Facing Death and Life After: The Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) of Generation Z COVID-19 Survivors


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Abstract: This paper delved into the experience of posttraumatic growth of severely traumatized Generation Z COVID-19 survivors. The descriptive type of research was utilized as it only explains the fundamentals of the results without manipulating and influencing the data gathered. The exploratory sequential mixed method was specifically employed to triangulate, homogenize, and support quantitative and qualitative results and their relationship with each other through the use of the COVID-19 Peritraumatic Distress Index to screen their trauma level, Posttraumatic Growth Inventory to assess their growth level, and an in-depth interview method to further explain their lived experiences respectively. The purposive sampling method was applied to gather 100 respondents and 7 participants both belonging to generation z ages 18 to 25 for quantitative and qualitative data respectively. It was discovered that it is through successful meaning management or making sense of the world after a trauma transformed people. This finding was supported by the Meaning Management Theory which suggested that people can seek and reconstruct meaning amidst existential uncertainties and the Posttraumatic Growth theory which states that life-altering and life-disruptive trauma results in growth. The quantitative finding revealed a high score of growth among respondents; this also mirrors the qualitative data in which several themes per domain of PTG were interpreted. Participants reported having heightened feelings of courage, resiliency, & perseverance in terms of facing adversities, embarking on a newly discovered path with a sense of contentment and determination, developing a meaningful connection within their social circle, having a greater sense of appreciation for the value of live through priority shifting, and realignment of values, and developing a deeper faith anchored with a deeper meaning and purpose in life.

Keywords: Trauma, Generation Z, COVID-19, Posttraumatic Growth, and Meaning Management

Introduction

As the sudden COVID-19 pandemic hit the last summer of 2020 in the Philippines, every Filipino’s life has never been the same. Everyone is not exempted from emotional, psychological, mental, physical, and moral trauma and exhaustion brought about by this pandemic has been continuing to affect millions of lives up until this moment. Many variants have surfaced around the globe, particularly here in the Philippines wherein as of this writing, the deadly delta variant and its mutants is the dominating one. There are over 516,922,683 active cases of COVID-19 globally and over 6,259,9450 death cases as of May 9, 2022. Coronavirus is a pandemic of fear; if one thing connects every person of every culture, it is the fear of death (Zhang et al., 2019). The pandemic served as one of the greatest threats to human life, leading to sudden awareness of one’s mortality, especially among young COVID-19 survivors. However, the younger generation’s awareness and acceptance of death are not typical (Soriano and Calong Calong, 2020). Thus, the development of thanatophobia, or fear of death has become rampant. This fear has been seen as a declining process when aging, older generations tend to accept the fact that death is a part of the natural world (Krause et al., 2018). On the other hand, younger generations such as Generation Z have a high degree of thanatophobia (Chopik, 2017). As a result, when faced with such a traumatic event that threatens human life, alteration in one’s personal worldview in life may occur. Furthermore, exposure to life-threatening events is a disabling and traumatic experience that results in a negative emotional reaction from the inevitability of death or maybe a positive change due to the opportunity of re-evaluation of life (Pandya and Kathuria 2021; Walter 2020). Enduring a very disruptive experience leads to Post-traumatic Growth which according to Tedeschi and Calhoun (2006) pertains to a transformational process of effectively coping with highly traumatic circumstances. The degree of this experience may vary among people. Still, growth can only happen after facing, understanding, and managing the trauma well.

The lifestyle in this new normal is not just about surviving a day alive, but also coping with the roller-coaster distress of living. Surviving the fatal threats of this virus will not end as it is now part of our daily lives. That’s why, this paper was conceptualized to help people of any particular significance to open up about how they feel about themselves and the situation at hand, inform them on how to address such underlying anxiety, and give background information on how to solidify the information about posttraumatic growth that would add up to the body of knowledge.

Research Questions

This study examined the occurrence of posttraumatic growth among COVID-19 generation z survivors. Specifically, it sought to answer the questions set out hereunder:

1. What is the overall posttraumatic growth of the respondents after surviving COVID-19?
2. What are the effects of surviving CODI-19 on the respondents in terms of:
   2.1 personal strength;
2.2 new possibilities;  
2.3 relating to others;  
2.4 appreciation of life; and  
2.5 spiritual changes?

3. In what way did your experience with COVID-19 change and help you in terms of:  
   3.1 personal strength;  
   3.2 new possibilities;  
   3.3 relating to others;  
   3.4 appreciation of life; and  
   3.5 spiritual changes?

Conceptual Framework

Trauma and adversities highly affect an individual in the long run. It could be a negative one or the opposite. The diagram below specifies the road to achieving posttraumatic growth.

The quality of posttraumatic growth experienced by an individual highly depends on how they reconstructed meaning and made sense of their world after significant trauma. Walter (2020) stated that COVID-19 made most people realize the traumatizing and disabling reality of mortality. Hence, pandemic-related events are associated with the development of posttraumatic stress disorder in those who suffered extremely from COVID-19 (Wathelet, 2021).

Luckily, Wong (2007) has found out that when people are faced with existential adversities that shatter their assumptive world, humans are capable to reconstruct meaning and life because, according to him, uncertainties allow us to revamp and re-author our worldview.

With this capability, posttraumatic growth may happen. PTG is an experience of positive change because of a successful cognitive engagement to a disruptive traumatic event. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun (2006), the degree of trauma constitutes the quality of growth. All in all, growth will happen after effectively enduring and processing a psychological traumatic battle through meaning management.

Literature Review

The Coronavirus

The World Health Organization (2020) defines COVID-19 as “an infectious disease caused by the SARS-Cov2 virus. It is known to be a transmittable virus which travels as a “respiratory droplet” through sneezing, coughing, talking, breathing, etc. (Cleveland Clinic, 2020). Hence, as per Roberts, M.D. (n.d.) of East Alabama Health, social distancing and wearing of face masks or any cloth face coverings are necessary to avoid transmission and widespread of the virus. Symptoms of this virus may differ from person to person because classifications of COVID-19 vary from mild to severe and from symptomatic to asymptomatic (Mayo Clinic 2021; WHO 2020).

Currently, COVID-19 is continuously mutating resulting in the development of different variants such as the deadly Delta variant, it is proven that this variant is more infectious and spreads faster which causes severe illness (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Thus, many researchers and medical professional urges people to get vaccinated to reduce the risk of contracting new variants and lower the possibility of having a severe infection (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; World Health Organization; 2020).

According to the World Health Organization (2021), as of May 9, 2022, there are exactly 6,259,9450 death cases and 516,922,683 confirmed cases worldwide. OCTA research (2020) as stated by Rocamora (2021) of the Philippine News Agency, recorded a 2.32% CFR which means more than 2 out of 100 people died from the disease.

Understanding “Coronaphobia”

Coronaphobia is a psychosocial concept about the fear of uncertainty in the fight against COVID-19, or the general fear of coronavirus (Singh et al, 2020). This concept was supported by Peitl et al. (2019), who stated that fear of COVID-19 is caused by its novelty and uncertainty of what will happen next. It may also be caused by negative psychological impacts on oneself such as elevated anxiety and prolonged fear (Rahman et al., 2020; Satici 2020).

Lee (2020) defined this as “dysfunctional anxiety” that affects life, he also delved into the scope and augmenting validity of “Coronaphobia” as an emerging pandemic and psychologically related stress. He used multiple regression analysis as a main tool to predict the outcome of the response variable. The study showed that coronaphobia is also related to depression, generalized anxiety, death anxiety, or trauma. Menzies and Menzies (2020), De Luca and Calabro (2020), Singh et al. (2020), and Saladino
(2020) supported this for they also found a similar result that Coronaphobia is a trauma caused by the feeling of isolation, the feeling of loneliness, feeling of helplessness, the feeling of hopelessness, loss of freedom, the feeling of fear towards contamination of the virus, fear of uncertainty towards the reality, and fear of death.

