

Minitmithing Kapayapaan: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Posttraumatic Growth Among Military Personnel Who Fought in the Marawi Siege

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ABSTRACT

This paper focused on the posttraumatic growth of soldiers deployed in the Marawi Siege in 2017, the First Scout Ranger Regiment (FSSR) unit, considered the military's elite squad. Psychologists Tedeschi and Calhoun posited that a positive change follows a traumatic life event leading to a personality transformation in the individual, thus facilitating growth. The study explored how the soldiers' involvement in the war resulted in their more profound connection to the Divine Being. The experience made them have a more meaningful relationship with the people they love, appreciate their lives more, and accept their current situation and the responsibilities that go with it.

Keywords: *Posttraumatic Growth, military personnel, Marawi, Positive Personality, Siege*

INTRODUCTION

Peace has been elusive in Mindanao, where the Muslims who belong to the Islamic faith resisted control by the national government. Alarmed by the increasing number of Christian settlers, a group representing Mindanao's Muslim population was formed, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF). (Camp and Judd, 2005). Other Muslim groups advocating peace followed, such as the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) in 1989.

The Philippine government and MNLF entered into a peace accord in 1996, stating that both parties would accept the ceasefire. Despite these efforts, the armed conflict between the government and the Moro groups continued. Rebel groups were formed, such as the religion-oriented Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) along with other groups: the Abu Sayyaf and Maute, branded as terrorists who affiliated themselves with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) (Moes, 2017).

On May 23, 2017, the Armed Forces of the Philippines performed a botched raid in the capital of Lanao Del Sur, Marawi City, to capture a wanted terrorist commander, Isnilon Hapilon, an Abu Sayyaf subleader and believed to be the emir of ISIS in Southeast Asia. The raid was unsuccessful, leading the leader of Maute group to his escape. Their group was able to retaliate by destroying the city, especially its churches. They also raised the flag of ISIS in every possible landmark in the city. (Fonbuena, 2017).

The Battle of Marawi lasted five months, with the Philippine flag raised in the municipal hall. The casualties were 920 militants, 165 troops and police, and at least 45 civilians. The city's destruction was so vast that the government estimated it would cost US\$1 billion to rebuild it. (Reuters, 2017).

The five months of the battle had an adverse effect on the emotional and psychological conditions of the soldiers who fought for the people, peace, and the country. Studies on returning soldiers from a war zone show that they experience depression, anxiety, traumatic brain injury, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and many other harmful conditions resulting from their experiences in the war. These issues did not only affect them personally, but their families, friends, and extended relatives as well (Acosta, 2013).

Many studies on traumatic stress in the military focused on the adverse reactions that a soldier had experienced (Restivo, 2017). Victims of war come home to find that they are being blamed for the war. As a result, they develop antisocial behaviors because some find it hard to adjust to their peacetime roles (Summerfield, 2001). These studies paid attention to posttraumatic stress disorder to understand the negative implications of trauma on behavior, cognition, and emotions. (Southwick et al., 1994). However, pieces of later evidence suggest that positive reactions to a traumatic event can also lead to posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Posttraumatic growth (PTG) is defined as a positive change in the psychological, social, or even spiritual aspects of a person's life after a traumatic incident. These may include personal improvement, altered priorities, improved relationships, and finding meaning in life. (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

While there have been numerous research and systematic reviews of PTSD among military and ex-military personnel (Ramchand et.al., 2015), there were no similar studies and reviews on posttraumatic growth among them (Mark et al., 2018). To address this gap in the literature, this study blazed the trail on the phenomenon of posttraumatic growth among the military deployed in the Marawi siege. It aimed to discover whether PTG within this group was present and the associated factors that influenced this phenomenon.

This study hopes to fill the void in the availability of literature on posttraumatic growth locally and abroad. Furthermore, this could provide a positive outlook on the effects of trauma, especially among the military, emphasizing the possibility of growth after a traumatic incident.

