



## ***Spirituality and Posttraumatic Growth in Adolescent Girls with Dating Violence Experience***

**Aqila Kerinina<sup>1\*</sup>, Chandradewi Kusristanti<sup>2</sup>**

Universitas YARSI Jakarta, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>[chandradewi.kusristanti@yarsi.ac.id](mailto:chandradewi.kusristanti@yarsi.ac.id), <sup>2</sup>[chandradewi.kusristanti@yarsi.ac.id](mailto:chandradewi.kusristanti@yarsi.ac.id)

\*Correspondence

### **Abstract**

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There are many cases of violence among adolescent girls who have experienced violence in dating in Indonesia. Even though dating violence is painful, adolescent girls can grow in a way called posttraumatic growth after the event. Spirituality can help people find meaning and purpose in their lives, which may help them recover from trauma. This study aims to determine the significance of the role of spirituality on posttraumatic growth in adolescent girls who have experienced dating violence. This study uses a quantitative approach with DSES to measure spirituality ( $\alpha=0.932$ ) and PTGI-SF to measure posttraumatic growth ( $\alpha=0.812$ ). Participants in this study were adolescent girls (15-25 years old) with dating violence experience ( $N = 309$ ). The result shows that spirituality was crucial for posttraumatic development ( $R^2 = 0.156$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The results of this study can be helpful as a reference for conducting interventions targeted at adolescent girls to increase their spirituality and knowledge of healthy relationships.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The period between childhood and adulthood is known as adolescence (Santrock, 2003). During this age of growth, there are psychological changes (e.g., searching for identity, being more capable of expressing themselves, and losing regard for parents), physical changes (e.g., gaining height, maturation of reproductive organs, and experiencing puberty), and social changes (e.g., capable of critical thinking, more respectful of others, and the need to have close friends). During puberty, feelings of shared liking for the other sex can manifest when people date (Sembiring, 2014). Men and women who choose to be married can learn how to develop strong relationships by dating (Putri, 2012).

The National Women's Life Experience Survey 2016 by Indonesia's Central Statistics Agency (BPS) and Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (*KemenPPA*) demonstrated significant violence against women. Physical and sexual abuse was suffered by 33.4% of females between the ages of 15 and 64. Additionally, the rate of sexual violence against women who were still single reached a significant 34.4%. According to the study results, many unmarried adolescent girls or young women suffer violence from their friends, boyfriends, neighbors, or other family members. *KemenPPA*'s

Online Information System for the Protection of Women and Children (2018) reports that 2.090 of those who harmed women were their friends or boyfriends. According to Courtain and Glowacz (2021), dating violence is any behavior that harms the development of their partner and intends to cause pain on purpose. Dating violence includes physical assault, sexual assault, harassment, power, intimidation, possessiveness, and blaming (Wilson & Maloney, 2019). According to Sutherland (2011), various behaviors that show dating violence include swearing, intimidating, and being distanced from family and friends. Physically aggressive behavior includes pinching, hitting, pushing, choking, or kicking. Furthermore, sexually harassing behavior includes being forced to kiss, being threatened to send nude photos, forcing body groping, or forcing sexual intercourse.

According to Kaukinen (2014), the impact of dating violence can include physical injuries and psychological problems such as heartache, depression, and feeling worthless. Based on qualitative research conducted by Sari (2018) on a sample of young women who have experienced dating violence, the impact of psychological violence experienced is in the form of feelings of anxiety if the partner's behavior changes quickly, the partner breaks the relationship, or the partner abandons them. A community focused on campaigning against sexual violence and harassment in Indonesia, Samahita, reported that most victims of sexual violence committed online are in bad conditions, such as feeling afraid and consistently experiencing panic attacks and anxiety, as reported in the BBC News Indonesia article (2020). According to our literature review, dating violence causes several negative impacts, including trauma.

Sari, Wijono, and Hunga (2020) stated that a traumatic incident is an unpleasant and painful incident that makes an individual stressed and unable to live life. People may be traumatized if emotionally stressed, making it difficult to control their feelings (Nawangsih, 2014). As a result, someone who has experienced trauma will show negative changes, such as difficulty adjusting, an inability to carry out daily activities, and emotional changes (Rahmat & Alawiyah, 2020). However, after someone experiences trauma, it is possible to see positive changes that bring a better life, called posttraumatic growth. This has been proven in a study conducted by Paredes and Pereira (2018) with cancer survivors and in a study by Subandi, Achmad, Kurniati, and Febri (2014) with survivors of natural disasters. Both studies found they had spiritual beliefs, such as finding meaning in life to get through traumatic events.

