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Formal and Informal Social Support and Teacher's Growth after Being Exposed to Violence Against Them

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Abstract

This study focused on the psychological growth experienced by school teachers (N = 100) after being exposed to violence against them. Anchored in the salutogenic approach of positive psychology, our model suggested that individual and interpersonal level resources work together to determine the extent to which teachers exposed to violence against them may also experience positive growth. Two models representing a mediating or moderating role of support in the associations between exposure to violence, emotional responses and growth were tested. Results indicate a possible mediation-moderation model: (a) A positive association exists between exposure to violence and negative emotions in teachers, with older teachers being less exposed and responding more positively. (b) Positive emotions mediated the associations between exposure to violence and growth. (c) Path Analysis confirms a moderation-mediation model highlighting social support's moderating effect on the relationship between violence exposure and emotional outcomes, underscoring its significance in mitigating negative emotions and facilitating post-traumatic growth. These insights underscore the imperative for policy interventions that bolster social support systems for teachers, enhancing their emotional resilience and potential growth from traumatic experiences.

Keywords

Violence against Teachers, Psychology, Positive Psychology, Teachers, Growth, Exposure to Traumatic Event, Formal Support, Informal Support

1. Introduction

Violence against teachers is a term describing a broad range of behaviors that

might pose a threat, insult or (direct or indirect) harm to teachers at work and usually includes: verbal or psychological abuse, physical threats or actions aimed at causing damage or harm as well as online communications aimed at harming teachers (Espelage et al., 2013). This phenomenon has become a significant problem in education systems all over the world (Irwin et al., 2021; McMahon et al., 2014; Longobardi et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2011). Evidence suggests a rise in violence incidence in school settings, aimed at both students and teachers. For example: According to a report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2024) for the 2021-2022 school year, 56% of teachers reported experiencing physical violence from students after the pandemic restrictions were lifted, a significant increase from 14% during the pandemic. Additionally, 80% of teachers reported verbal harassment or threats from students, up from 33% during the pandemic.

Numerous studies indicate that exposure to violence takes a very heavy toll on all parties involved: schools, students, and teachers in particular (Moon & McCluskey, 2020). While the phenomenon of violence aimed at teachers is on the rise, authors mention that it is not addressed in a satisfactory manner in the existing literature (McMahon et al., 2020). While current research on violence against teachers does explore antecedents, triggers, experiences, consequences and even potential resources for coping with this challenge (McMahon et al., 2024), this study explores a slightly different direction: recent theories and research suggest that exposure to violence and hardship, alongside its detrimental outcomes, may also produce positive outcomes for those experiencing them, such as newly found confidence, self-efficacy, and personal or professional growth (Germsn-Ben Hayun & Zysberg, 2023). In this study we aim at exploring factors associated with experiencing positive effects alongside the known negative ones as a result of experiencing violence among teachers.

The literature on growth experiences resulting from coping with difficulties and trauma is expanding; however, only few studies dealt with growth experiences from difficulties and trauma among teachers (Berlanda et al., 2019; De Cordova et al., 2019; Roland et al., 2014). A recent study (German-Ben Hayun & Zysberg, 2023) indicated that alongside the negative consequences of violent incidents experienced by teachers, they reported experiencing positive changes such as professional growth and development, personal growth, and improving relationships. So, there is preliminary evidence suggesting that teachers' exposure to violence against them may, alongside the well-known toll associated with it, may also result in some positive experiences and outcomes. At this point we have limited understanding of the process and dynamics underlying these experiences in teaching and educational settings. The current study set out to propose and test a model accounting for teachers' sense of psychological growth in the aftermath of exposure to violence. Our model is predicated on positive psychology's salutogenic approach, suggesting that individual and interpersonal level factors work together to determine the extent to which teachers exposed to violence against them may also experience positive growth, focusing on social support.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Violence against Teachers