The development of the so-called “Coronaphobia” among people facing COVID-19 has become rampant nowadays. All qualitative and quantitative information listed above agreed that “Coronaphobia” is a COVID-19-specific trauma related to unending uncertainty, unforeseen reality, contraction of the virus, depression, generalized anxiety, and death anxiety. Furthermore, the pandemic predicament had caused significant changes to the participants’ lives including and not limited to daily routine, life, beliefs, priorities, and perception.

**Concept of Death and Death Anxiety**

Pallis (2020) identified that death varies among one’s culture, experiences, personal beliefs, religion, and perception. It pertains however to the end-of-life processes both physically and biologically. Based on Merriam-Webster (2021), death also refers to an “instance of dying” which is interpreted as a state of non-being or departure from human life.

Not every person accepts the fact that everyone will die eventually. Hence, the development of so-called “thanatophobia” or death anxiety is a possibility. Death anxiety is a common human experience in all societies (Zhang et al., 2019). It is a complicated idea that serves numerous ideologies and meanings depending on the researcher’s vantage point. However, Pandya and Kathuria (2021) compiled various research on death anxiety by doing a scoping review approach and meta-synthesis to rewrite its direction by developing therapeutic ways of helping people dealing with thanatophobia and understanding its general meaning. Dadfar and Lester (2017) and Chacko and Sunny (2018) said that death anxiety is a “dread of death” or fear of death both of oneself and of other people. On the other hand, it is also defined as a “negative emotional reaction” to the inevitability of death (Tomer and Eliason 1996; Pandya and Kathuria; 2021). Death anxiety is believed to be related to the feeling of anxiety and distress towards the process of dying which constitutes the fear of “loneliness, suffering, loss of time, and loss of existence” (Sinoff, 2017).

Fear originates from life-threatening events (Ouhtoff, 2020). Legg (2018) and Firestone (2018) in a different article, points out that particular triggers arise or lead to the development of death anxiety which may come from unpredictable, harmful, and stressful events that affect one’s life such as having a life-threatening illness, being exposed to traumatic events, and having disrupting experiences. Some researcher like Block (2021), believes that specific causes of death anxiety are currently not clear. However, some researchers like those mentioned above and Yalch and Levendosky (2018) state that exposure to trauma “evokes” the likelihood of developing death anxiety or an “unresolved psychological distress” with death (Sinoff, 2017).

Nonetheless, death anxiety is an unusual experience that people face. It is a universal phenomenon present in every human life, it varies along with several factors such as age (Dadfar and Lester 2017; Pandya and Kathuria 2021). The meaning of death differs from person to person. Overall, death anxiety links to the fear of the unknown, death, and the process or “pain” of dying originating from unpredictable, harmful, and stressful events that threaten life.

**Meaning Management**

Human beings are meaning-seeking creatures, it is through meaning that people can act, interact, and behave with their assumptive world. Human beings are unique in their intellectual capacity to be aware of their mortality (Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski, 2015). People's reaction toward death awareness is dynamic, complex, and multifaceted. There are two major ways in how people respond to death awareness and that is through (1) Defensive reaction and (2) Growth-Oriented reaction (Cazzolino, 2013).

**Responding to death through denial.** According to several studies supported by the Terror Management Theory by Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (2015), people are motivated by their instinct for survival and self-preservation. Hence, when mortality is made salient, they tend to protect themselves through denial to defend their self-esteem and cultural worldviews - symbols, beliefs, and standards that individuals within a group put significant value on. Defensive reactions allow people to deny vulnerability by embracing the concept of immortality, this could be achieved by engaging in different cultural ideologies that reward extrinsic motivations because according to Cozzonillo (2004), “cultural ideologies seek the perpetuation and redemption of life”. According to the findings of Wong (2007), denial reactions powered by one’s defensive mechanism allow people to pursue his/her meaning unconsciously as a result of preserving their cultural worldview.

**Responding to death through acceptance.** Denial is not the only way to face death awareness. Some people facilitate the terror of death through an “open, authentic, and intrinsic” way to search for meaning (Cozzonilo, 2013). As per Wong (2007), people are motivated by living a “good and meaningful life”. That is why, people’s capacity to reflect and contemplate allows us to seek, make, and reconstruct (if needed) meaning to continuously live our purpose. When faced with death, people can transform fear and negativity in the service of creating new possibilities and adapting their reconstructed meaning to the changing world. However, it should be noted that this process includes intentional and conscious efforts. Thus, freedom of choice is a powerful weapon to find meaning. Wong’s Meaning Management Theory asserts that the “best defense is an offense.” Being free from the terrors of death through acceptance allows people to live life to its fullest.

But what determines people’s response to death? Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (2015), Cozzonillo (2013), and Wong (2007) believe that although choice plays a significant role, one’s triggering signals or experiences that made one aware of death is a notable factor. Cozzonilo (2013) and Luta (2021), proposed two kinds of existential encounters (1) specific and individualizing and (2) abstract and categorical. People who encounter death more personally and specifically (illness, accidents, trauma) tend to accept death and facilitate intrinsic growth. However, people abstractly encounter death through death reminders that are unspecific to a participant such as visiting funeral homes, exposure to the word “death,” witnessing death incidents on the news, etc results in denial and shielding of one’s cultural worldview and self-esteem through extrinsic motivators.
Generation Z Profile

As for Dimock (2019) of Pew Research Center, Generation Z is born between the years 1997 to 2012 at the age of 10-25 years old. Gaidhani et al. (2019) and Francis and Hoefel (2018), pondered upon what makes Generation Z unique in terms of worldview. According to their research, generation z or Genzens are self-learners, they are highly analytical and pragmatic thinkers, and they tend to be more realistic and sensitive but also more anxious. They give importance to practicality, and they are always on the hunt seeking the truth. They tend to have a better understanding and openness in relating to people. Also, generation z people were born during the time of recession which is why they prioritize financial security and job stability. Lastly, generation z are people that strive to create an impact, they are purpose-driven.

Ang et al. (2021) in their investigation on the resilience of Generation Z students during the pandemic, found out that despite all adversities and challenges brought by the COVID-19 pandemic in their daily life, 26 out of 27 Generation Z students tend to have a high level of resiliency in surviving and pushing through life. They were able to investigate this by conducting a descriptive cross-sectional study through semi-structured interviews via online platforms. Researchers highlighted that Generation Z students believe that resilience is a necessity to survive which comes from one's desire, determination, social group, and experiences.

Generation Z and Death Anxiety

Age plays a vital role in determining the presence and degree of death anxiety among people (Laguilles-Villafuerte and de Guzman, 2020). As a result, the dread of death can be seen as a declining process when aging. Older people have lower death anxiety than the younger generation (Soriano and Calong Calong 2020; Krause et al. 2018; Sinoff 2017).

Wani (2018) ought to know the effects of age and psychological well-being on death anxiety. He was able to differentiate levels of thanatophobia between adolescents, young adults, and the elderly by administering the Templer Death Anxiety Scale and PGI Well-Being Scale. According to the results, the elderly tends to have a better quality of psychological well-being and a lower rate of death anxiety followed by young adults and adolescents who scored very poorly on the PGI well-being scale and scored higher on Templer’s death anxiety scale.