Posttraumatic growth is a positive psychological growth experienced by individuals after experiencing unpleasant events in the past (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Although similar, posttraumatic growth differs from resilience (Tazkiyah, 2019). Resilience is a form of acceptance by individuals of painful events when these events occur. Whereas, in posttraumatic growth, apart from being able to accept individuals, they also experience positive changes after a traumatic event occurs (Tedeschi & Kilmer, 2005). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) stated that posttraumatic growth is one way to

resolve trauma. It will be valued in painful, devastating conditions and under psychological stress. Thus, it can make individuals change their experience into a better and more helpful one after experiencing a traumatic event (Rahayu, 2016).

Posttraumatic growth does not emphasize suffering as a condition that must be carried out with the whole struggle. However, the more people grow, the more they will get used to suffering, misery, and sadness (Malhotra & Chebiyan, 2016). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) explain that negative events produce negative consequences for most people. However, research results also show that these negative events can produce positive psychological changes and benefits for many people. A study by Ulloa, Hammett, Guzman, and Hokoda (2015) found that people take time to achieve positive psychological growth after past traumatic events. Wong and Yeung (2017) said that posttraumatic growth occurs when people use their emotions and cognition well against traumatic events so that they have new meaning in life. Someone can find a meaning to deal with traumatic events, one of which is through spirituality.

Spirituality is essential in seeking and forming the meaning of someone's life towards an event (Purwanto & Hendriyani, 2021). Unlike religiosity, spirituality refers to more open-mindedness, which directs individual thoughts based on religion (Prasetyo, 2016). As stated in Danhauer et al. (2013) research, spirituality also has a purpose. Individuals with a high level of spirituality will be protected from negative actions such as suicide, divorce, drug abuse, physical illness, and depression. According to research by Gallagher, Phillips, Lee, and Carroll (2015), spirituality can create meaning, purpose in life, and meaningfulness in life which can be seen in thoughts (e.g., managing emotional anxiety, solving problems wisely), feelings (e.g., having concern for others, controlling negative emotions) as well as individual actions such as becoming more independent (Anderson, Renner, & Danis, 2012; Beck & Watson, 2016; Paredes & Pereira, 2018; Subandi, Achmad, Kurniati, & Febri, 2014). This is related to the developmental tasks of adolescents. Adolescents can achieve independence from their parents, can control themselves over values and life principles, and improve their communication with peers (Saputro, 2018). A spiritual adolescent will have no trouble going through life and completing developmental tasks for the next stage.

Spirituality can help individuals return to a better condition after a traumatic event. It was reported in case studies of people who had experienced traumatic events such as being physically abused, experiencing domestic violence, or being raped multiple times (Blakey, 2016). In addition, the research also conveyed that many women reported that their spiritual belief was vital in living life and could help their recovery in various ways, for example, by seeing God as a trusted protection. Spirituality can also play a significant and constructive role in individual efforts to overcome stressful medical events, which can be seen in participants in the form of medical patients of various ages who have experienced physical trauma, such as accidents, illnesses, and major surgeries (Karami, 2018).

To date, studies on spirituality and posttraumatic growth have focused a lot on samples with traumatic experiences where individuals have no control over these events, such as samples in the form of cancer survivors (Danhauer et al., 2013; Paredes & Pereira, 2018), physical trauma such as survivors of accidents, illness, and disasters (Ramos & Leal, 2013), physically abused, domestic violence, and raped (Blakey, 2016), as well as trauma from burns (Baillie, 2014). In Indonesia, studies discussing posttraumatic growth were found in samples in the form of breast cancer survivors (Rachmawati, 2015; Rizka, 2016), bullying survivors (Dewi & Valentina, 2020), and sexual violence survivors (Zuraidah, 2019; Sesca, 2018; Fakhira & Utami, 2021). Dating violence, in contrast to some of the contexts of traumatic events examined in these studies, is an example of a traumatic event in which individuals have more control over the event. Thus, we believe that these differences in characteristics can contribute to the reaction and impact of the individuals who experience it. Furthermore, the number of violence cases against unmarried women or adolescents who are victims of violence is relatively high, and the perpetrators are their significant others, one of whom is a boyfriend. As a result, studies on posttraumatic growth with a sample of young women who have experienced dating violence are essential.