METHODOLOGY

This study used the qualitative approach, specifically the interpretative phenomenological analysis, whose primary goal is to investigate in detail the lived experiences of people to examine how they make sense of their personal world experiences. It is assumed that people are self-interpreted beings who can actively interpret life events (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The approach is phenomenological since it involves a detailed examination of the participants' lived experiences and their personal perceptions of these experiences.

The main objective of the IPA is to get the meanings of the participants' particular experiences and events. How the participants make sense of their experiences and how the researcher interprets them is the argument of the IPA method. Its phenomenological lens relies on an individual's personal perception or account of an object or event rather than creating an objective statement of the object or event itself. (Giorgi, 2003).

IPA is committed to the theory that the person is a cognitive, linguistic, affective, and physical being. It assumes a chain of connection between people's talk and their thinking and emotional states. But sometimes, this chain of connection can be complicated because there are moments when participants struggle to express their experiences --what they think and how they feel about them. IPA researchers should, therefore, be aware that people are hesitant to verbalize what they feel and think. So, they must learn how to interpret their participants' mental and emotional states from what they say (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

IPA is an appropriate method when one is trying to find out how individuals perceive the particular situations they are facing and how they are making sense of their personal and social world (Giorgi, 2003). To its advantage, IPA has no need to test a hypothesis because it aims to explore and discover the phenomenon being studied. (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

IPA involves double hermeneutics, a two-stage interpretation process: the participant in the study makes sense of his/her world. At the same time, the researcher attempts to interpret how the participant does it (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

IPA uses the idiographic mode of inquiry where data has been derived in the analysis of each individual case. Thus, the goal is to make specific statements about the particular group's perceptions and understandings rather than prematurely making general claims.

Purposive sampling was used to select the key informants in the study. It is a non-probability sampling where key informants are selected based on characteristics matching the need and the study's objective (Crossman, 2018). The key informant should be (1) active-duty military personnel; (2) a member of the First Scout Ranger Regiment unit; (3) was deployed in the Marawi siege, and (4) was on the frontline during the war.

The exclusion criteria include (1) war veterans who have retired from the service; (2) non-members of the First Scout Ranger Regiment; (3) not on the frontline of the war; and (4) not deployed in the Marawi Siege.

A semi-structured open-ended interview was employed to elicit data from the key informants. The grand tour questions asked were: (1) *"Tell me about your experience in the Marawi Siege;* and (2) *"How has your life been since the siege?"*. This kind of interview, being flexible, helped the researchers be guided by a schedule rather than be dictated by it (Giorgi, 2003).

The ethical principles under the American Psychological Association were strictly observed in the study. Due respect was accorded to: (1) principle of human dignity in recognizing the participants' worth in the study and ensuring that the reports done in this research are honest and accurate; (2) principles of beneficence and non-maleficence by interacting with the participants professionally. A therapist in the camp, who was military too, was present in the room to assist; (3) the principle of informed consent was applied in providing the participants adequate information about the research, its purpose, who will gain access to it, and its intended use. Consent from the respondents was sought in publishing the data in the study. The (4) principle of confidentiality was observed by making sure that the dissemination of the research material in data presentation and analysis was anonymized by assigning pseudonyms for each respondent.

RESULTS

Background of the Respondents

The respondents who took part in this study were all First Scout Ranger Regiment members and were deployed to Marawi during its war crisis against the Maute and ISIL in 2017. The researcher used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

“Rizal” , a Corporal from Negros Occidental, has been with the Rangers for 6 years. As the team’s lead scout, he ensured that the traversing path was clear of enemies. He was wounded in the leg when hit by an improvised explosive device (IED).

“Gregorio” from Davao Del Sur is a sergeant of 11 years who currently resides in Cavite with his family. As a fire observer, he made sure that the area was clear of the enemies before they proceeded. He was wounded by the shrapnel of a grenade that hit him in the leg.

“Marcelo” from Bulacan had been with the Rangers for 10 years. An assaulter, he was part of the troops that led an attack. His foot was shot by a sniper.