In addition, Chopik (2017) investigated the relationship between age and death anxiety through two (2) research methods, the first one was administering a cross-sectional survey on 2,363 adults, and the second one was a four (4) year longitudinal study on 9,815 adults. The same findings were observed which concluded that death anxiety declines across the lifespan of a person. Young adults or younger people tend to have a high degree of death anxiety level (Robah, 2017)

Like the researchers above, Reyes (2017), also investigated this through a Filipino lens. He wanted to know the relationship between age, self-esteem, and death anxiety among Filipino youth and the older generation. By utilizing a two-part analysis and using the Templer death anxiety scale and Rosenberg Self Esteem scale among 520 respondents (260 youth and 260 older adults), he was able to find out that Filipino youth have a high degree of death anxiety and lower level of self-esteem as compared to the older adults. He added that the youth are in the process wherein existential contemplation about the meaning of death begins.

Posttraumatic Growth

The field of posttraumatic development investigates what helps people go over life’s obstacles and prosper as a result of adversity (Danylochuk, 2015). Whether or not we have these components of life in place before the trauma, they may help us recover, establish meaning, and create pleasant experiences that, while not changing the terrible circumstance, offer life meaning and purpose as it goes on.

Personal Strength. This domain refers to the essence of one’s character in facing adversities - being able to survive the worst scenario and becoming vulnerable yet stronger. Facing a traumatic event, tests and prepares an individual for the future. Tedeschi (2018) states that in his research, survivors of trauma may say that they learned they were stronger than they thought they were after going through the ordeal. They are left with the impression that if “I can get through this, I can get through anything.”

This supports his statement in an article by Harvard Business Review last 2020 that people are frequently astounded by how effectively they have dealt with adversity in their personal and professional life and that they are better prepared to face future problems. Magomed-Eminov (2021) found out that the COVID-19 situation has surely made most victims improve their “inner resources” to help them adapt to the changing world. He discovered that people who experienced the pandemic situation tend to experience an increased sense of resilience, this resiliency is an indication of one’s willingness to learn more and successfully cope with life.

New Possibilities. This domain pertains to “developing new interests, new activities, and embarking on significant new paths in life (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2006, p. 5). Tedeschi (2018) explains this as people finding new pathways in their lives, new activities they may participate in, or new priorities. What happens to some people after a traumatic event is that things, they thought were important no longer appear significant to them, or things they could attain before no longer seem conceivable to them. Certain chances are no longer available to them, and they must seek other ways to live their lives. Boals et al. (2019) stated that life-altering events provide victims an opportunity to re-evaluate their own life which may result in the discovery of new possibilities in life. The discovery of new possibilities may lead to contentment. Contentment does not imply a lack of desire; rather, it implies that you are content with your current situation and believe that the changes your life takes will be for the better (Draghici, 2018). Pearce (2019) believes that contentment is known to bring peace of mind and positivity to a person that it can facilitate growth and self-improvement. Hence, Lodhi, and Gul (2021) stated, life-threatening incidents made most people aware of the true essence of satisfaction. Aside from this, the determination in pursuing goals and dreams could also be seen (Kaufman, 2020).

Relating to Others. This domain is defined as an increase in a sense of freedom to be oneself, compassion, intimacy, and closeness toward other people - family, friends, romantic partner, and/or community. It leads the individual to relate to the world in an entirely new way. Surviving a traumatic event creates a deeper connection to an individual’s social circle which sometimes

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leads to engaging in altruistic acts (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2006). Greenburg, et al. (2018) claimed that individuals may seek help from others and so develop social skills that allow them to utilize social environments to meet their psychological requirements. Individuals may have developed and relied on internal resources because of the absence of an impact, which aided their posttraumatic development and so prevented the need for social support into adulthood. Greenburg’s claim can be supported by Tedeschi’s statement during his podcast on Psychological Association (APA) 2018 that people may be more empathetic to others and honest in their emotional responses. These relational alterations may result from the experience of getting social support and compassion from others. It also results from knowing how difficult life may be in the aftermath of misfortune and being a little more forgiving and empathetic for those who have gone through difficulty themselves, perhaps not being so judgmental. In addition to that, Baron-Cohen (2018) believes that increased compassion and empathy are related to the severity of one’s adversity.

**Appreciation of Life.** Knowing what is more important, realizing what is more precious, embracing the essence of life, and not taking life for granted are what define this domain. When confronted with fear and loss, people often learn to appreciate what they still have that they may have overlooked before. People become more grateful to be alive and to have survived their traumatic experiences. Wellma (2020) ascertains that death is a powerful reminder to live and to appreciate the time we have left. People become more thankful for the chance to continue doing something constructive after the accident (Tedeschi, 2020). Stallard, Pereira, and Barros (2021) sought to know the PTG of the nurses during the first wave of the COVID-19 virus by providing them with a single open-ended question: “Do you think there are any positives to come out of this pandemic and the social distancing restrictions?” They found that exposure to psychological distress due to the pandemic is associated with the development of a greater appreciation of life, most specifically, reconnecting with life and reconsidering what is more valuable. Traumatic incidents force an individual to reconfigure his/her assumptive world which could result in a higher level of functioning (Exenberger et al., 2019). Greater gratitude and increased appreciation of life due to a deep understanding of what happened in the aftermath of trauma (Uy and Okubo, 2018). Bray (2017) believes that the “painful” adventure of trauma survivors may lead to improved functioning and a deeper level of self-awareness. After battling with the trauma, these survivors are then ready to return and offer the world something richer and deeper than they ever could have before (Williams, 2017).

**Spiritual Change.** This pertains to the transformation of one’s philosophical view, existential and spiritual being. It refers to the development of a greater sense of purpose, meaning in life, and faith (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2006). This domain comes across as a greater engagement in religious life. It may represent a shift in people’s perceptions of what they regard to be the spiritual realm. In some cases, it might be a greater aptitude or interest in wresting with existential concerns such as the meaning of life, the purpose of existence, and the extent to which all individuals are tied together (Tedeschi, 2018). According to the National Center for PTSD (n.d.), a greater perceived closeness and understanding to God is an aftereffect of successfully processing a traumatic event. Spiritual struggles are pivotal orienting systems that allow a traumatized person to allow changes through doubt that creates collaborative problem-solving with the higher being (Hart et al., 2020). The spiritual change includes existential concerns of traumatized people such as the meaning and purpose of life. According to Vohs et al. (2019), our negative experience in life improves one’s meaning in life for it allows the victim to deeply comprehend oneself and the perspective of life from unwanted and unwell encounters. An increase in eagerness in fulfilling one’s social and familial responsibilities and being innately kind to other people was seen to be a major source of one’s purpose after a COVID-19 trauma (Chean et al., 2020). Suffering, pain, and trauma refine our search for meaning leading to the discovery of one’s purpose and our “new life” (Bayod, 2020).

**Growth after Trauma**

The trauma from the coronavirus pandemic will alter one’s life (Krueger, 2020; Masiero et al., 2020; Silver, 2020). The development of psychological trauma is common when the involvement of a threat to life is present (Silver, 2020). According to Muldoon (2020), COVID-19 is a traumatic event because it anchors threats to human life, mortality, and safety. He added that social disconnection and new experiences such as being in quarantine, lockdown, and isolation amplify the trauma that people are experiencing. However, the degree of trauma may differ individually.

