



Understanding the Positive Transformation of Breast Cancer Survivors

Kyla S Amoranto ^{1*}, Kearny Leiden A Tajan ², Fay Kim Dianne O Tamondong ³, Althea Jade L Ramada ⁴, Roy Kenneth Y Lazaro ⁵

^{1, 2, 4} CHRA, College of Arts and Sciences, City of Cabuyao, Laguna, Philippines

³ College of Arts and Sciences, City of Cabuyao, Laguna, Philippines

⁵ Rpm, CHRA, College of Arts and Sciences, City of Cabuyao, Laguna, Philippines

* Corresponding Author: **Kyla S Amoranto**

Article Info

ISSN (online): 2582-7138

Volume: 06

Issue: 03

May - June 2025

Received: 02-04-2025

Accepted: 03-05-2025

Page No: 1207-1211

Abstract

This qualitative study examines the perspectives of breast cancer survivors who report positive change after their diagnosis. The article is based on the narratives of five participants and identifies such factors as personal growth and development, resilience and reorientation in personal beliefs and values that shape this transformation. The research chooses participants by using the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) and collects data by conducting individual interviews and analyzes it through thematic analysis. The findings reveal a complex interplay of individual and social factors that foster post-cancer growth, moving beyond traditional medical perspectives to highlight the potential for meaningful change. The study underscores the significance of post-traumatic growth (PTG) in breast cancer survivors, illustrating how their journeys can lead to enhanced appreciation for life, increased resilience, and a renewed sense of purpose. These insights aim to inform clinicians, support groups, and researchers in enhancing the well-being and support provided to breast cancer survivors. **Keywords:** post-traumatic growth, breast cancer survivors, positive transformation, resilience, coping mechanism.

Keywords: Post-Traumatic Growth, Breast Cancer Survivors, Positive Transformation, Resilience, Coping Mechanism

1. Introduction

Breast cancer, a leading cause of cancer-related deaths globally, affects both men and women. While genetic factors increase risk, many cases occur without a family history. The treatment process, involving chemotherapy, surgery, radiation, and hormonal therapy, is arduous and significantly impacts patients' psychological and physical well-being (Suarez *et al.*, 2021; Moshier Panahi *et al.*, 2020) ^[1]. Five-year survival rates remain relatively low, varying across genders and geographical locations (NCI SEER, ASCO data). Long-term consequences for survivors, including physical and psychological challenges, are often under-recognized.

However, the concept of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) suggests that severe trauma can lead to positive transformations (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999, cited by Franco *et al.*, 2023; Martino & Freda, 2022) ^[2]. Unfortunately, the long-lasting consequences of a cancer journey on body image and weight, physical function, sexual health, psychological balance, and spiritual issues are hugely underdiagnosed, and these patients' needs are rarely met. The health questions that remain unanswered during the survivorship trajectory hamper complete recovery after cancer experience and, in some cases, represent a threat to the survivor's chances of cure. In line with this, According to Kurapov (2023), the research has focused on the pathological outcomes of this traumatic event in the last fifty years. Only recently, a study by Martino and Freda (2022) ^[2] emphasized the necessity for a deeper comprehension of the positive changes rather than focusing on evaluating the unfavorable ones. It was discovered that such a horrific event could also benefit one's life, relationships, health, and general well-being. The possibility that traumatic events may lead to a positive change or transformation has been called "post-traumatic growth" (PTG; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999, cited by Franco *et al.*, 2023). Post-traumatic growth (PTG) suggests that with the help of a severely traumatic event, the

consequences of which are more clearly understood, one can even reach the level of positive transformation. The positive transformation, to which PTG refers, is meant to deal with the five primary domains of life: personal strength, new possibilities, relation to others, more appreciation of life, and spiritual change. For some, these transformative experiences translate into a renewed sense of purpose and pivot towards activities and relationships that foster a sense of well-being and fulfillment.

This study aims to explore the subjective experiences and internal dynamics contributing to PTG in breast cancer survivors, seeking to understand the process and identify interventions to improve their quality of life and overall well-being.

2. Methodology

A. Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design employing a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research analyzed and examined human behavior, attitudes, and experiences using non-numerical data, including interviews, observations, and surveys. Aspers and Corte (2021) indicate that a primary benefit of qualitative research is the development of in-depth knowledge of the social world. It provided insights into why phenomena exist, how they affect people, and what people think and feel about them.