School violence is defined as any behavior that is intended to harm (physically or emotionally) members of the school community or their property (The American Educational Research Association, 2013). Violence against teachers is a private case of the above definition in that it refers to similar behavior patterns, but only when they are aimed at teachers, typically by students, their parents and at times—colleagues or supervisors (Espelage et al., 2013). Although violence against teachers has become a significant problem in education systems, few studies have focused on teachers: The last report on indicators of school crime and safety (2020) showed that there was an increase in teachers' reports of threats and assaults compared to previous years. In a Canadian research, Wilson et al. (2011) revealed that 80% of teachers experienced violence during their work. Similarly, McMahon et al. (2014) found that 80% of the participating teachers reported being victims of violence at their schools. In Israel, a study conducted among 1521 homeroom teachers found that many teachers are exposed to verbal and physical violence from students (Zeira et al., 2004) findings indicate that many teachers in Israel are exposed to a considerable amount of verbal and physical violence. Other studies showed that most of the violence against teachers was committed by their students themselves (Gerberich et al., 2011; Lokmić et al., 2013; McMahon et al., 2014; Tiesman et al., 2013; Zhang et al., 2016).

Violence against teachers is manifested in several forms. *Verbal violence* is the most common form of violence against teachers (Data of the Knesset Research and Information Center, 2014; De Ceballos, & Carvalho, 2021; Lokmić et al., 2013) and has been defined as "deliberate use of inappropriate and harsh words to hurt another person" (Lokmić et al., 2013: p. 1). Studies showed that teachers have experienced insults from their students on a daily or weekly basis (McMahon et al., 2022; Robers et al., 2010). Another form of violence against teachers is *Physical violence.* This form of violence is defined as "physical injury to varying degrees—pushing, kicks, beatings… (and even) homicide" (Benbenishty et al., 2006: p. 19). In a U.S. national study that examined violence against teachers, McMahon et al. (2014) noted that 29% of teachers in their research reported been physically attacked at least once. Recent years have seen a rise in gun-related violence which may be seen as a sub-category of this type of violence (McMahon et al., 2024; Wallace, 2023). *Sexual violence* may be defined as "any type of unwelcome sexual behavior (words or actions) that created a hostile work environment" (Gerberich et al., 2011: p. 4). Longobardi et al. (2019) found that 3% of teachers reported been sexually harassed or assaulted. In the Israeli study, 1.8% of teachers reported sexual comments or attempts to "hit on" them (Zeira et al., 2004). As the online world expands and develops, the emergence of *online violence* against teachers is more and more notable. Online violence is defined as intentional dissemination of information (in text, pictures or audio formats), in order to damage the reputation, status and dignity of the victim, i.e., the teacher, by using electronic devices and

their modalities, especially mobile phones, Internet and increasingly popular social networks (Lokmić et al., 2013). A study by Heiman et al. (2014) conducted among 585 Israeli teachers, showed that 12% of them were attacked verbally, had rumors about them generated and dispersed or threats expressed online. Kopecký & Szotkowski (2017) reported that 22% of Czech teachers who participated in their study experienced online violence.

Violence is identified as one of leading causes of negative outcomes for employees as well as the organizations for which they work: On the personal level stress, anxiety burnout and even post trauma have been identified in employees exposed to violence against them (Chirico et al., 2021; Pariona-Cabrera et al., 2020). Physical and mental health outcomes have been reported in recent studies as well (Stahl-Gugger & Hammig, 2022). On the organizational level such phenomena might influence organizational climate (Acquadro Maran & Begotti, 2020; Saleem et al., 2020), employee engagement (Saleem et al., 2020), organizational performance and reputation (Chirico et al., 2021). The grim consequences of exposure to aggression and violence in the workplace seem to be well supported by evidence across time, settings and culture. Teachers exposed to violence against them in schools often reported stress and distress, lower motivation, lower performance, reduced trust in students and the school and intent to leave the school and the teaching profession (Moon & Mcluskey, 2020; Zeira et al., 2004). The existing literature, though not developed enough, does indicate that such exposure to violence is destructive to teachers as well as others. But is there more to the effect of exposure to violence?