The trauma that the world is experiencing affects people’s worldview, it affects not only their well-being but also their perception and orientation in life (Campbell, 2020). Life after a traumatic event varies according to people (Hendricks, 2018). Renee (2018) agreed with the statement of Hendricks (2018) that the effects of trauma on one’s life differ from person to person. Some may be affected negatively, and some may find positive changes because people have individual differences. Depending on how the people managed and coped with it because growth is related to one’s cognitive activity (Tedeschi and Calhoun, 2006, p. 10). Renee (2018) listed five (5) positive effects of trauma on life, (1) a new appreciation for life, (2) improved relationships, (3) excitement for new possibilities of what’s ahead, (4) new-found personal strength, (5) change in perspective. The same finding was observed by Walter (2020), according to his research COVID-19 made most people, especially the youth, face their mortality for the first time in their lives which makes it a very traumatic and disabling experience. Tsi and Morisette (2022) found out that one’s attitude in facing adversities changes after trauma. They discovered that resiliency and perseverance evolve after enduring a battle. Resilience and perseverance go hand in hand with each other because for one to flourish, one must require these two when faced with adversities. One’s courage and resiliency impact a person’s perseverance in facing adversities (Henry, 2017). He defined death and mortality as a common experience between humanity and as part of a natural World. Hence, having this experience may lead to a positive change in life perspective for this is an opportunity to re-evaluate and review one’s life. He added that death should be talked about freely among people of all ages.

According to Tamioloka and Kailaitzaki (2020), a greater sense of personal strength, development of social growth, significant appreciation of life, and spiritual growth will be seen when a person succeeds in the cognitive restructuring of what has happened. Kristo (2021) also found out that PTG is more likely to happen after a major life crisis. 167 students have completed the PTG online survey and he found positive growth in the student’s emotional, spiritual, psychological, and social well-being. Kowalski et al. (2021) ought to find out the silver lining in the COVID-19 crisis, the researchers administered several surveys.
among 179 workers which included the PTG Inventory scale, based on the results, the respondents have shown higher levels of PTG most especially developing a deeper spiritual relationship. A similar study was conducted by Feingold et al. (2021), they administered PTG inventory in two different timelines among front liners, and a greater appreciation of life, improved relationships, greater personal strength, and spiritual growth were observed among respondents.

COVID-19 deeply affected every human being. The war against this invisible threat disrupted one’s life. Suffering from this traumatic experience developed distress among people, however, some researchers are hopeful that this experience may provide introspection and re-evaluation to create a positive impact in changing life perception.

Methodology
Research Design
The study followed the descriptive type of research due to its appropriateness of its nature to the pursuit of which extracting valid responses among respondents/participants was its main goal which was then used as the basis for describing, classifying, and interpreting variables involving the timely COVID-19 pandemic phenomenon.

Furthermore, the strategy used to justify its descriptive nature was the mixed method of research which is used for gathering, evaluating, and “mixing” quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell, 2012). Specifically, the explanatory sequential design of mixed method was used in which researchers obtained quantitative data through the use of a questionnaire and then qualitative data through the conduct of individual interview method. Quantitative results screened from respondents who passed the CPDI scale were then matched and triangulated with similar qualitative results extracted from the participants with the highest trauma in such a way the qualitative data support quantitative findings. With all these approaches, the worldview and lived experiences of COVID-19 survivors were basically analyzed and interpreted.

Instruments
For the quantitative data, the researchers adopted the standard COVID-19 Peritraumatic Distress Index (CPDI) developed by Qui et al., (2021) to measure the severity of range-related symptoms and to initially screen the most 100 qualified respondents. CPDI constitutes 24 questions tackling fear, anxiety, sadness particular phobias, cognitive change, avoidance, obsessive behavior, physical symptoms, and loss of social functioning. This was presented through the 5-point Likert Scale format of never, occasionally sometimes, often, and most of the time with equivalent rates of 0, 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively. The total score for this scale ranges from 0-96 and a CPDI score of ≤27 indicates low or no trauma, 28–51 indicates mild to moderate trauma, and ≥52 indicates severe trauma.

Afterward, the qualified 100 respondents who passed the CPDI test took the adopted Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996). This was known to measure the extent of positive growth or posttraumatic. The PTGI is a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (“I did not experience this change as a result of my crisis”) to 5 (“I experienced this change to a very great degree as a result of my crisis”). The total growth score or global score ranges from 0 - 105 with higher scores indicating a higher degree of growth, it could be determined by adding all responses from each item. A total score of ≥ 46 indicates a moderate to high degree of PTG. On the other hand, a total score of ≤ 45 shows none to low PTG (Jansen et al., 2011; Lane et al., 2019; Mazor et al., 2016; Peng et al., 2021). PTGI also examined which domain was the predominant source of growth among the 5 major domains of growth. Each domain has a different number of corresponding items. Hence, the mean values are used to interpret the scores (Hoenne et al., 2021; Tedeschi et al., 2017). The total mean score ranges from 0- 5. A total mean score of 0 - 2 indicates a “no to a low degree” of growth for a specific domain and 3 to 5 which mirrors a response level of “moderate to a high degree” of growth.

For the qualitative data, the researchers structured a questionnaire with 15 open-ended questions in connection to questions/statements answered in PTGI to solidify, strengthen, and support the foundation of what was answered in the quantitative method. The questionnaire was face, content, and construct validated by the 10 educators and associates from the University of Santo Tomas, Ateneo de Manila, Polytechnic University of the Philippines, and St. Paul University, Quezon City.

Respondents and Participants of the Study
In the initial selection procedure of the original 142 respondents, those who had asymptomatic cases, deceased significant loved ones due to COVID-19, and COVID-19 relatives were not invited to become part of the study due to the degree of relationship and the quality of experiences that might influence and affect their honest and truthful answers. Thus, the 142 generation z severe COVID-19 survivors were first-hand picked to participate and fulfill the research objectives.

The main respondents of this study include 100 qualified severely traumatized generation z ages 18 to 25 years old for quantitative and a total of 7 participants out of the 100 respondents for qualitative. The 100 qualified respondents got 61-86 total scores which indicate severe COVID-19 trauma with 70.4% equivalent. On the other hand, the 42 unqualified respondents got 7-51 total scores which indicates low to moderate COVID-19 trauma with the 29.6% equivalent.

Below are the profiles of the top 7 participants who scored the highest PTG score in the study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>OCCUPATION</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>OVERALL PTG SCORE</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>SHS Professor</td>
<td>Male</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>College Student</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>College Student</td>
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Table 1. Participant’s Profile

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As shown in Table 1, only 7 participants were picked for the qualitative part of this study because the researchers have reached the point of saturation and they are the ones who got the highest PTG scores. All participants were COVID-19 survivors who developed severe trauma from their point of view of survival. They are the ones who experienced extreme anxiety, pain, and fear during the times of their encounter rather than through the representation of shared experiences from significant others.

Data Management

Instruments Used

COVID-19 Peritraumatic Distress Index (CPDI) and Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) were adopted and permitted by the authors themselves to initiate the quantitative part of the study. On the other hand, the researchers-made questionnaire was formulated to officiate the qualitative part of the study which had undergone a series of corrections and revisions in order to go along and support the PTGI statements in the quantitative method of the study.

Collection of Data

Researchers collected information from the barangay officials of the communities they belong to. They also sought information from friends, relatives, and colleagues whom they’ve known to have been in COVID-19 and survived a severe case. As the purposive sampling method was used, an invitation to participate in the study was sought through Google Mail. An enclosed Google Form containing the data privacy act agreement, basic information about themselves, the CPDI tool (for the initial 142), and the PTGI tool (for the final 100 respondents), and comments and suggestions were voluntarily accomplished.

For the quantitative procedure, the researchers utilized CPDI Scale as a screening tool for all 142 COVID-19 survivor participants. 100 of those who scored severe trauma answered the PTGI scale to assess their overall PTG score and the quality of growth that occurred in five (5) different PTG domains.