“Andres” from Isabela was a sergeant and had been with the Rangers for 12 years. He specialized in explosives. He was carrying boxes of bullets when an enemy sniper started shooting at him, leaving him no choice but to dive to a hiding spot; however, the boxes he was carrying fell onto his back, damaging his spine.

“Apolinario,” a sergeant from Koronadal City, had been with the Rangers for 10 years. He was a member of multiple teams sent to rescue those trapped troops in the war. He was wounded in the stomach, which required an operation, thus, leaving him with no intestines for 10 months.

“Juan” is a sergeant from Bohol. He had been with the Rangers for 10 years. He was a pathfinder, a specialized soldier who set up and operated drop zones, pickup zones, and helicopter landing sites for airborne operations, air resupply operations, or any other air operations in support of the ground unit commander. His jawbone was hit by a bullet that caused its skin to melt.

“Graciano,” is from Roxas, Palawan. He was s a sergeant with the Rangers for 16 years. A team leader in the war, he was shot in the legs, resulting in broken bones.

“Jacinto” is from Pangasinan. He was tasked to rescue troops who got trapped in the war. He was not harmed.

Theme 1: Deeper Faith in God

The interviewed soldiers were one in attributing their survival to God. They acknowledged their belief in a Higher Being that protected them during the war. Each of them testified how they got closer to this Being after the war. Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), attest that the spirituality of the people who have survived a traumatic incident becomes stronger and more vigorous. Juczyński and Oginska-Bulik (2018) noted that trauma experience might also lead to changes in an individual's existential or religious beliefs. This more robust spirituality is noticeable among the participants. Specifically, three distinct subthemes can be gleaned to show their deeper faith in God due to their traumatic war experiences.

Attributing one's survival to God's will. The war that lasted for months exposed them to risk and danger to their lives. Some believed that a Higher Being guided their actions during the war. Those wounded attributed their life to the help of a Divine Being. Gregorio recounted:

Despite the danger of the situation we were in, we got out alive. First and foremost, I am thankful to God because I believed He guided us. There are times that I also remember my friends who did not survive this war.

Although thankful for the guidance that God gave him, Gregorio did not forget those who sacrificed their lives. Some of whom were his friends. Remembering them is a way of honoring their valor. Jacinto, another survivor, shared his belief in the Divine Being who gave him strength and kept him alive.

I am complete and whole until now because God gave me the strength to survive.

These accounts by the participants emphasized that the skills and abilities they were trained for situations like this were second only to their belief in God, which played a huge role in their war endurance. This indebtedness to the Divine Being was further strengthened after the traumas they had undergone.

A more intimate relationship with God. They express their gratitude to God for another chance at life through constant praying. It is their testimony of a closer and better relationship with Him. Rizal and Jacinto noted:

I became closer to God now more than ever

After the war, I learned to communicate more with God.

Both have said that they are much closer now to God because they could handle any difficulty after the dangers they faced during the war.

Being able to practice one's faith. All of them are required to stay in their headquarters due to their injuries, thus giving them a chance to worship their God. They also have more time to attend church services beyond Sundays. Their headquarters have its church making it easier for them to practice their faith.

Rizal attributed the further strengthening of his faith to the easy access to a church where could go to mass as much as he wanted to.

My faith is now stronger because I can go to church anytime I want.

My situation now differs from when I was in the field missions. I struggled to go to church back then because the area was full of danger, and at any moment, a fire exchange could spark. Now I am thankful because I have the chance to worship Him.

When he was deployed in the missions, Rizal found that practicing his faith was quite a struggle because he could not go to church even if he wanted to. Now, he is pleased to have the chance to worship his God. Marcelo had the same problem:

During my stay in the battalion, I rarely go to church, but now that I am in the headquarters, I can go to church freely because the church is very accessible.

It was hard for Marcelo to practice the responsibilities of his faith. Luckily at present, the church in their headquarters made it easy for him to do that.