2.2. Growth from Life Crisis and Challenge

As mentioned above, studies showed that life crises, traumatic experiences and difficulties have severe psychological, behavioral, emotional and physical consequences (Cobb et al., 2006; Henson et al., 2021; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2004). A more recent body of literature presents a dual experience in which alongside the pain and the negative consequences of life crises there is the possibility of growth, and other gains (Draucker, 2001; Edmonds & Hooker, 1992; Folkman, 2008; Frantz, Farrell, & Trolley, 2001; Hogan & Schmidt, 2002; Jayawickreme & Blackie, 2014; McCann & Pearlman, 2015; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2009; Wu et al., 2019). Recent studies showed that the COVID-19 pandemic generated high levels of stress and other negative consequences, but at the same time, it was also possible for individuals to experience positive changes about themselves, their relationships with others and their philosophy of life (Chi et al., 2020; Vazquez et al., 2021).

Growth out of coping with difficulties has been a central element in developmental, and humanistic psychology for many decades (Frankl, 1963; Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961). The term "posttraumatic growth" was coined by Tedeschi & Calhoun (1995) and defined as the positive psychological change that is experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances. According to them, such growth describes the experience of individuals who have

went through a psychological transformation and have identified various gains related to dealing with difficulties that were not present before the struggle with crises occurred (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2009). Antonovsky's salutogenic approach emphasizes that successful coping with stress enables psychological growth as well as a range of additional positive outcomes (Hobfoll, 1998). Similarly, Bonanno (2004) claimed that people who have experienced difficulties or trauma can experience positive psychological changes as a result of the difficult event. Wu et al. (2019) noted that nearly half of their study participants reported positive change after experiencing a traumatic event.

Studies showed that the positive outcomes are expressed, among other things, in changing priorities, strengthening interpersonal relationships, a sense of personal strength and mental resilience, spiritual development and increased appreciation for life (Follingstad et al., 1991; Ickovics et al., 2006; Menger et al., 2021; Kimhi et al., 2010; Senter & Caldwell, 2002; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2009). Interestingly, people who have experienced both positive and negative changes as a result of a crisis or challenge have shown higher levels of growth compared with those who reported only positive outcomes (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

2.3. Social Support and Growth from Traumatic Experiences

Researchers contend that it is not the trauma itself that is responsible for growth as much as what happens during and in the aftermath of trauma (Henson et al., 2021; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2009). Studies showed that the development of growth from traumatic experiences relies on several factors. One of these factors is sharing the experience with others, receiving emotional feedback and social support (Abel & Friedman, 2009; Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2014; Henson et al., 2021; Prati & Pietrantoni, 2009; Richardson, 2016; Wu et al., 2019).

García et al. (2022) refer to social support as the feeling of being appreciated by others and belonging to a caring, helpful, and supportive social network. According to them, such support associated with better quality of life, lower psychological morbidity and longer life expectancy. According to Calhoun & Tedeschi (2014), sharing negative emotions enables individual cognitive processing, reduces the risk and normalizes the situation and the feelings of the person that experienced trauma. Similarly, Wu et al. (2019) argued that family and social-circle-related support encouraged and enabled growth from trauma. Israeli study found that greater social support tended to exhibit better coping strategies in traumatic situations (Abel & Friedman, 2009).

Social support can be emotional (lending an ear, being present for others when they need to share experiences or vent out emotions) or instrumental (providing help with various tasks, or duties) (Gottlieb & Bergen, 2010), formal (emanating from structured, official sources) or informal (coming from ad-hoc relations or from personas or groups that have no official role as supporters (Seon et al., 2019). In a recent study that examined students' post-traumatic growth in dealing with COVID-19 it was found that attachment to sources of

social support (family, friends, peers, and significant others) can foster posttraumatic growth (García et al., 2022). Similarly, Northfield & Johnston (2022) investigated the role of perceived social support in moderating psychological distress and posttraumatic growth during the COVID-19 pandemic. They found a strong positive relationship between the impact of trauma and posttraumatic growth in adults. Another research explored whether social support from different sources has a differential impact on growth of 277 Chinese parents who have lost their only child (Zhou et al., 2022). Their findings indicated that positive support from close family members and others was significantly related to post traumatic growth (Zhou et al., 2022).