For the qualitative side, an in-depth interview was conducted among 7 participants only who scored the highest PTG to further explain and understand the quantitative findings from the PTG. Participants were limited to 7 because the data had reached its point of saturation. The interview guide questions prepared by the researchers were validated by 10 professionals to ensure their reliability. Consent forms were given, and all interviews were scheduled for at least two days to ensure the preparedness of the participants. The interview was held via Microsoft Teams to be able to record the session with the participant’s permission. All raw data was transcribed into a script for encoding and interpretation purposes only and the identities of the participants were treated with the strictest confidentiality.

Ethical and Legal Concerns

After an email confirmation was sent to the questionnaire validators, 100 respondents, and 7 participants, consent forms at the beginning of the Google form had to be declared so any objection to the collection of information shall be addressed in no time. If the respondents and participants agreed to give their full consent and wished to participate in the survey and interview methods respectively, then the information gathered would be securely treated with the strictest confidentiality and would be solely used for the betterment of this academic pursuit.

Data Analysis

The quantitative aspect of this study was treated with descriptive statistics. Means and standard deviations were calculated to determine how close the standard deviation was to the mean in each statement. The data gathered were inputted and facilitated through IBM-SPSS version 28.

The 5-point Likert scale for CPDI was utilized to carefully choose the qualified 100 respondents that will become part of the quantitative data. Also, the total score for this scale ranges from 0-96, and a CPDI score of ≤27 indicates low or no trauma, 28-51 indicates mild to moderate trauma, and ≥52 indicates severe trauma.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5-point Likert-Scale</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Adjectival Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.50-4.00</td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.50-3.49</td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.50-2.49</td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.00-1.49</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0-0.59</td>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another PTG scale was used for the 100 qualified respondents for the quantitative data and for the selection of the 7 qualified participants for the qualitative data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Degree of Trauma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-2</td>
<td>No to a Low Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>Moderate to a High Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once all interviews were transcribed, the responses were systematically encoded. The researchers conducted a one-on-one discussion in which each researcher analyzed the transcripts; thus, inferences were unified amongst the researchers. The researchers extract themes and patterns from the participants’ answers to facilitate making generalizations through thematic analysis. The entire process of interpretation was done with full professionalism and guided by the available related pieces of literature to avoid biases.
Results and Discussion

The Overall PTG Score of the Respondents After Surviving COVID-19

Table 2. Post-Traumatic Growth of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Global Score</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Verbal Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>High Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n=100

Table 2 showed the mean and standard deviation of the set of scores obtained from the 100 qualified respondents for the quantitative method. It can be inferred that the data gathered are clustered around the mean since the standard deviation is 5.00 and the mean is 94.7. Hence, it showed a high degree of severe trauma among respondents.

The Effects of Surviving COVID-19 on the Respondents

Personal Strength

Table 3. Personal Strength of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Strength</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Verbal Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have a greater feeling of self-reliance.</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know better that I can handle difficulties.</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am better able to accept the way things work out.</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was.</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>4.46</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 shows the personal strength of the respondents. The statement “I discovered that I'm stronger than I thought I was.” obtained the highest mean value of 4.68 while the statement “I know better that I can handle difficulties.” obtained the lowest mean value of 4.30. On the other hand, statements “I have a greater feeling of self-reliance.” and “I am better able to accept the way things work out.” are in between levels with mean values of 4.50 and 4.36 respectively. The overall mean and standard deviation values are 4.46 and 0.64 respectively which indicate a high level of post-traumatic growth in terms of personal strength.

The results show a high degree of respondents’ character in facing adversities. The respondents were able to discover that they were stronger than they thought they were in facing challenges. It reaffirms the literature of Tamioloka and Kailaitzaki (2020), that a greater sense of personal strength could be seen when a traumatized individual succeeds in the cognitive restructuring of what has happened. Furthermore, trauma survivors realize that they were stronger than they thought they were after going through the ordeal (Tedeschi, 2018)

New Possibilities

Table 4. New Possibilities of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Possibilities</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Verbal Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I developed new interests.</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I established a new path for my life.</td>
<td>4.39</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to do better things with my life.</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise.</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more likely to try to change things that need changing.</td>
<td>4.54</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4, shows the PTG of the respondents in terms of new possibilities. The statement “I am more likely to try to change things which need changing.” got the highest mean value of 4.54, and the statement “I am able to do better things with my life.” got the lowest mean value of 4.36. Further, the statement “I developed new interests.”, “I established a new path for my life.”, and “New opportunities are available which wouldn't have been otherwise.” are all found in the in-between level with the mean values of 4.43, 4.39, and 4.37 respectively. The overall mean and standard values are 4.44 and 0.67 respectively which signify a high level of post-traumatic growth in terms of new possibilities.

The results show a high degree of new possibilities among the respondents which entails that they have developed new passions and interests to love and significant new paths to embark on. They were likely to try to change things that needed to be
changed to fulfill their mission. This aligns with the literature of Tedeschi (2018) that people find new pathways in their lives, new activities they may participate in, or new priorities after significant trauma.

**Relating to Others**

Table 5. Relating to Others of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relating to Others</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Verbal Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a greater sense of closeness with others.</td>
<td>4.41</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more willing to express my emotions.</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have more compassion for others.</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I put more effort into my relationships.</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are.</td>
<td>4.68</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I better accept needing others.</td>
<td>4.47</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.58</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.49</strong></td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 5, the data showed the mean and standard deviation of respondents in posttraumatic growth in terms of relating to others. The highest mean value obtained is 5.00 from the statement “I have more compassion for others.” while the lowest mean value obtained is 4.33 from the statement “I am more willing to express my emotions.” The mean values 4.68, 4.59, 4.57, 4.47, and 4.41 are obtained from the statements “I learned a great deal about how wonderful people are”, “I put more effort into my relationships”, “I more clearly see that I can count on people in times of trouble.”, “I better accept needing others”, and “I have a greater sense of closeness with others.” respectively.

The overall mean and standard values are 4.58 and 0.49 respectively which shows high posttraumatic growth of the respondents in terms of relating to others.

**Appreciation of Life**

Table 6. Appreciation of the Life of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appreciation of life</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Verbal Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I changed my priorities about what is important in life.</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can better appreciate each day.</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.63</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.66</strong></td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 presents the PTG of respondents in appreciation of the life domain. The highest mean value of 4.75 was derived from the statement “I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.” In contrast, the lowest mean value of 4.55 was obtained from the statement “I changed my priorities about what is important in life.” In between the two extremes, the mean value of 4.58 was collected from the statement “I can better appreciate each day.” The overall mean and standard values of 4.63 and 0.66 respectively denote a high posttraumatic growth of respondents in the appreciation of life domain.

A high degree of appreciation for life was found in all respondents. It was found that they were able to realize the value of their own lives. This adheres to the literature of Tedeschi (2020) which states that being confronted with life’s vulnerability makes people ponder about the value of living and that facing and surviving extreme trauma leads an individual to appreciate even the smallest things in life. It only approves that respondents were able to embrace the true essence of life, know what is more important, realize what is more precious, and not take life for granted.

**Spiritual Change**
Table 7. Spiritual Change of the Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spiritual Change</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Verbal Interpretation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a stronger religious faith.</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>High degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.35</strong></td>
<td><strong>0.79</strong></td>
<td><strong>High degree</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7 shows the PTG of the respondent in terms of spiritual change. The statement “I have a better understanding of spiritual matters” accumulated the highest mean of 4.37 followed by “I have a stronger religious faith” of 4.32 mean. They got a total average score of 4.35 which indicates a high degree of spiritual change and a 0.79 standard deviation which signifies that all scores are close to the mean.

All respondents developed a high degree of spiritual change and they were able to gain a better understanding of spiritual matters. This is aligned with the findings of Kowalski et al. (2021) that a deeper spiritual relationship is found in 179 workers during the COVID-19 crisis. Tedeschi (2018) believes that a greater interest in evaluating spiritual and existential concerns such as the meaning of life, the purpose of existence, and faith happens amidst extreme trauma. All respondents developed a greater purpose, deeper meaning in life, and stronger faith.