## METHOD

This is a non-experimental, quantitative study, with two variables investigated: spirituality as a predictor variable and posttraumatic growth as a criterion variable. The population in this study were young women with dating violence experience, and the participants were adolescent girls aged 15-25 who had experienced psychological, physical, and sexual violence as screened by the TALE checklist. This study used purposive sampling as a sampling technique. Purposive sampling is sampling with predetermined characteristics (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

This study's data collection instrument was a questionnaire, where participants could directly answer written questions (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). This study used three questionnaires: posttraumatic growth, spirituality, and TALE (The Trauma and Life Events) checklist via Google Forms and distributed via social media. After data collection, this research questionnaire obtained 351 participants. Then, after re-examination, only 309 participants' data could be processed because those met the sample criteria.

This study used the TALE checklist Carr, Hardy, and Fornells-Ambrojo developed in 2018. The TALE checklist was used as a screening tool to ensure participants experienced traumatic events, including dating violence. In addition, the TALE checklist in this study has 20 items that refer to traumatic events, such as the participant's age at the time of the incident, the number of events experienced, and which events had the most influence (Carr, Hardy, & Fornells-Ambrojo, 2018).

The criteria variables in this study were measured using the PTGI-SF (Posttraumatic Growth Inventory - Short Form) questionnaire developed by Cann et al. in 2010. The purpose of the PTGI-SF is to make it easier for participants who are survivors of physical trauma when the time for data collection is limited. According to Cann et al. (2010), PTGI-SF has ten items with a six-point Likert scale in the range of 0 – 5, with 0 (experienced no change) and 5 (experienced very significant change). The PTGI-SF has five dimensions: respect for life, relationships with others, inner strength, new possibilities, and spiritual change (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Examples of items from the PTGI-SF are "*I have a greater sense of closeness with others,*" "*I established a new path for my life,*" and "*I have a better understanding of spiritual matters.*" PTGI-SF has excellent reliability, generally in the range of 0.90 in various samples (Cann et al., 2010).

The predictor variable in this study was measured using the DSES (Daily Spiritual Experience Scale) tool developed by Underwood in 2002 and then revised in 2011. The DSES is designed to measure spiritual experiences such as the experience of a relationship with God, transcendent awareness, and how beliefs and thoughts form part of life from a spiritual perspective (Underwood, 2002). DSES has unique qualities suitable for cross-cultural research, is used in various religious and cultural settings, and has been translated into various languages (Underwood, 2011). DSES has 11 dimensions (Underwood, 2006) and has sixteen items, namely 15 items with a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 6, with 1 (never) and 6 (several times a day). Then, one item with a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 4, in which 1 (not at all) and 4 (as close as possible) (Putri, 2019). Examples of items from the DSES measuring instrument are "*I feel God's presence,*" "*I feel God's love for me directly,*" and "*I feel grateful for my blessings.*" DSES also has an excellent reliability score, generally in the range of 0.92 across various samples (Fath, 2015).

In this study, we first conducted expert judgment on Underwood's DSES (2011). Expert judgment in this study was performed to match the instruments' items with their functions and objectives. Before making an expert judgment, we carried out a forward translation. After that, a backward translation is carried out by a sworn translator at a language institution. Two experts have carried out expert judgment. Experts have given several items of feedback. We then used the feedback to conduct readability tests on participants who matched the predetermined characteristics ( $N = 14$ ) and tried out ( $N = 32$ ).

In this study, we used the internal consistency of Cronbach Alpha with JASP software to measure the reliability test. According to Souza, Alexandre, and Guirardello (2017), an excellent measuring instrument has a reliability of  $\alpha \geq 0.7$ . The reliability test scores in this study were 0.812 (PTGI-SF) and 0.932 (DSES).

Before data collection, we also conducted item analysis. According to Azwar (2015), an item is considered good if it has a value  $> 0.2$ . The results of item analysis on

the PTGI-SF and DSES measuring instruments that have been carried out by trying out data obtained an item-rest correlation value of  $> 0.2$  on the PTGI-SF and DSES measuring instruments. Item 1 in the PTGI-SF showed an item-rest correlation value lower than 0.2. We decided not to delete or replace the sentence in item number 1 because it did not affect the average correlations between items that scored  $> 0.2$ . Azwar (2018) noted that efforts to delete these items were unnecessary.

## RESULTS

This study carried out score categorization to see differences in participant scores so that they could be analyzed in the discussion section. Underwood (2006) states that the DSES measurement tool has a score range of 16 – 94. The point of this score is that the higher an individual's spiritual score, the more reflective they are and the more spiritual values they have within themselves (Underwood, 2011).

**Table 1**  
*Score Categorization*

Score Categorization	Range	Amount	Percentage
Low	$X < 41$	0	0 %
Medium	$41 \leq X < 65$	28	9.01 %
High	$65 \leq 94$	281	90.9 %

Before running the regression test, we conducted the normality, linearity, and correlation tests as regression prerequisites and score categorization. Firstly, we conducted the normality test. The normality test used in this study is the Kolmogorov Smirnov.