Juan elaborated further on the significant change in the practice of his religion by sharing his situation before as contrasted to now:

Back in Jolo, I tried to attend church every Sunday, but since it is an area full of terrorists and a Muslim-dominated place, I was afraid of being a Catholic. Back then, no one motivated me to attend church, and no one supported me to practice my religion freely. Now that I'm in the headquarters, I no longer think of any threat to practice my belief in God.

Juan feared that attempting to practice his beliefs in terrorist-controlled areas could be futile, considering that Muslims who believed to be extremists were the majority. Although Christians were residing in those places, he could not be complacent. At war

in Marawi, prayers were their only ammunition against the enemies. Without them, he would lose his motivation. Despite his busy schedule during the crisis, it was solace for him to continue to pray.

Aside from having easy access to church here, I have comrades who support my faith, and we even go to mass together. That is something that motivates me to practice belief.

The narratives that the participants shared were enough to highlight how a traumatic incident can ironically lead to the strengthening of one's spirituality or faith. It is possible then that spirituality may grow robust after experiencing distress in a war.

Theme 2: Establishing Essential Interpersonal Relationships

The war not only changed them but also altered how they treated others. They realized how important it is to cherish the time they spend with their loved ones and other significant people in their lives. Two years after the war, they now could have the luxury of building a more meaningful relationship with the people they love. This is a sign of posttraumatic growth in a person who has a closer interpersonal relationship (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1996). In a study, Habib, Stevelink, Greenberg, and Williamson (2018) attested that ex-military personnel who experienced trauma felt closer to their family and colleagues. Their war experience made them realize that they needed to cherish the time they spent with their loved ones. Three subthemes can be elicited from this theme.

A stronger relationship with the family. The soldiers had mentioned that they had more time to spend with their families and could be with them as often as they wanted to. Communicating with them was no longer a struggle as they had the chance to do it at any given time.

"After surviving the war, I learned to spend more time with my family. I learned to give more importance to them."--Rizal

Rizal had prioritized spending more quality time with his family. It was hard for him to do this when he was in Marawi. Marcelo and Graciano also were thankful now that they could give quality time with their families:

"Right now, I can bond with my family, unlike before when I was deployed to war, I really did not have a chance to do that. Even before the war, I am lucky already to see my family three times." - Marcelo

“My life before is somehow empty because I rarely see my family, but now I have all the time to be there for them.” –Graciano

Jacinto is another grateful soul for having been given the same opportunity:

“I am closer to my family now and still have a job in the military. That, for me, is a great blessing. They can now feel that while I’m working and serving the country. I am there for them too.” - Jacinto

Jacinto, favors staying in the headquarters as he visits his family. He can perform his duties both as a military man and a family head conveniently. He need not go to far-flung areas anymore.

Family is a source of strength and courage. While engaged in battle, the thought of their families waiting for them to return home gave them strength. Their faith in the Almighty was this realization which came after the war because of another source of inspiration.

Jacinto admitted being afraid:

“Even though I am trained to be in combat situations, I was still afraid. I’m just a human being capable of experiencing fear too.” – Jacinto

Jacinto’s faith and the desire to be reunited with his loved ones were the sources of his strength. He did not deny the fear, anxiety, and nervousness he experienced. He thought of what would happen to his family if something terrible happened to him.

“Of course, I have children, I have a wife. What would happen to them if I did not make it? I constantly kept thinking about them while being in that war, and that strengthened me. “ –Gregorio

Gregorio’s concern for his family made him overcome the negative thoughts he had during the war. He did not want to leave his family, especially his children, who needed a father and a provider.

The soldiers’ accounts of their war experiences proved that a morale booster for military men serving on the battlefield was their families. They needed to survive because their loved ones depended on them. Such a realization is an example of growth resulting from stress-ridden experiences.

