





PERSONAL GROWTH AFTER SPOUSAL BEREAVEMENT IN OLD AGE

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND **RESEARCH AIMS**

event with possible negative psychological and physiological health outcomes. However, spousal bereavement can also lead to positive changes, such as personal growth. Despite increasing academic interest in personal growth, little is known about its

The aim of this study was to explore personal growth after spousal bereavement, its predictors, course and relation to well-being.

Study description

Data stems from the longitudinal, survey-based study NCCR LIVES IP 212.

The Sample consists of 332 persons who experienced spousal bereavement within the previous five years. Mean age (wave one) was 73 years, SD = 8 years, range 60 - 89, 58% were women.

METHODS

Measures

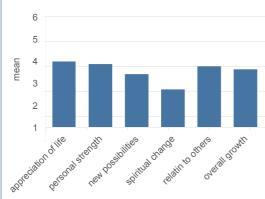
The questionnaire contained items created by the IP 212 team and standardized test instruments, e.g.:

Personal growth: Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI-10, Cann et al., 2010; Maercker & Langner, 2001)

Well-being: Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al. 1985; Schumacher, 2003), Center for Epid. Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977; Hautzinger, 1993), De Jong Gierveld Loneliness Scale (De Jong Gierveld & Kamphuis, 1985; De Jong Gierveld & van Tilburg), Swiss Household Panel (P09C01, subjective health), Hopelessness Scale (Beck et al., 1974; Krampen, 1994)

RESULTS

Dimensions of Growth



Correlations of Growth and Well-being

Growth (respectively its subdimensions) was correlated with less loneliness, more hopefulness and more life satisfaction (all wave one and wave two).

In the subsample of the recently bereaved, higher growth was correlated with more emotional loneliness (wave one), higher life satisfaction (wave two) and lower social loneliness (wave two).

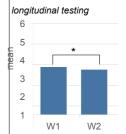
There was no significant correlation of growth with depression and subjective health.

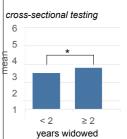
Predictors of Growth

Hierarchical regression analysis

	β
sex	.09
education	22**
age (years)	05
extraversion	.18**
neuroticism	00
conscientiousness	16*
agreeableness	.03
openness	.13
resilience	.16
duration of marriage	.02
development in relationship	10
marital happiness	.01
time since loss	.09
predictability of loss	.09
emotional valence of loss	.01
social support	05
new relationship	03
current stress	.15*
R ²	.15

Change over Time





DISCUSSION

The results support the assumption that personal growth occurs after spousal bereavement in old age. Furthermore, growth could be related to well-being, but not with all dimensions significantly or in either way.

Growth seems to be associated with lower education, higher extraversion, lower conscientiousness and higher stress. Interpersonal resources, relational and context factors appear to be less important. Yet these results should be regarded with suspicion, as some are not in line with other studies and growth could not be predicted well.

The course of growth remains unclear because of contradicting results.

Knowledge about growth could be valuable for a more holisitc theoretical understanding of the adaption to loss and for psychological interventions. LIVES International Conference,

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