The phenomenological research design focused on exploring the essence of human experiences and understanding the meaning people attributed to those experiences. It sought to capture the underlying structures and core aspects of these experiences without imposing preconceived theories or interpretations. Delve. Ho, L., & Limpaecher, A. (2022). Phenomenological research aims to understand the essence and meaning of human experiences, making it suitable for exploring the positive transformation of breast cancer survivors. This approach allowed researchers to understand the subjective reality of survivors, which was crucial for capturing the nuances of their journey. Through this, researchers explored the meaning-making process and identified factors contributing to positive transformation.

B. Research Locale

This study was conducted in Cabuyao, Laguna. Cabuyao City is a thriving urban area 42 kilometers southeast of Metro Manila. Known as "The Enterprise City of the Philippines," it is a hub of business opportunities and home to a diverse population.

Cabuyao City was selected as the locale due to its accessibility, diverse population, and healthcare facilities like the Global Medical Center of Laguna, Holy Rosary of Cabuyao Hospital, Ospital ng Cabuyao, and First Cabuyao Hospital and Medical Center. These facilities could provide a pool of research participants and help gather data for the selected participants, who are breast cancer survivors. Cabuyao Laguna has a dedicated organization focused on women's health and awareness, particularly concerning breast cancer. The city's urban setting and the availability of medical facilities and organizations make it a suitable location for conducting this research. The findings could help understand the positive transformation among breast cancer survivors in the city. They could contribute to developing support programs and services tailored to their needs.

C. Participants

The participants in this study were selected breast cancer survivors; the population of interest comprised individuals who had bravely faced and overcome the challenges of breast cancer, embodying resilience and strength in their journey towards survivorship.

Researchers engaged with five inspiring breast cancer survivors who participated in a screening using the post-traumatic growth inventory. Researchers screened potential participants to ensure they met the established criteria. The inclusion criteria included individuals who had been diagnosed with breast cancer, completed their treatment at least one year prior to the study, and were willing to share their experiences. The aim was to achieve a diverse sample representing a range of ages, socioeconomic statuses, cancer stages, treatments received, and self-reported measures of personal growth, thus capturing a broad spectrum of perspectives.

D. Sampling Design

The researchers will employ a purposeful sampling design to select participants who can provide valuable insights in this study. The total number of target participants of this study will be five (5) breast cancer survivors with post-traumatic growth. These will be selected based on their relevance to the research criteria, which include time since diagnosis, stage of cancer, treatment received, and self-reported measures of personal growth since trauma using post-traumatic growth inventory.

The design of this study will be based on in-depth interviews, where data will be collected to fulfill the research objectives. Researchers have chosen the interview research method because it allows for in-depth exploration and gathering of rich qualitative data. By employing purposive sampling and utilizing interview research, this study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of post-traumatic growth among breast cancer survivors from the perspective of selected breast cancer survivors in Cabuyao City Laguna. The insights gathered from this sample will contribute to the existing body of knowledge and potentially inform interventions and support systems for breast cancer survivors.

E. Research Instrumentation

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The interviews had a basic structure and were adaptable to different situations. Researchers explored the experiences of breast cancer survivors and their post-traumatic growth by creating an interview guide. This interview guide served as the starting point for examining the lives of breast cancer survivors and their positive changes. Questions in the guide featured open-ended prompts designed to encourage participants to reflect on their personal journeys, obstacles encountered, helpful coping techniques, and personal growth. Researchers used audio-recorded interviews, obtained with participants' approval, and transcribed them. These transcripts were then analyzed.

Researchers followed ethical practices, ensuring informed consent and maintaining confidentiality. A qualitative approach was used to identify themes related to positive transformation, resilience, and individual growth. Overall, this instrumentation plan was used to capture the stories of breast cancer survivors, providing a source of inspiration for those facing adversity.

F. Data Gathering Procedure

The first step in the data collection process was distributing informed consent forms to a chosen group of breast cancer survivors who are going through screening using post-traumatic growth inventory (PTGI) to assess if they have post-traumatic growth. Once individual interviews with these survivors have been arranged, the recording was done with their permission. The study's goal shall be evident in the consent form, emphasizing the importance of participants' open participation and confidential responses.