Educators reported that support from the school leadership, peers, student-teacher relationships and relationships with students' parents promoted their well-being, positive emotions and support professional flourishing (Berlanda et al., 2019; De Cordova et al., 2019). De Cordova et al. (2019) found that with regard to violence perpetrated against teachers by students, the results show that support from school management operates as a protective factor and improve well-being at work. Additional evidence suggests that availability of social support at school is associated with lower rates of distress (Berlanda et al., 2019). More recently, McMahon et al. (2024) showed that both demographics and organizational aspects of the school moderate the effects of exposure to violence in teachers and their stress levels and intentions to leave. That said, the literature on post-traumatic growth, among teachers and the factors that facilitate this growth are still lacking. The current study aimed to fill this gap.

2.4. Emotional Responses and Likelihood of Growth in the Aftermath of a Challenge

Post traumatic growth as well as other positive outcomes of coping with challenge, are often associated with the experience of positive emotions during and in the aftermath of stressful events (Rosner & Powell, 2014). A vast body of evidence associates positive and negative emotional responses with respectfully positive and negative outcomes (from behaviors to achievements and well-being) (Diener et al., 2020; Waters et al., 2022; Zysberg, 2016). Positive and negative emotions are often seen as the mediating path of experience between individual resources (e.g. resilience, emotional intelligence), social resources (support or community resilience) and outcomes. As such they are a pivotal variable in the proposed model.

2.5. The Study Model

Based on the literature reviewed above we hypothesized that exposure to aggression alone among teachers will not necessarily associate with potential growth, but with the involvement of social support, ameliorating negative emotions and increasing positive emotions, the likelihood of experiencing growth increases. **Figure 1** summarizes the hypothetical model guiding this study.

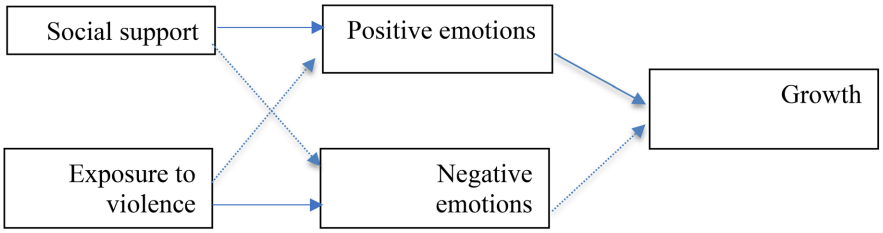

Figure 1. The hypothesized model. Note—solid lines represent positive hypothesized associations and dashed lines represent negative associations.

2.6. The Role of Social Support

While hypothesizing about the mediation effect of emotions in the association between exposure to aggression and growth, we tested two models of social support's involvement in the association between exposure to violence and growth: a) Social support as an exogenous factor—Social support is viewed as an independent factor that people may or may not have to varying degrees. As such it operates in the model as an exogenous factor; b) Social support can be viewed as a moderating factor—interacting with exposure to violence, so that in its presence even when exposed to aggression, positive emotions are more likely to be experienced (alongside negative ones) thus increasing the likelihood of growth.

3. Methods

3.1. Design

Testing the proposed model required the application of a quantitative, descriptive, and correlational design study. Data collection relied on online self-report questionnaires disseminated among schoolteachers in Israel via social networks and professional online forums for teachers.