Theme 3: Greater Appreciation of Life

The soldiers are fully aware of the dangers of war to life and property. Although they are ready to offer their lives for their country, their desire to survive for their families never waned. Their rendezvous with death has given life more significance and meaning. To Tedeschi and Calhoun (2009), PTG could result in better life appreciation. To this, Juczyński and Oginska-Bulik (2018) attested that people who experienced a traumatic situation had a greater appreciation of their life and lived it productively. Another agreement came from Habib et al. (2018), who posited that military personnel experienced a new appreciation for life after returning from combat. Some of them had a new appreciation for other people's cultures which they gained through their multiple tours of duty. The soldiers who came back from the siege are one in expressing their gratitude through prayers and deeds for a second chance in life.

Realizing that death is imminent. Being part of the war made them realize that life can easily expire. They had witnessed the death of their friends, batchmates, and troops. They had fully grasped that at any moment, they, too, might be joining the innumerable caravan. Gregorio and Jacinto admitted that they too entertained the fear of dying.

"I realized that our lives could be taken from us so easily" – Gregorio

"When I saw some of my friends who did not make the war, I realized that in just one hit of a bullet, I could be the next soldier who would not see the light of the day." - Jacinto

Gratitude for surviving the war. Realizing the flimsiness of life, the soldiers were grateful for a second chance to live again. They should make the most out of it by doing good deeds. They were also grateful for having the opportunity to be with their family again. Rizal shared his story:

I am so grateful to God for giving me another chance to live. Despite that I have committed many sins in my life, He reminded me that I am still worthy to live. I also learned to take care of my life right now, unlike before I lived my life as if it were my last.

I am okay. At least I am still alive and still in service. - Marcelo

I saw soldiers who did not make it. I am thankful that I was not one of them. - Graciano

Marcelo and Graciano, despite the injuries they had during the war, were still thankful for being alive and not losing any body parts. Graciano compared his situation with other survivors whose damaged body parts had to be amputated. Marcelo was overwhelmed by the reality that he was still breathing. He is also thankful because he was not discharged from the service and was given an assignment in the headquarters, which makes him safer.

The war may have claimed properties, relationships, and lives. Still, for the soldiers who went all the way to the end of this conflict, it was a lesson for them to grow more as individuals by appreciating what they have -- the gift of life, the opportunity to live their lives to the fullest.

Theme 4: Accepting the Present

Their lives changed after the war. From being in the field on constant missions, they now stay in the headquarters. Initially, some of them found it hard to accept not being in the midst of the action, which is the core of being a soldier. It was a complete change of environment needing adaptation. The theory of posttraumatic growth believes that one positive change a person undergoes is gaining confidence in his strength. (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2017). Taken out of the war zone and transported to headquarters, they survived by accepting the inevitable change they needed to adapt to.

Personal limitations resulting from the war. The injuries inflicted by the war limited their movements as well as their performance. Some of them found walking difficult because their legs were hit by shrapnel. Others had lost self-confidence because they were no longer as active as before. Even their workloads had been lightened.

After being injured, I thought, "Is this the only thing I can do now?" At times, I find it hard to receive more tasks because I doubt myself already. I lost my self-confidence because I learned that I have limitations in what I can do. - Rizal

His numerous tasks and responsibilities in the headquarters made him feel inadequate to meet the expectations of his new job. The thought of his limitations somehow lessened his self-confidence.

However, despite of these doubts, I say to myself, "If my friends can do it, why can't I?" So even though I'm not that good, I'm not that intelligent, I still try my best to do things. I also intend to stop comparing myself to others. – Rizal

Despite his doubt, Rizal motivated himself by thinking that he could do as well as his other co-workers. Accepting his limitations pushed him to do his best.

I sometimes miss the life of being deployed to combat missions, but in my case, I will never have that chance again because of my medical operation, because of the injuries I got from the war. -Apolinario

This change in my life will always leave a mark. I'm forever staying in the headquarters and will no longer experience deployment to wars. – Marcelo

Apolinario admitted that he missed being assigned to the war zone, a task to which he had been acclimated. His operation, however, gave him a different kind of life he had to deal with every day. Marcelo, like him, had been limited to headquarters and could no longer serve in any field work.