Making sure that recording devices, notebooks, pens, and a comprehensive collection of guide questions that are specifically adapted to the experiences of breast cancer survivors who are experiencing post-traumatic growth can be obtained was necessary before any data is collected.

Participants were being encouraged to speak openly about their experiences throughout the interview sessions. The researchers used attentive listening techniques and insightful inquiries to explore details of their individual experiences further. Audio recordings of personal interviews were provided for accurate documentation of answers and conversations.

The responses of breast cancer survivors were carefully transcribed after each interview to maintain the deepness and genuineness of their feelings, ideas, and beliefs.

Ethical considerations, including participant privacy and confidentiality, were being prioritized during the data collection procedure. In "Understanding the Positive Transformation of Breast Cancer Survivors," all transcripts and recorded materials will be safely kept and adopted only to understand why breast cancer survivors have changed and transformed positively.

G. Ethical Consideration

Before conducting any interviews, researchers obtained informed consent from each participant. This process fully informed participants of the study's objectives, methodology, and potential risks. Participants were assured that their identities and opinions would be protected, and they were explicitly informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Researchers provided a comprehensive explanation of the study's purpose and rationale to each participant. In strict adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173), researchers prioritized the security and confidentiality of all personal information and data. Formal authorization to conduct data collection and interviews was obtained via a signed letter from the cooperative's Chairperson. Researchers ensured that all participation was entirely voluntary and that all gathered information remained strictly confidential, upholding the highest standards of ethical research practice and participant protection. The researchers' commitment to these principles underscored the importance of respecting participants' rights and autonomy throughout the research process.

3. Results and Discussions

This study delves into the lived experiences of breast cancer survivors, unveiling a journey marked by significant positive transformations. Participants described their diagnoses as profound opportunities for self-discovery and growth rather than mere battles against illness. The essence of their experiences reflects a deepened appreciation for life, enhanced resilience, and a transformative shift in perspective.

Through thematic analysis, several key themes emerged that illustrate the multifaceted nature of their recovery process.

One of the most prominent themes is the strengthening of family bonds and support networks. Survivors reported notable evolutions in their relationships during and after treatment. Many described how their families became more cohesive, with increased emotional support playing a vital role in their healing journey. The experiences of facing a life-threatening illness brought family members closer together, fostering a sense of unity and shared strength. This enhanced social support not only provided comfort but also contributed to a greater sense of belonging, reinforcing the idea that communal ties are essential for emotional resilience in challenging times.

In addition to familial support, survivors expressed a significant adoption of a new perspective on life. Many articulated a newfound appreciation for the simplicity and beauty of everyday moments, attributing this shift to their experiences with cancer. They emphasized a commitment to optimism and acceptance, which allowed them to navigate the emotional challenges of their diagnosis more effectively. This transformative outlook often led to the recognition of "second chances," where survivors learned to value life in ways they previously overlooked. By reframing their experiences, they cultivated a mindset that embraced gratitude and a deeper appreciation for life itself.

The study also highlighted the importance of strategies for resilience and emotional stability. Participants discussed various coping mechanisms that emerged during their journeys, emphasizing the significance of maintaining a positive outlook and engaging in self-care routines. Many survivors actively sought emotional and practical support from loved ones and community resources. This proactive approach to coping was pivotal in navigating the complexities of recovery, illustrating that resilience is often bolstered by a network of supportive relationships. Effective coping strategies provided survivors with the tools needed to manage their emotional well-being and foster a sense of agency in their healing processes.

Moreover, the narratives of survivors were punctuated by moments of realization and empowerment. Participants shared transformative experiences where they shifted from feelings of despair to moments of personal empowerment. These pivotal realizations were frequently motivated by the desire to support their loved ones and a developing belief in their own inner strength. Such moments served as critical turning points, reinforcing their resilience and self-efficacy. Through these experiences, survivors discovered their capacity to overcome adversity, leading to a profound sense of empowerment and self-belief.

Another significant theme was the deepening of faith and spiritual connection. Many survivors reported a transformation in their spiritual beliefs, often finding solace in religious practices or spiritual routines. This deepening of faith provided them with comfort during their journeys, offering a sense of hope and purpose. Spirituality not only served as a coping mechanism but also redefined survivors' life priorities, contributing to their emotional healing. The reliance on spiritual practices highlighted the importance of faith in fostering resilience and promoting a positive outlook amidst life's challenges.

