage one's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors—is essential for dealing with the long-term effects of CSA and is a key part of the healing process. Although disclosing abuse and building supportive relationships are crucial, there is still limited research on how survivors navigate these challenges to become resilient and make positive adjustments in their lives. The concept of post-traumatic growth (PTG), introduced in the 1990s, describes how trauma can lead to positive psychological changes, such as personal growth and a new outlook on life. This study looks at the experiences of adult CSA survivors in Region IV-MIMAROPA, using one-on-one interviews to understand their self-regulation strategies, healing processes, and instances of PTG. By shedding light on their resilience and growth, the study aims to build greater empathy and support within families, communities, and institutions. The goal is to enhance psychological interventions and counseling strategies, validate survivors' experiences, and reduce stigma, ultimately supporting the development of better ways to help individuals who have faced such trauma.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this case study is to explore, elaborate, and understand the experience of a survivor of

childhood Sexual abuse based on their self-regulation, healing process, and post-traumatic growth.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study utilized a multiple-case design within a qualitative research framework, focusing on narrative techniques to explore the experiences of adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Narrative approaches, through in-depth examination of individual experiences, provide valuable insights into participants' behaviors, attitudes, and perspectives. This qualitative method emphasizes open-ended and conversational communication—whether text, video, or audio—to gain a deep understanding of participants' concepts, opinions, and experiences.

Based on the interpretive and constructivist paradigms, qualitative research focuses on getting a full picture of things rather than predicting what will happen, which is what the positivist paradigm does [1]. When executed with rigor, qualitative research offers internal consistency and facilitates exploration of critical questions about individuals and their lives [2]. The narrative approach centers on the meanings individuals attach to their experiences, particularly those that involve significant changes or impacts [3] [4].

A case study method examines the uniqueness and complexity of individual cases to understand specific activities and contexts [5]. According to Yin [6], case studies are essential for investigating contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clear.

Participants

The study initially included six adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse from the MIMAROPA region. Due to the concept of saturation—when no new relevant information emerges. Data collection achieves saturation when it yields a comprehensive understanding of the research subject, and additional information does not contribute new insights [7].

The snowball sampling technique was employed, a non-probability method useful for identifying participants in hidden or hard-to-reach populations. Existing participants referred others who met the research criteria, creating a chain-referral network [8].

Measures

An interview guide questionnaire was utilized, consisting of five sets of questions designed to explore

the participants' experiences with childhood sexual abuse. This tool aimed to delve into their mechanisms of self-regulation, recovery, and post-traumatic development. The goal was to understand how survivors manage their emotions, actions, and thoughts following trauma.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher began by reviewing relevant literature on adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse, gaining a foundational understanding, and identifying holistic methods for further investigation. The study initially involved six participants, but data saturation led to its refinement to three.

Individual interviews were conducted, with each participant providing information about the study's objectives, their rights, and the interview procedures. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring participants were aware of their right to withhold information or withdraw from the study at any time.

Interviews were recorded with participants' consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality. The researcher then used thematic analysis to identify and analyze themes from the transcribed interviews, examining emergent patterns and relationships among concepts.

Data Analysis

The data analysis involved transcribing recorded interviews and reading the transcriptions multiple times. Comments were made in the margins to note interesting or relevant points. Themes were identified and organized chronologically and then analytically to understand relationships between concepts. The analysis culminated in a thematic framework, with a table summarizing key excerpts from participants' comments, which provided deeper insights into their experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Participants were fully informed about the study's goals, their rights, and the confidentiality measures in place. Informed consent was obtained, and participants' real names were anonymized to protect their identities. Participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time without consequence. Demographic profiles were collected but kept confidential. Participants received written transcriptions and interpretations of their data, with the final decision about reporting data resting with the participants. The study adhered to the ethical guidelines set by the Psychological Association of the Philippines [9].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section integrates findings of analysis across cases to generate a more descriptive framework for self-regulation, healing process, and post-traumatic growth among adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. It shows the similarities and differences across cases supported by empirical literature. Table 1 shows the themes that were evident and common in the cases analyzed.

Table 1. Theme of Self-regulation, Healing Process and Post-traumatic Growth among Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Self-Regulation

Variables	Themes	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Self-Regulation	Individual Attitudes	✓	✓	✓
Process ff Healing	Managing Oneself	✓	✓	✓
Post-traumatic Growth	Positive Disposition	✓	✓	✓

Individual attitudes emerged as a crucial element in the context of self-regulation among survivors of childhood sexual abuse. The survivors' responses to their trauma fall into two categories: negative and positive. Specifically, Participant 1 struggled with articulating their ideas, suffered humiliation, and held prejudices against men, but also showed self-improvement, a change in perspective, and acceptance of the maltreatment. Participant 2 expressed similar feelings of embarrassment and low self-worth, coupled with prejudgment towards men, but also demonstrated self-improvement and acceptance of the maltreatment. Participant 3 conveyed feelings of embarrassment, low self-worth, and difficulty in articulating thoughts, along with an acceptance of the abuse, a shift in perspective, and a desire to improve. Despite the shared problems, each participant's experience with self-regulation varied, demonstrating a complex interplay between negative and positive responses.

Healing Process

The theme of "Managing Oneself" emerged from the healing process of childhood sexual abuse survivors for all participants, categorized as coping strategies. Coping strategies encountered by all participants can be classified as (1) positive behavior. Research participant 1 demonstrated positive behavior by expressing themselves, gaining support from others, and opening up

to others. Research participant 2 manifested it in the form of being able to open oneself to others, being able to obtain support from others, and being able to express oneself. Research participant 3 exhibited it in the form of being able to open oneself to others, being able to obtain support from others, and being able to express oneself.