The Changes in the Five (5) Domains of PTG of the Participants

It was discovered that the severely traumatizing COVID-19 experience of the participants resulted in a high degree of growth of PTG and its domains. It was uncovered by analyzing every response from the participants. Growth after trauma is a cognitive restructuring process of making sense of the trauma and developing a new perspective or worldview (Matos et al., 2018). We found out that People’s capacity to reflect and contemplate allows us to seek, make, and reconstruct (if needed) meaning to continuously live our purpose. According to Wong (2007), human beings have the innate capability to reconstruct meanings because humans are oriented toward living a meaningful life. Humans have a built-in cognitive framework consisting of one’s sense of purpose, beliefs, goals, and worldview which enables human beings to function well in his/her assumptive world. Meaning is defined by Birell et al. (2017) as a “mental representation of possible relationships among things, events, and relationships that connects one’s interpretation of the world.” Through meaning management, people can restore a meaningful world despite life-shattering events (Matos et al., 2018). Almost all traumatized participants said that “Napagtanto ko na may dalawa palang buhay ang tao, yung isa nag-uumpisa pag narealize mo na you only have one.” They were able to realize the fragility of life, hence, a process of meaning reconstruction occurred. A participant said that “I realized that life is to be lived. I had to seize every day of my life as if it is my last” and “The reminder of death changes you to become a better person… kaya I will never take life for granted. I will use it for my purpose.” When individuals become aware of their mortality, they can facilitate terror of death to acceptance of its concept which could lead to one’s development via intentional and conscious efforts (Wong, 2007). Traumatizing events that threaten life allow people to reflect on life and to re-adjust their perspective to fulfill their purpose and to live a meaningful life. Truly, the Meaning Management Theory (2007) proves that uncertainties allow us to revamp and re-author our worldview to restore ourselves leading to healing and growth (Park & Kennedy, 2017).

Moreover, this also supports the PTG theory which emphasizes the occurrence of positive transformation after processing and facing a trauma (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). It is through successful meaning management or making sense of the world after a trauma transforms people (Birrell et al., 2017). Moreover, the findings below elaborate on the specific themes per domain as to how the participants exhibit them.

**Personal Strength**

**Table 8. Changes in Facing Life Problems**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Become proactive;</td>
<td>Courage;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having undying courage;</td>
<td>Resiliency;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting and facing problems;</td>
<td>Perseverance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having perseverance;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being determined in solving problems;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bouncing back from adversities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to withstand every problem;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Believing in oneself that everything will be better;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although faced with adversities, the following themes have been extracted from them such as courage, resiliency, and perseverance.

Participants reported having a heightened feeling of personal strength in facing adversities which can be seen in (1) Courage, (2) Resiliency, and (3) Perseverance.
Having a great sense of courage in facing problems became one of the three sub-themes under personal strength. Aristotle has defined the word courage with the phrase “Courage is the mother of all virtues because, without it, you cannot consistently perform the others.” Beard (2019) has explained this phrase by saying that courage can be seen as a symbol of moral superiority. Meaning, it is a virtue that moderates our instincts toward recklessness on one hand and cowardice on the other. Based on the findings, the participant’s undying courage was seen in having an increased belief in themselves in fighting problems, becoming a fighter, being proactive, and believing that all problems can be solved. A participant said that “If not for the experience I had during my COVID days... ay wala baka sumuko narin ako ngayon maybe kumbaga minsan magpakaraan na ko ng suicidal thoughts kasi madali ako sumuko sa mga problema ko eh.” One’s moral spirit and tenacity amidst adversities strengthen when it is tested. The realization of one’s true capabilities and strength in solving problems is a natural effect of successfully processing a life-threatening incident (Tedeschi, 2018). Another participant said “na-face ko na yung death so bakit itong napakasimpleng problema na to eh di mo masolusyonan parang grabe nun dyba? parang lahat kayo ko lutasin eh. Hindi ako yung titiklop sa problema, ang problema ang titiklop ko.” The COVID-19 situation have surely made most victims to improve their “inner resources” to help them adapt to the changing world (Magomed-Eminov, 2021)

Due to the increased sense of courage, one’s resiliency in facing problems was also reported. The development of resilience after trauma is known to be one of the most talked about aspects of coping in modern traumatic stress research. The process of adjusting successfully in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, danger, or severe causes of stress is referred to as resiliency. As much as resilience entails “bouncing back” from adversity, it may also include tremendous personal development (American Psychological Association, 2020). Based on the data, participants were able to experience this by always not quitting and finding a way to always fight back. Resilience indicates how well a person recovers and works after experiencing stressful or traumatic circumstances (Tsai & Morissette, 2022). In fact, a participant said “Lahat ng problems may solutions naninivala na ako diyan and if mag fail ka sa solution A mo; edi go ka sa solution b, if mag fail ulit, subok lang ng subok hanggang masolve. I know in myself that I can handle it well na.” Being able to bounce back from tough situations demonstrates great personal strength among participants. Magomed-Eminov (2021) believes that people who experienced the pandemic situation tend to experience an increased sense of resilience, this resiliency is an indication of one’s willingness to learn more and successfully cope with life.

Having undying courage and strong resiliency resulted in increased perseverance among victims. Resilience and perseverance go hand in hand with each other because for one to flourish, one must require these two when faced with adversities (Tsai & Morissette, 2022). Perseverance refers to the continued effort of doing something despite difficulties. Based on the answers given by the participants, it can be found that they have experienced this by always looking on the bright side, thinking positively, and being determined in solving all problems that go their way. This can be found in a statement made by a participant: “haharapin ko ng buong buo. Wala akong atrasan. Kasi para sakin naninivala ako na sa lahat ng nangyari sakin lahat malalagpasan ko.” Another participant stated that “haharapin ko po siya ng walang pag-aalinlangan, may tapang at, may pinaindigan. Handa akong sagasaan lahat ng problemang haharapin sakin.” Being able to focus on the bright side despite being faced with challenges can already be seen as the growth of a person. Tedeschi (2020) stated that bad experiences may lead to good transformation despite the pain that comes with testing positive for COVID-19, many of us can anticipate growing in positive ways as a consequence of it. One’s courage and resiliency impact a person’s perseverance in facing adversities (Henry, 2017).

Furthermore, all participants discovered their newly found strength in facing problems. This can be supported by the quantitative finding wherein the item “I discovered that I’m stronger than I thought I was” scored the highest mean. COVID-19 trauma opened one’s mind to realize how truly strong they are amidst life problems.

### New Possibilities

**Table 9. Development of New Plans, Goals, Interests, and Passion**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From having doubts to believing in one’s capabilities;</td>
<td>Discovery;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing long-term plans rather than short-term;</td>
<td>Contentment;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being content to one’s field of work;</td>
<td>Determination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having the will to pursue one’s dream;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From having no plans at all to having one concrete plan;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a deeper reason behind one’s plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this domain, the following themes have been determined based on the statements made by the respondents, discovery, contentment, and determination.

Recognition of new possibilities through (1) Discovery, (2) Contentment, and (3) Determination was observed in every participant.