**Table 2**  
*Normality Test*

	<i>Unstandardized Residual</i>
<i>Absolute</i>	.049
<i>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	.072

Data that is normally distributed has a significance value of  $p > 0.05$  (Schmidt & Finan, 2018), and the results of this study indicate that the data is normally distributed ( $p = 0.072$ ), as seen in Table 2 above.

**Table 3**  
*Linearity Test*

<i>F</i>	<i>Sig</i>
56.753	< .001

By using ANOVA, we then conducted a linearity test. Data is considered linear if the linearity test shows  $p < 0.05$  (Schmidt & Finan, 2018). It can be inferred from Table 3 above that the data is linear because  $p = <.001$ .

**Table 4**  
*Correlation Test*

Variable	Pearson's r	p
PTG – DSES	0.395***	<.001

Lastly, we conducted a correlation test. The findings revealed that the two variables, posttraumatic growth, and spirituality, showed a significant correlation ( $p < .001$ ,  $r = .395^{***}$ ), as seen in Table 4 above.

When all prerequisites were fulfilled, we tested the hypothesis using simple regression. The regression test results show a significant role of 15.6% of spirituality on posttraumatic growth ( $R^2 = .156$ ,  $p = .000$ ), as seen in Table 5 below. The regression equation is  $Y = 21.793 + 0.219X + 2.311$ . The regression equation shows that if there is no DSES, the consistency value of PTG is 21.793, and for every 1% addition to DSES, PTG will increase by 0.219 with a possible error value of 2.311.

**Table 5**  
*Main Result*

	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Std. Error	t	p
	0.395	0.156				
<i>(Intercept)</i>			21.793	2.311	9.430	< .001
DSES			0.219	0.029	7.533	< .001

To enrich the results of this study, we also conducted an additional analysis based on our literature review. Previous research found that individuals who experienced dating violence once had more potential to experience posttraumatic growth than individuals who experienced dating violence more than once (Cobb, Tedeschi, Calhoun, & Cann, 2006). We then conducted an additional analysis using Independent Sample T-test for participants' frequency of experiencing dating violence.

**Table 6**  
*Additional Analysis*

Demographic Data	Mean	p
<b>Frequency of dating violence</b>		
>1	38.759	< .001
1	40.482	< .001

Table 6 above showed a significant difference in the posttraumatic growth score if viewed from the frequency of dating violence experienced by the participants ( $p < .001$ ). Thus, these results prove that participants who experienced dating violence only once showed a more excellent posttraumatic growth score than those who experienced more than one incident of dating violence.

## DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the impact of spirituality on posttraumatic growth in adolescent girls who had experienced dating violence. Linear regression showed that spirituality contributed significantly to building posttraumatic growth among participants ( $R^2 = .156$ ;  $p = .000$ ). In other words, 84.4% of the posttraumatic growth variance has been influenced by factors other than spirituality.

Anderson, Renner, and Danis (2012) explained that spirituality is essential for women who experience traumatic events such as violence. After women experience violent events, individuals will experience depression and anxiety. In these conditions, spirituality is essential to assist individuals in carrying out the events they have experienced. Furthermore, a study by Mushonga, Rasheem, and Anderson (2021) explains that women who have spirituality after going through traumatic events like violence are wise in controlling negative emotions, refrain from harmful behaviors like suicide, derive value from the violent events they encounter, and are independent. A comparable finding was also discovered in a study by Karami (2018). It has been discovered that those who are spiritual are more able to see the positive side of the terrible experiences they go through. Positive behaviors influence individuals' posttraumatic growth, and as their spirituality grows, they become more resistant to harmful activities (Danhauer et al., 2013). The studies align with this research because they both show that spirituality has influenced the positive psychological growth of individuals and has a high level of spirituality in female participants who have experienced traumatic events in the form of violence in relationships.

It has consistently been found that spirituality has a role in the positive psychological growth of individuals who have experienced traumatic events. This is supported by several studies, including those by Beck and Watson (2016) with postpartum trauma survivors as participants, Paredes and Pereira (2018) with breast cancer patients as participants, and Subandi, Achmad, Kurniati, and Febri (2014) with victims of natural disasters as participants. According to those studies, participants' spiritual insights enable them to discover the purpose of their lives and cope with painful experiences. Furthermore, those studies also explain that spirituality possessed by individuals can provide a positive view of traumatic events (Beck & Watson, 2016); they can handle traumatic events better, they can manage their emotions, solve problems wisely, and able to think that all these traumatic events have good meaning (Paredes & Pereira, 2018), an increased sense of meaning in life, discover their life goals, they can overcome pressures in life and have a good outlook on traumatic events (Subandi, Achmad, Kurniati, & Febri, 2014). These three studies have similarities with this research because both show that spirituality has affected the positive psychological growth of individuals who have experienced traumatic events. Still, this research focuses on traumatic events where individuals can have more control over these events, such as

dating violence in adolescent girls. Thus, it can be concluded that the spirituality individuals possess can facilitate individuals in carrying out traumatic events.