Lastly, the cumulative effect of these experiences led to an enhanced appreciation for life and mindful living. Survivors expressed a renewed zest for life characterized by gratitude

and purpose. They committed to cherishing everyday moments, fostering a greater appreciation for their journeys. This commitment to mindfulness allowed them to engage more fully with their lives, emphasizing the significance of being present and savoring the richness of life experiences. The transformative nature of their journeys prompted a shift in focus from mere survival to actively living with intention and appreciation.

In conclusion, this study illustrates that the journey through breast cancer is not solely about overcoming a physical illness. Instead, it represents a transformative process that cultivates inner strength and redefines personal priorities. The critical roles of family support, faith, and a positive mindset emerged as essential elements in fostering resilience and post-traumatic growth among survivors. By gaining insights into the lived experiences of breast cancer survivors,

this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the psychological and emotional aspects of recovery, highlighting the importance of supportive networks and personal growth in the healing journey. Through their narratives, survivors offer powerful testimonials to the human spirit's capacity for healing and the potential for profound personal growth, even in the face of significant challenges.

4. Discussion

This chapter presents a summary of findings and conclusions based on qualitative research exploring the positive transformation of breast cancer survivors. The study highlights key themes related to resilience, emotional and psychological growth, and the role of faith, family, and support systems in the healing process.

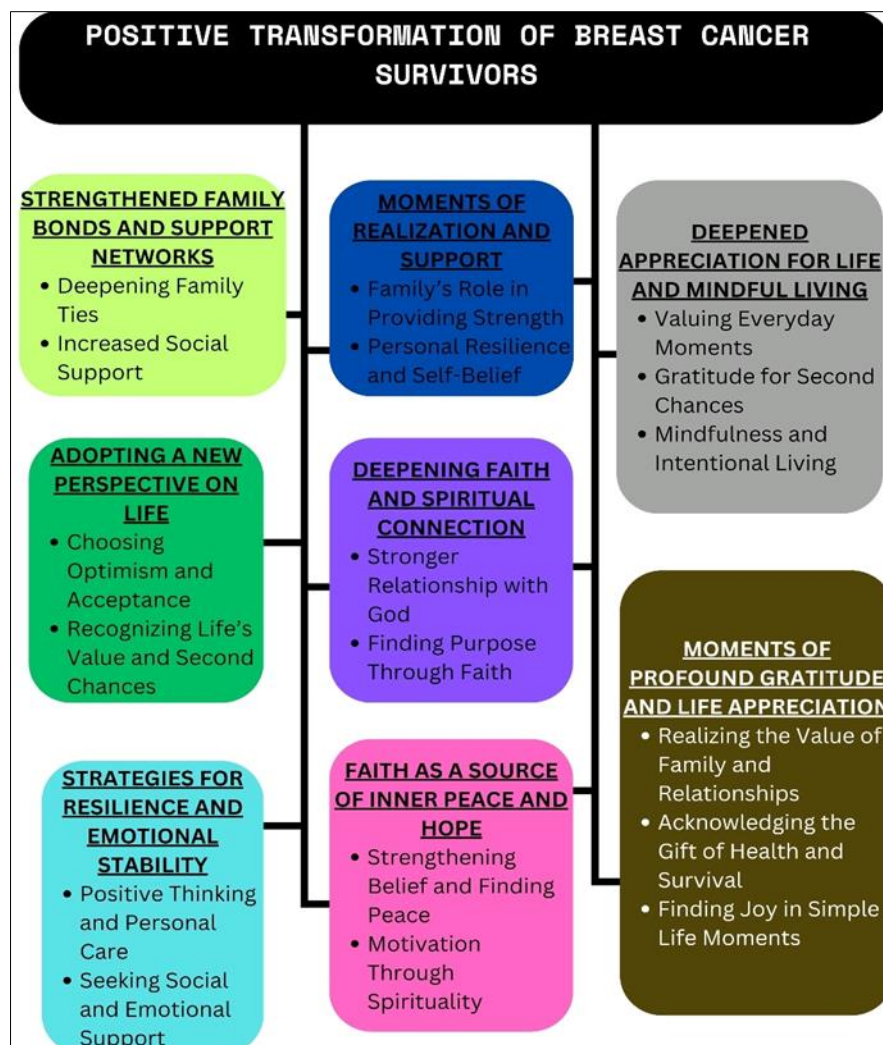


Fig 1: Thematic map of positive transformation of breast cancer survivors

Figure 1 shows the interconnected themes that emerged from understanding the positive transformation of breast cancer survivors. The figure illustrates the significant transformation in survivors' outlook on life, revealing how adversity led to personal growth and emotional strength.