Limitations, whether physical or mental, had impeded most of them, yet they learned to recognize that these were reminders of the courage they displayed in defending their country's sovereignty.

Change of environment. Working in the headquarters, they needed a complete adjustment of their roles as soldiers. Their focus now was on administrative tasks, paperwork, and secretarial tasks.

From being in the jungles and combat, now staying in the headquarters. But I am okay. I have accepted this fact. What's important is that I get to keep my military status, and my job. – Andres

Andres shared the drastic adjustments he had to make. Despite these changes, he remained grateful for seeing his friends and comrades, especially those who fought with him. Knowing he was not alone in adjusting to his new milieu made him feel he was in safe company.

One thing that makes me thankful is that I am still with the company – Apolinario

Apolinario was thankful that this change gave him time to focus on his family.

For me, it's still better to be deployed to missions, but I have already accepted my fate that I'll stay in the headquarters for the duration of my military service. I already made peace with that fact. Besides, I get to spend time with my friends from the war. - Marcelo

Marcelo still preferred to be on deployment, but he had wholeheartedly accepted the reality of his case. An additional bonus is seeing his fellow soldiers to bond with.

I have peace of mind staying here in the headquarters. - Andres

The changes in his conditions gave Andres the calm and tranquility of staying in their headquarters.

When you are in combat missions, everything is uncertain; being here in the headquarters gives us the certainty of safety and allows us to spend time with our families. -Apolinario

Apolinario agreed with Andres regarding being put out of harm's way while staying in their headquarters. Additionally, they could be with their families at any given time.

Overcoming the shock of war. Flashbacks of the horrors of the war kept recurring in their minds. Accepting them as learning experiences made them determined to overcome their fears and anxieties.

*I can say that I am okay now, unlike when everything was very fresh.”
– Andres*

*“I have already tried to forget the unfortunate events of that war.” –
Marcelo*

*“Each time I struggle from the memories of the war, I am lucky that we
have stress debriefing here in the camp. -Jacinto*

The soldiers received counseling to help them cope with the aftermath of the war. They admitted that hearing something about Marawi triggered many bad memories of the event. Each time they faced this situation, counseling services were available at the headquarters. They also were aware that much depended on themselves if they were to keep their sanity for the sake of their work and their families.

From their accounts, it becomes apparent that despite their desire to go back to life as active soldiers, they had started to accept that doing administrative work is not a sign of weakness. They still serve the military but in a different capacity now. Their new responsibilities provide their families with the needed assurances that the lives of their breadwinners are no longer in danger.

Theme 5: Focusing on New Possibilities

After the war, a lot of things changed for them: their responsibilities, relationships with people, communication with their families, development into better people, and eagerness to learn.. They were aware that these were all for the greater good. PTG also suggests that a person undergoing change has a greater sense of personal growth. This was shown by the participants who rebuilt themselves by prioritizing their families and working on their headquarters that were alien to them in the beginning.

Focusing on the family. Their main priority now is the family. They were not after giving them a good life only but growing with them physically and emotionally as well. Most important for them is to see their kids grow to be good citizens of the country. Working in the headquarters will keep them safer than fighting in the war.

My priorities now are my family. I admit I did not give them much attention before because I was too busy being a soldier. I thought, "What will happen to them when I die?" I guess it's time now for me to be a soldier of this family, not just of this country. - Rizal

Rizal did not give much attention or time to his family because he was too focused on the missions assigned to them. His experience reminded him of the reason for doing this. He did not want to die in the battle because he kept thinking about his kids' future. As part of his growth after the traumatic experience, he wished to spend quality time with his family.