Participants were able to develop new interests, passions, and plans, hence it led to discovery. Discovery in this study pertains to the uncovering of significant new paths in life after their painful experience with COVID-19. Participants stated “I dati po kasi ano eh parang di talaga ako sure sa lahat ng ginagawa ko... walang concrete plan... wala akong direksiyon sa buhay.” Other one said siguro “Comparing my dreams... mas clear na kung ano yung gusto kong gawin at gusto manguyari ganun”. From having nothing to gaining something became one of the most beautiful transformations that the participants have experienced. Life-altering events provide victims an opportunity to re-evaluate their own life which may result in the discovery of new possibilities in life (Boals et al., 2019). Traumatic adversities change people’s perspectives on what is important and conceivable to them. The things they thought were important no longer appear significant to them. Certain changes are no longer available to them, and they must seek other ways to live their lives (Tedeschi, 2018).
Through the discovery of a career plan, participants were able to realize the essence of contentment, which is the state of satisfaction with where you are in life. It does not imply a lack of desire; rather, it implies that you are content with your current situation and believe that the changes your life takes will be for the better (Draghici, 2018). Developing a sense of contentment after a traumatic experience can be seen with this statement made by one participant: “Ngayon, mas gusto ko yung long term dati kasi short term lang eh. I am looking for something that will bear a fruitful and meaningful career.” This strengthens the statement made by Pearce (2019) that contentment is known to bring peace of mind and positivity to a person and that it can facilitate growth and self-improvement. After experiencing everything, COVID-19 survivors were able to realize and reframe what they truly want - to live a simple and realistic yet meaningful life. One participant said “Mas piniprioritize ko yung alam kong may touch pa of reality. nag start talaga ako maging logical and practical.” As Lodhi & Gul (2021) stated, life-threatening incidents made most people aware of the true essence of satisfaction.

Due to one’s eagerness and satisfaction, participants became more determined in pursuing their new path in life. With the development of how the participants want the path of their life to go, a determination can be found. Determination talks about how people are motivated to grow and change (Cherry, 2021). This definition can be seen with one of the statements that a participant of this study said, “kasi parang bagong buhay ko na to eh parang feeling ko sayang naman. Kung di ako nag survive parang tatanungin ko sarili ko what i should have done no puro pagsisiksi parang ito na yung pagkakatawan para maging determinado sa pangarap mo”. This shows how much experiencing something traumatic has helped them be determined in pursuing their goals and dreams (Kaufman, 2020).

The themes from this domain manifest the highest-scored item from the quantitative data that people who experienced trauma are “likely to change things which need changing”. Qualitative findings revealed that severely traumatized COVID-19 survivors transformed their old ways into better ones. They will now embark on a newly discovered path with a sense of contentment and determination for the benefit of their own lives.

### Relating to Others

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharing one’s thoughts and experiences with loved ones;</td>
<td>Meaningful Connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became more accepting;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became more understanding;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became more caring;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became honest;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Became selfless;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased empathy;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased compassion;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned to be forgiving;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuing communication with family and friends;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciation of friends, and family;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being always there for someone who is in need;</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the statements given by the respondents of this study, the theme of having a meaningful connection has been determined.

Participants were able to have a genuine relationship by developing (1) Meaningful Connections with their peers, family, loved ones, and other people.

A meaningful connection to one social circle includes the virtues of acceptance, openness, empathy, appreciation, caring, honesty, selflessness, and more importantly compassion toward other people and one’s family. The participant’s COVID-19 battle opened their eyes to the value of being innately good toward others. This validates the quantitative finding of this study, based on the data, the item “I have more compassion for others” under the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory scored the highest average. All respondents manifest this kind of transformation. A participant said “Gusto ko rin ibigay kung ano man yung natanggap ko so I just wanna be there for all my friends. sinasabi ko na anytime you need me, anytime you need a shoulder to lay on o kung ano man problema mo na you want to just get out of your system – I’m just here for you.” Another one said that “kahit di sila magsabi…naraaramdaman ko na po lahat ng naraaramdaman nila kahit katiting parang gusto ko na po silang intindihin…gusto kong sabihin na andito lang ako.” Obviously, their experience changed how they relate to others. Renee (2018) suggested that surviving trauma leads to an improved relationship and a new way of relating to others. Also, Baron-Cohen (2018) believes that increased compassion and empathy are related to the severity of one’s adversity. In fact, one participant stated “natuto akong magpatawad.. Kasi ako yung taong mahirap magpatawad nagtatanim ako ng galit eh I hold grudges pero at that time… nagkapatawaran na kami kasi I was thinking time ko na to eh paano kung wala ed di ko na mabigay.” Suffering from the life-threatening COVID-19 made all participants extend themselves to be of service to others who are also suffering. These relational alterations may result from the experience of getting social support and compassion from others and from knowing how difficult life may be in the aftermath of difficulty (Greenberg et al., 2018). Moreover, the connection between participants and to their social circle became more genuine and authentic. According to one participant “Minsan ka lang mabubuhay kaya dapat maging tootoo ka. Kasi if sa simula palang di ka toto sa sarili mo mahihirapan kung maksalamuhana sa tao.” Openness and authenticity impact the meaningful connection between two people.
Appreciation of Life

Table 11. Renowned Life Appreciation and Priorities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having a positive outlook on death;</td>
<td>Valuing life;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living in the present;</td>
<td>Priority Shifting;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started to prioritize themselves first</td>
<td>Realignment of Values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing their needs before their wants;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a positive impact on others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing what is essential;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing one’s dream</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing their family;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritizing oneself;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focused on self-improvement;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed a sense of contentment;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sees the good in the bad;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appreciative of people around them;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved outlook in life;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After interviewing the respondents, the themes determined in this domain are: valuing life, priority shifting, and realignment of values.

Traumatized COVID-19 survivors have developed a greater sense of appreciation of life more specifically in (1) Valuing Life, (2) Priority Shifting, and (3) Realignment of Values.

Valuing life became one of the three prominent themes around the participant’s responses. They come to appreciate the beauty of life, to value life, and not to take life for granted. The COVID-19 experience made most participants realize the fragility of life and its reality - death comes to all. According to several participants, their battle with COVID-19 changed their outlook on death. One said that “Now I see death as a fulfillment of life as I am expecting my birthday to come. I also should be expecting my death to come… kaya gawin mong makabuluhan.” From denial and fear of death, trauma survivors come to accept the concept of death. People who encounter death more personally and specifically (illness, accidents, trauma) tend to accept death and facilitate intrinsic growth (Cozzonilo 2013; Luta 2021). Due to this, a heightened feeling of appreciation and valuing of life is present. A participant said, “Ngayon po, syempre sa kabila ng lahat mas naappreciate ko na po yung lahat at is in lahat ng bagay kaya di ko hahayaan sumabay lang sa agos ng buhay eh kailangan mo ring lumangoy ganun” another one said, “I appreciated and appreciating my life more, maisip mo kasi lahat eh kapag konting ubo na lang mamatay ka na.” Traumatic incidents force an individual to reconfigure his/her assumptive world which could result in a higher level of functioning (Exenberger et al., 2019). It only shows that facing a traumatic event that threatens life enhances one’s care and value for one's own life. Greater gratitude and increased appreciation of life due to a deep understanding of what happened in the aftermath of trauma (Uy & Okubo, 2018).

Owing to valuing life, two (2) themes: priority shifting and realignment of values among participants were seen. Based on the findings, participants reported shifting their priorities, they came to prioritize now themselves, family, dreams/goals, and what is essential in the world. Life-threatening events allow us to reflect on life. A participant said that “It all goes back to experiencing yung near death, yung encounters na yon kasi. It’s the turning point that drove me to realize these things, to acknowledge what is essential in life, and to focus on what matters… When you come to realize your mortality, you act accordingly.” Another said “This COVID-19 experience of mine made me realize how temporary life is and what is essential in this life. “Exposure to psychological distress due to the pandemic is associated with the development of a greater appreciation of life, most specifically, reconnecting with life and reconsidering what is more valuable (Stallard et al., 2021). Wellma (2020) ascertains that death is a powerful reminder to live and to appreciate the time we have left.