Figure 1 also highlights eight interconnected themes. Firstly, the strengthening of family bonds and support networks demonstrates the crucial role of social support in navigating the challenges of cancer. The shared experience often deepens family ties and increases social support, providing

both emotional and practical assistance. Secondly, the adoption of a new perspective on life underscores the significant shift in values and priorities experienced by many survivors. This newfound appreciation for life's simple pleasures, coupled with optimism and acceptance, is a powerful factor in their overall resilience.

Thirdly, the development of effective strategies for resilience and emotional stability highlights the proactive coping mechanisms employed by survivors. These include positive thinking, self-care, and seeking both emotional and practical

support from their social networks. Fourthly, the identification of moments of realization and support emphasizes the importance of pivotal junctures where survivors shift from despair to empowerment, often fueled by family support and a growing belief in their own strength. The themes of deepening faith and spiritual connection, and faith as a source of inner peace and hope, underscore the significant role of spirituality in providing comfort, purpose, and resilience during this challenging time. Many survivors found strength and meaning through their faith, fostering inner peace and hope. The resulting deepened appreciation for life and mindful living reflects a significant shift in perspective, with survivors cherishing everyday moments and living more intentionally. Finally, the experience of moments of profound gratitude and life appreciation highlights the overall positive transformation, with survivors recognizing the value of relationships, health, and the simple joys of life.

In essence, figure 1 demonstrates that the positive transformation experienced by breast cancer survivors is not a singular event but a multifaceted process involving the strengthening of social support, the development of coping mechanisms, a shift in perspective, and a deepening of spiritual connection. These interconnected themes contribute to a profound appreciation for life and a renewed sense of purpose and resilience.

The findings of this study affirm that breast cancer survivorship extends beyond physical recovery, profoundly shaping individuals' emotional resilience, personal growth, and outlook on life. This study aligns with the concept of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG), demonstrating that survivors often undergo meaningful transformation after experiencing adversity.

Survivors' experiences highlight that while the initial diagnosis brings fear and uncertainty, it also serves as a catalyst for self-discovery and emotional empowerment. Many participants reported strengthened relationships, a renewed appreciation for life, and a deeper sense of purpose. Faith played a crucial role, providing emotional stability and fostering a positive mindset. Furthermore, family support and social networks emerged as significant factors in sustaining resilience.

Ultimately, the study reinforces that the journey of breast cancer survivors reflects the human capacity for growth, transformation, and renewed hope. Through emotional resilience, social support, and a deepened sense of gratitude, survivors navigate their experiences with strength, demonstrating that adversity can lead to empowerment and meaningful change.

5. References

1. Ciria-Suarez L, Jiménez-Fonseca P, Palacín-Lois M, Antónanzas-Basa M, Fernández-Montes A, Manzano-Fernández A, *et al.* Breast cancer patient experiences through a journey map: A qualitative study. *PLoS One*. 2021;16(9):e0257680. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0257680>
2. Martino ML, Lemmo D, Testoni I, Iacona E, Pizzolato L, Freda MF, *et al.* Anticipatory mourning and narrative meaning-making in the younger breast cancer experience: An application of the Meaning of Loss Codebook. *Behav Sci (Basel)*. 2022;12(4):93. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12040093>
3. National Comprehensive Cancer Network (NCCN). NCCN Guidelines for Patients®: Distress [Internet]. 2021 [cited 2025 Jun 10]. Available from: <https://www.nccn.org>
4. American Cancer Society. Post-traumatic growth and cancer [Internet]. [cited 2025 Jun 10]. Available from: <https://amp.cancer.org/cancer/survivorship/be-healthy-after-treatment/post-traumatic-growth-and-cancer.html>
5. Knaul FM, Doubova SV, Robledo MCG, Durstine A, Pages GS, Casanova F, *et al.* Self-identity, lived experiences, and challenges of breast, cervical, and prostate cancer survivorship in Mexico: A qualitative study. *BMC Cancer*. 2020;20(1):1. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12885-020-07076-w>