I learned to prioritize my family now more than ever. – Gregorio

This job is not a job for my country, but most especially, this is for my family. I always remind myself of this. –Apolinario

I can now spend time and go to church with my family. -Marcelo

I have to remind myself that being there for my family is not just me being a provider but also being the head of the family who would guide our children. - Jacinto

Jacinto, Marcelo, Gregorio, and Apolinario were all prioritizing their families. Jacinto took his family on vacations giving them his full time and concentration. Juan has his own experience along this theme:

After the war, I said to my wife, "let's build already our dream house." So, I loaned money from the bank and ensured I could give my wife,

*currently pregnant with our second child, a place they could call home.
This is also for my eldest, who has autism. I want her to have good
conditions in life as she grows up. -Juan*

By surviving the war, Juan realizes several significant things, especially his autistic kid 's need for therapy which his unemployed wife could not manage if he died in the war. He is also after his recovery. He decided to get a loan to build a house for his family. But above all, they need his love and affection.

Developing one's character. Safe in the headquarters, they resolved to build their character. Having survived the war, they felt that they were more capable of doing things they were unable to do before.

I give more importance to myself now. – Rizal

*I don't want to experience that kind of fear again, so while I'm here at
the headquarters, this is my opportunity to build a better character. -
Gregorio*

*After surviving the war, I can say that I am more determined and
stronger now. -Andres*

*Though I can say that I was courageous back then, I feel like I have more
courage now after surviving the war. -Marcelo*

I am more disciplined now, unlike before.”-Jacinto

The soldiers were proud of their self-confidence, feeling they were stronger and more steadfast after the war. They endured an 8-month war, with their experiences becoming instruments in developing their characters.

Willingness to accept more responsibilities. With their new job assignments, they intended to do the best that they could, starting with the prioritization of whatever duty was assigned to them.

Whatever work is given to me, I focus on that. -Andres

I have a higher rank now, so I have more responsibilities.” -Marcelo

Some of them were promoted and have been praised for their administrative tasks.

DISCUSSION

The Marawi siege played a crucial role in shaping the posttraumatic growth of soldiers returning from the mission. Each respondent had his share of struggles during and after the war. These experiences elicited different reactions and adjustments for life to continue after their near rendezvous with death.

The respondents changed their spirituality by having a more personal relationship with the Divine Being. They had more time to regularly attend church services. The spiritual growth is an aftermath of having them survived the perils of war because of their strong faith in God. As their journey progresses, their belief keeps on growing.

The soldiers also developed a more personal relationship with people, especially with their families. All of them had the future of their family in mind, most especially their children. They held a stronger bond with them by sharing more quality time. Their stay in the headquarters afforded them more fruitful moments with their loved ones.

The theory of PTG argues that people who have undergone dreadful situations may experience growth in relating to others. Recognizing that they could have perished in the war and therefore missed their families, they became more conscious of spending time with them. Thus, building meaningful relationships with their families illustrates posttraumatic growth.

Furthermore, the soldiers recognized the worth of their lives. They gave more importance to living a worthwhile life in the present.

Their situations had changed from the war. Roles, tasks, environment, and the other things they do have all been affected by the siege. They experienced limitations in their actions and capabilities because of their injuries. Because of this, they had to adjust their line of work. Despite these impediments, the soldiers were eager to overcome their handicaps and the shocks during the war by accepting their present situation and doing their job assignments.

With this acceptance of the here and now, they felt ready to face new potentialities resulting in getting promoted in service, prioritizing their families and safety, and learning new tasks. The theory of PTG argues that people who come back from distressing events may start to open themselves to new possibilities.

Returning from the Marawi Siege, the returnees experienced growth in their lives, such as: having a deeper faith in God by practicing their beliefs through deeds and prayers, securing a purposeful relationship with their families, and acknowledging the second chance they got in life. This study showed how the respondents provided meaning

to their struggles during and after the war, shaping their posttraumatic growth experience. This study can help people see a traumatic incident and have positive results. This would provide a better understanding of possible growth achieved after an inevitable crisis in an individual's life. This study is also significant because it explains traumatic events' implications to one's personal growth, especially for soldiers who fought in a war zone.

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