New priorities follow a realignment of values. Thus, participants are now unmaterialistic, family-oriented, driven towards a goal, optimistic, contented, and compassionate. All participants are empowered to live a meaningful life and make their time here on earth worth living. When people are faced with extreme adversity, people often learn to appreciate what they still have that they may have overlooked before (Tedeschi, 2020). In fact, one participant said that “Kahit sobrang bigat ng experience na to hindi ko siya hihilingin na sana di ko siya na-experience… Hindi ko siya tatanggalin kasi ang daming- ang dami ninyo naituro saakin na hindi mo matutunan kung hindi mo pagdadaan.” This COVID-19 experience is a painful and life-changing journey. Experiencing the agony of the trauma is a vital part of transformation, it results in the development of new skills to live authentically (Keck et al., 2017). Bray (2017) believes that the “painful” adventure of trauma survivors may lead to improved functioning and a deeper level of self-awareness. This supports the findings of priority shifting and realignment of values among participants after facing their trauma. After battling with the trauma, these survivors are then ready to return and offer the world something richer and deeper than they ever could have before (Williams, 2017).

Therefore, the quantitative data support the qualitative findings, greater appreciation of life through valuing life, priority shifting, and realignment of values mirrors the highest scored item in the survey “I have a greater appreciation for the value of my own life.” Participants are now able to have a deeper appreciation for the value of life by realigning one’s values and priorities toward achieving a meaningful life.
**Spiritual Change**

### Table 12. Development of a New Sense of Spirituality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Having a deeper faith in God; Having a better understanding of spirituality; Having stronger faith through doubts and trials; Became religious; A deeper relationship with God; Became more faithful; Better relationship with God; Being the author of our own lives; Being an instrument for the sake of helping other people; Imitating God and being with God in life eternal; Not taking life for granted; Living your life to the fullest; To help one’s family and other people;</td>
<td>Deeper faith; Deeper meaning; Deeper purpose</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The major themes found in this domain are: **deeper faith, deeper meaning, and deeper purpose**. These were found within the answers of the respondents for this study which can be seen below.

A deeper engagement in spiritual and existential concerns about life was seen in all participants. Hence, they developed a (1) Deeper Faith, (2) Deeper Meaning, and (3) Deeper Purpose.

A **deeper faith** was reflected in all participants which constitutes having a better understanding of one’s relationship with God. Some became more religious and others developed a renewed perspective about God. One participant said that “I do realize the true meaning of prayer. That prayer is not about wishing and saying sorry for the sins that we committed...It is about really communicating to God and talking about nothing at all.” According to the National Center for PTSD (n.d.), a greater perceived closeness and understanding to God is an aftereffect of successfully processing a traumatic event. Participants developed a better relationship with God and improve faith. They were able to realize that having doubts in the most difficult times is an integral part of having a deeper faith. Faith according to them should be dynamic and not static - it fluctuates to grow (Rettler, 2018). A participant said, “True faith is not the absence of the presence of it...you’ll always find a way to be resilient enough to believe in God again.” When people are faced with great trauma, spiritual struggles happen not to pull an individual down but to guide people in their search for meaning and purpose in life. These struggles are pivotal orienting systems that allow a traumatized person to allow changes through doubt that creates collaborative problem-solving with the higher being (Hart et al., 2020).

The traumatizing and disabling COVID-19 experience of the participants became an avenue to ponder one’s existential concerns. It was seen that participants developed a **deeper meaning** in life after a trauma. Meaning in life is the basic motivating factor that influences one’s purpose in life. It enables individuals to function well in this world full of uncertainties (Lin, 2020). Based on the qualitative data, deeper meaning constitutes to using one’s life meaningfully and not taking it for granted. One participant said “We are the author of our own lives ngayon andito ako sa pags na ito kasi life is all about experiencing every day of your life. Ngayon maganda at sigurado ako na sa mga susanod na pahina eh hindi nagising maganda.” A meaningful realization and belief about the reality of life enabled the participants to make sense of what has happened to them. Meaningfulness or deep reflection on what happened is the last step in achieving PTG (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006). Another participant said, “For me, the meaning of life is to imitate Christ and be with him in life eternal.” A newly found meaning made all participants discover a new purpose in life. According to Vohs et al (2019), our negative experiences in life improve one’s meaning in life for it allows the victim to deeply comprehend oneself and the perspective of life from unwanted and unwelcome experiences.

A **deeper purpose** in life comes with a **deeper purpose** in life. All participants became empowered to extend kindness, to become an instrument of God in helping people, and to fulfill one’s responsibility as part of one’s family, a friend, student, or employee. The increased eagerness in fulfilling one’s social and familial responsibilities and being innately kind to other people was seen to be a major source of one’s purpose after a COVID-19 trauma (Chean et al., 2020). One’s purpose in life gives our existence meaning, one participant said “gusto ko makatulong... to give back, makatulong sa kapwa. Nung ako yung nangangailangan may taong andiyan, ngayon gusto ko naman maging taong nagproprovid sa taong nagangailanagn at yun yung rason ko at misyon ko.” Suffering, pain, and trauma refines our search for meaning leading to the discovery of one’s purpose and to our “new life” (Bayod, 2020).

All in all, the mixing of quantitative and qualitative data revealed a deeper understanding of spiritual concerns. A deepened faith reflects a greater meaning and a meaningful purpose in life. This proves the quantitative findings, wherein most respondents experienced spiritual change by having “a better understanding of spiritual matters.”

**CONCLUSION**

**Overall Posttraumatic Growth.** Facing and processing a life-disruptive traumatic experience through meaning management leads to a high degree of posttraumatic growth which mirrors the high quantitative score mean from the overall posttraumatic growth score of the respondents after surviving COVID-19.

**Personal Strength.** Surviving life’s biggest threat enabled participants to realize their true inner strength in facing uncertainties. They developed a stronger sense of courage, resiliency, and perseverance which supports the data from the quantitative study that respondents have discovered that they are stronger than they thought they were.
Participants realized how difficult life is in the aftermath of trauma. As a result, the formation of a meaningful connection that gives importance to openness, sympathy, empathy, kindness, and understanding became the participants’ main priorities because they were able to develop compassion for others.

Spiritual Change. Trauma allowed participants to experience spiritual struggles which enabled them to ponder spiritual and existential concerns. In consequence, respondents had a better understanding of spiritual matters. Hence, they are now engaged in having a deeper faith, deeper meaning, and purpose in life.

Recommendations
Based on the findings, the researchers recommend the following:
1. Utilize the face-to-face interview method so that researchers could extract further and dig deeper into the interviewees’ overall perspectives.
2. Widen the age bracket of the subsequent studies to avoid limiting the results to a single generation.
3. Examine and compare the occurrence of PTG in terms of gender.
4. Consider having participants with severe COVID-19 cases for better and more meaningful data analysis.
5. Look for COVID-19 survivors who had “near-death experiences since most of the meaningful responses obtained in the qualitative method of the study solely came from them.
6. To do a comparative study of COVID-19 survivors is suggested to reevaluate the posttraumatic growth of patients tested with the delta variant and omicron variant.
7. Future studies should look at posttraumatic depression (PTD) to examine and understand the negative effects of a traumatic experience on COVID-19 survivors.
8. Future researchers focusing on the aftereffect of surviving COVID-19 studies whether delta or omicron surges are highly encouraged to indulge in the relationship between the variables used in the study and the concept of death of those who got infected with COVID-19.

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This thesis would not be possible without the help of the following people:

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REFERENCES