3.2. Participants

This sample included 100 school teachers (12% males, 88% females) from Israel. While sampled as a convenience sample the researchers took care to try and represent different schools within a broad area of Israel representing the state mandated educations system. Teachers were contacted via social networks and professional bulletin boards and were asked to participate in a study about their experiences as teachers. Participants had to be practicing teachers who currently work in a state mandated school. Most of the respondents were teachers in public schools (88.5%). Also, the majority of participants (69%) were primary school teachers, 17% were middle school teachers, and 14% were high school teachers. The seniority of the teachers ranges from one year to 35 years (M = 12.98; SD = 8.541). The mean age was 41.86 years (SD = 8.087), with a range from 25 to 61 years. The total sample was comprised of 24.3% respondents who rated their economic level as low or very low, 26.4% described their economic level as average and 37.1% who described their economic level as high. 50% of the participants had M. A degree and 50% had M. A degree. 82% of the participants were married,

11% were single at the time, and 7% were divorced.

3.3. Measures

Violence Exposure. This questionnaire was based on Reuveni (2006) questionnaire that checked the frequency of violent incidents in schools. It included a description of 11 violent behaviors, referring to violence directed towards the teachers. 4-point Likert scale was adopted with 1 representing "never" and 4 representing "very frequently". The reliability of Reuveni (2006) questionnaire was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Coefficients ranging from .62 to .91, which indicate a satisfactory level of reliability.

Scale of Perceived Social Support (*MSPSS*). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988) is a 12-item measure of perceived adequacy of social support from three sources: family, friends, and significant other; using a 5-point Likert scale (0 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The scale was translated into Hebrew in 1995 by Statman. Cronbach Alpha reliability of the 12 items was high (α = 85.0 to α = 91.0 as well as high reliability in the retest (r = 85.0 to r = 88.0). In the Hebrew language scale (Statman, 1995), a high Cronbach Alpha reliability ranged .91 - .93.

Positive and Negative Affect Scale (*PANAS*; Watson et al., 1988) is a 20-item self-report measure to assess positive affect (PA) and negative affect (NA). PA is associated with pleasurable engagement with the environment, whereas NA reflects a dimension of general distress summarizing a variety of negative states such as anger, guilt, or anxiety. The scale translated into Hebrew in 2002 by Ben Zur. The respondents are asked to rate the extent to which they have experienced each particular emotion within a specified time period, with reference to a 5-point scale. Validity and reliability of this scale were examined in a few studies, including the Hebrew version of the scale (El-Yagon, Rimmerman, & Margalit 2020). These studies indicated that the reliability of the questionnaire for the positive ranges from α = 79.0 to α = 84.0 and for the negative. α = .87 to α = .79.

Posttraumatic Growth Inventory—PTGI. The purpose of the questionnaire is to evaluate positive changes reported by the person, which occurred following exposure to a traumatic event. The questionnaire includes 21 statements regarding the respondents lifestyle and feelings as they report experiencing them, after experiencing a traumatic event. The respondents asked to rate each statement on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = no change, 4 = significant change). 21 statements that are grouped under five factors, or general categories: new possibilities, relating to others, personal strength, spiritual change and appreciation of life. The reported reliability of the scale ranges .89 to .90 (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

Demographics such as age, tenure, education level, and gender were also collected.

3.4. Procedure

The study plan was approved by the authors' IRB. Potential participants were

approached electronically the authors. They were asked to participate in a study about "various aspects of teachers' work life". Anonymity was promised and they were instructed to fill out the questionnaires when they have free time away from work or other obligations. Participants were asked to forward the link to other teachers. Filling out questionnaires took about 10 minutes. Submission of the filled-out questionnaire was indicated also as providing informed consent to participate in the study. The authors did not collect any identifying information on any of the participants and of questionnaires were not submitted, the data was not saved. We therefore have no ability to report dropout percentages.

4. Results

The first section in this chapter presents the results of descriptive statistics and correlations among our main study variables. The second section reports the results of testing the research model using path analysis in AMOS 28.0.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Before testing our model, we first examined the distribution of our main variables. Descriptive statistics for all study variables, including means, standard deviations, reliability coefficients and ranges, are presented below in Table 1. The statistics revealed no floor or ceiling effect, and internal consistency coefficients were all within the accepted range to indicate good reliability.