This research focuses on the positive changes in young women with dating violence experience. One factor that can help the posttraumatic growth process is spirituality (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). A high level of spirituality will shield a person against undesirable behaviors like suicide, divorce, drug misuse, physical disease, and depression, according to research by Danhauer et al. (2013). People frequently require support to return to a healthier state after a stressful event. In this process, personal spiritual convictions, such as trust in God's will, are essential (Blakey, 2016). According to a study by Gallagher, Phillips, Lee, and Carroll (2015), spirituality also provides meaning, purpose, and meaningfulness in life, which can be seen from thoughts, feelings, and actions. For example, spirituality is a coping strategy when individuals experience difficult situations. This coping strategy can be practiced by getting closer to God, believing that the events being faced bring good, and having an attitude of tolerance and unity towards a group (Saad & de Medeiros, 2012). Therefore, individuals with high spirituality will also have a high tendency to experience posttraumatic growth. Thus, this aligns with this study because it found similarities that spirituality has a role in posttraumatic growth in individuals who have experienced traumatic events.

We also conducted additional analysis to see the difference between posttraumatic growth and spirituality if viewed from the demographic factors in the questionnaire. Results of the T-test showed a significant difference between the posttraumatic growth scores in participants who experienced dating violence once and more than once. More specifically, participants who experienced dating violence only once showed higher posttraumatic growth scores than participants who experienced more than one incident. According to Cobb, Tedeschi, Calhoun, and Cann (2006), individuals who have experienced dating violence once have more potential to experience posttraumatic growth than individuals who have experienced dating violence more than once. Individuals who have experienced pressure or traumatic events do not rule out the possibility of experiencing positive changes (Anderson, Renner, & Danis, 2012). In addition, Brosi, Rolling, Gaffney, and Kitch (2020) also explained that individuals who experience fewer violent incidents in relationships have a greater chance of developing posttraumatic growth than individuals who experience more frequent violent incidents in relationships. This is because individuals who have experienced violence once are aware of the abusive actions they have received and allow individuals to no longer return to unhealthy relationships. In line with previous research, this research also shows that individuals who receive violence in a one-time relationship will have a higher potential to experience posttraumatic growth.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that this research has similarities with previous studies that spirituality has a role in posttraumatic growth in individuals who have experienced traumatic events. In addition, it was also found that the

participants in this study and previous studies had a high level of spirituality. Individuals who have high spirituality can provide benefits to individuals such as an increased sense of meaning in life, can be the strength that individuals need to overcome pressures in life, provide a good view of traumatic events, protection from negative actions such as suicide, divorce, drug abuse, physical illness, and depression, individuals can be more assertive in making decisions, can concentrate well, can control negative emotions, can find benefits from the violent events they experience, and become more independent (Purwanto & Hendriyani, 2021; Pargament, Desai, McConnell, Calhoun, & Tedeschi, 2006; Blakey, 2016; Paredes & Pereira, 2018; Danhauer et al., 2013; Baillie, 2014; Beck & Watson, 2016; Subandi, Achmad, Kurniati, & Febri, 2014; Anderson, Renner, & Danis, 2012; Karami, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that spirituality has a significant role in posttraumatic growth in participants in the form of adolescent girls who have experienced dating violence. In addition, it was also found that the impact of traumatic events was not only harmful, but there were positive impacts that individuals could experience. Then, this study found that participants who experienced dating violence only once showed a higher posttraumatic growth score than participants who experienced more than one dating violence. For further research, it is suggested to measure the factors affecting posttraumatic growth, such as personality, disclosure, cognitive processes, and religiosity, to enrich the research results. Relevant practitioners or government institutions such as the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (*KemenPPPA*), Integrated Services for Empowerment of Women and Children (*P2TP2A*), or Regional Technical Implementation Unit for the Protection of Women and Children (*UPTD PPA*) can provide education regarding the importance of having healthy dating relationships in adolescents. This lesson is designed for girls and boys to ensure that neither becomes a victim or perpetrator of violence.

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