Table 2. Cross-Analysis of the Emerged Theme as to Commonalities and Differences in the Aspect of Self-regulation among Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Theme	Individual Attitudes
Categories	Personal Reaction
Case 1	✓
Case 2	✓
Case 3	✓

Table 3. Cross-Analysis of the Emerged Theme as to Commonalities and Differences in the Aspect of Process of Healing among Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Theme	Managing Oneself
Categories	Coping Strategies
Case 1	✓
Case 2	✓
Case 3	✓

Post-Traumatic Growth

Positive Disposition emerged as a topic from the post-traumatic growth element among individuals who survived childhood sexual abuse, characterized by their individual attitudes, for all participants. Each participant's unique attitudes can be categorized as (1) Personal Qualities. Research Participant 1 demonstrated it by being able to move forward, express oneself, and be thoughtful of others. Research participant 2 proved it by being able to move forward, be considerate of others, and assist others. Research participant 3 demonstrated it through the capacity for self-expression, helping others, and progressive motion.

Table 4. Cross-Analysis of the Emerged Theme as to Commonalities and Differences in the Aspect of Post-Traumatic Growth among Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse

Theme	Positive Disposition
Categories	Individual Attitudes
Case 1	✓
Case 2	✓
Case 3	✓

Based on the study's overall findings, a framework was created to help adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse understand the self-regulation, process of healing, and post-traumatic growth among the adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse. Therefore, these indicate that the study's findings can greatly aid in the development of appropriate psychotherapy.



Figure 1. A Framework of Self-regulation, Process of Healing and Post traumatic Growth

Key Concern Area	Program Objective	Strategies	Activities
Positive self-concept	-Help the survivor of childhood sexual abuse build intrinsic motivation. - Help the survivor of childhood sexual to realize their strengths. -Provide an opportunity to improve self-concept.	Group and Individual Session	Individual Activity Individual activity with worksheets Introduction of writing in the journal
Meaning Making	-to help them to see the event as a less damaging situation -to help them appreciate life more. -to improve relationships and enhance coping skills.	Group and Individual Session	Individual Activity Introducing the hero Archetype Group Activity
Self-Determination	- To help the survivors of childhood sexual abuse to develop their ability to succeed in a particular situation. - To realize the importance of goals and motivation in their lives. - To guide them in putting their plans into action.	Group and Individual Session	Individual Activity Group Activity Individual Activity with worksheet

CONCLUSION

This study involved adult female participants who, having graduated college and established professional careers, experienced childhood sexual abuse by individuals of the opposite gender. These participants disclosed their abuse in adulthood but chose not to file formal complaints against their perpetrators.

Self-Regulation. The participants demonstrated self-regulation, a process marked by initial negative reactions such as embarrassment and feelings of impurity. Over time, however, they learned to manage and respond positively to their experiences. Acceptance that the abuse was not their fault played a critical role in their self-regulation, leading to a shift in their self-perception and a significant healing process.

Healing Process. Support was a critical element in the participants' healing journey. Engaging with trusted individuals and feeling accepted by loved ones facilitated their ability to express themselves more comfortably. This support network contributed significantly to their post-traumatic growth, illustrating the importance of external validation and encouragement in the healing process.

Post-Traumatic Growth. The participants exhibited a profound shift from focusing on their own experiences to becoming more attuned and empathetic toward others. Their experiences with childhood sexual abuse fostered a heightened sensitivity to others' situations, driving them to assist fellow survivors through their professional vocations and voluntary activities.

Framework. The experiences of the participants underscore the intertwined nature of personal choice and social support in the journey of a childhood sexual abuse survivor. This study highlights that healing is an ongoing, non-linear process influenced by both internal self-regulation and external support. Survivors' paths reflect a combination of personal resilience and the support they receive, emphasizing the importance of continuous support throughout their lives.

Intervention Plan. Based on positive psychology, the proposed intervention plan aims to support survivors in their ongoing healing process and maintain their psychological well-being. The design of this plan not only supports survivors of childhood sexual abuse, but also aids victims who are still navigating their healing journeys. It focuses on fostering a positive outlook and enhancing resilience.

RECOMMENDATION

Participants. Survivors of childhood sexual abuse face considerable challenges in their healing processes. Engaging in therapeutic interventions such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), mindfulness practices, and trauma-informed counseling can help them develop effective coping strategies. Seeking support from trusted family, friends, and support groups is crucial in creating a validating and trustful environment necessary for rebuilding self-esteem.

Family. Families should foster a supportive environment by actively participating in the healing process. Educating family members and social networks about the challenges faced by survivors, as well as

providing guidance on empathetic support, can create a safe space for survivors to discuss their experiences and seek help.

DSWD and government agencies. Collaboration with government agencies and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) is essential for developing comprehensive support programs for survivors. These programs should include access to mental health services, legal advocacy, and financial assistance. It is also vital to educate policymakers on the need for protective policies that uphold survivors' rights and well-being.

Future Researchers. Researchers and professionals play a key role in advancing trauma-informed care and supporting childhood sexual abuse survivors. They should focus on ethical research methodologies and best practices, ensuring sensitivity and respect for survivors' experiences. Studies on self-regulation, healing processes, and post-traumatic growth will contribute to knowledge and evidence-based interventions. Collaboration among professionals is crucial for continuous improvement and responsiveness to individual needs.

Before implementing a psychological program Health professionals, particularly psychologists, should conduct a thorough validation process before implementing psychological programs for survivors. This includes pilot testing with a small group of survivors to ensure alignment with trauma-informed care principles and evidence-based techniques. Incorporating cultural sensitivity and establishing outcome evaluation criteria, such as improvements in mental health and self-regulation skills, is essential. Ongoing supervision and training by qualified psychologists will ensure the program's effectiveness and adaptability.

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