We then proceeded to examine preliminary associations among the study variables using simple zero order correlations. These are reported in Table 2. Significant positive correlations were observed between violence and negative emotional responses (r = .25, $p < .01$), and support and positive emotional responses (r = .33, $p < .01$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the study variables (n = 100).

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Cronbach's Alpha
Violence	17.57	5.66	11.00	44.00	.87
Support	5.94	1.47	1.25	7.00	.98
EMPOS	3.87	.65	1.56	5.00	.86
EMNEG	2.37	.66	1.09	4.36	.87
PTG	2.69	.80	1.00	4.00	.95

Table 2. Correlations among the study variables (n = 100).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Age	-							
2. Degree	.19*	-						
3. Gender	−.14	−.06	-					
4. Violence	−.19*	−.01	.01	-				

Continued

5. Support	.05	−.01	.07	−.12	-			
6. Positive emotion	.17*	.23*	−.02	−.02	.33**	-		
7. Negative emotion	−.19*	−.02	.05	.25**	−.13	−.13	-	
8. PTG	.06	.19*	.41	.04	.23*	.24**	−.05	-

*$p < .05$ **$p < .01$.

A few additional associations emerge from Table 2 that may be relevant in the context of this study: Age was positively related to emotional responses (positive emotions), and negatively with exposure to violence. These will be discussed later in more depth.

4.2. Path Analysis

Initial Model (*Mediation*)

To test our model, we used path analysis in AMOS 28.0. The hypothesized model included violence exposure, social support, positive emotional experiences (EMPOS), and negative emotional experiences (EMNEG) as predictors of PTG. The full model as proposed above, was not fully supported by the data, but a reduced model in which we omitted the non-significant paths, was well supported by our analyses: The Chi-Square statistic was found to be 1.24 (df = 4, $p = .86$), the Normed Fit Index (NFI) was .97. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) was .99. RMSEA = .01.

The results of the first path analysis are summarized in Figure 2 here.

The analysis supported a partial mediation model in which Exposure to violence associated positively with negative emotions but those in turn, do not associated negatively with post-traumatic-growth (PTG), as our model suggested. At the same time, we found that positive emotions partly mediate the associations between social support and PTG.

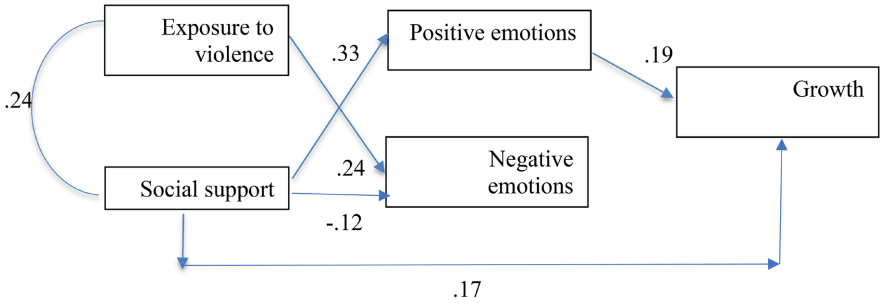

Figure 2. Empirical model 1—partial mediation.

Moderation-Mediation Model

While our two exogenous factor, mediation model received partial support from the data, it is possible that social support could act as a moderating variable, thus influencing the reduction of negative emotions following exposure to violence.

The inclusion of the interaction term between exposure to violence and social support to the model enhanced the goodness of fit indices. The Chi-Square statistic was 3.28 (df = 7, p = .85). The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) remained at .99. Similarly, the Normed Fit Index (NFI) remained consistent at .97, indicating the model accounts for 97% of the variance in the dependent variable. The RMSEA was .001. The model is presented in Figure 3 herein. The model supports a moderation-mediation set of associations in which exposure to violence showed a positive relationship with negative emotions, with a slightly increased path coefficient compared to the initial model. This finding again highlights that exposure to violence tends to increase negative emotions. Social support maintained a strong positive relation to positive emotions, with a consistent path coefficient. The positive relationship between social support and growth from violence also remained consistent. The interaction between exposure to violence and social support showed a significant negative relationship with negative emotions, as indicated by a path coefficient of −.25. This finding suggests that the combination of violence exposure and social support may contribute to a decrease in negative emotions.

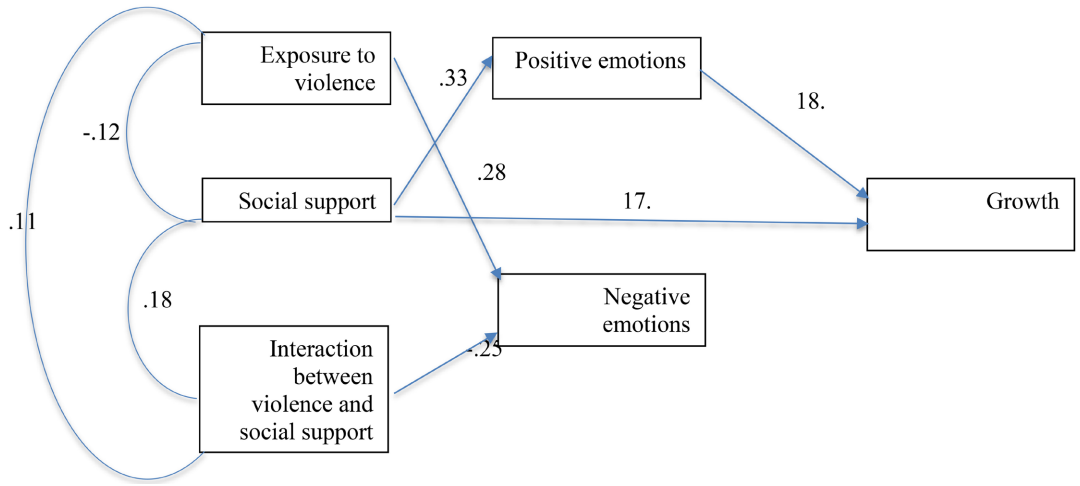

Figure 3. A mediation-moderation model.

Better understanding the Interaction Effect

In the final stage of analysis, the interaction effect between exposure to violence and social support was analyzed independently as a sole exogenic factor in the proposed model. This examination aimed to explore in more detail, the contribution of this interaction to the model. The results are summarized in Figure 4. The goodness-of-fit indices demonstrated a good fit of the data. The Chi-Square statistic was found to be 1.37 (df = 2, p = .50), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) remained consistent at .99. The Normed Fit Index (NFI), while slightly lower at .91, still reflects a high degree of the variance in the dependent variable. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) increased slightly to .04, but remained within the acceptable range, indicating a close fit of the model to the data.

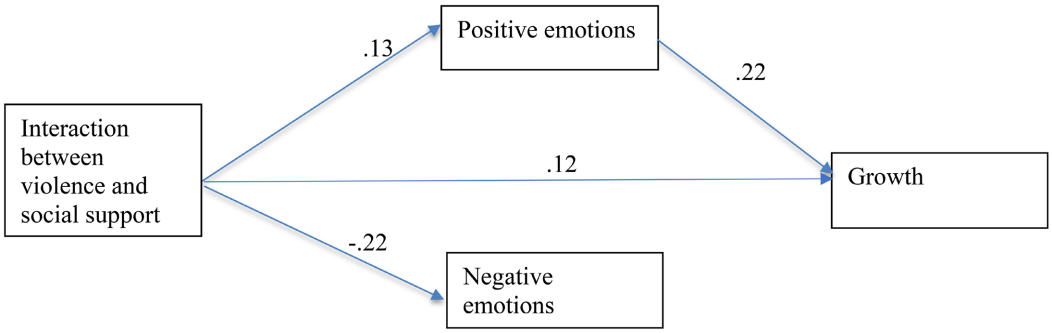

Figure 4. Testing the contribution of the interaction term (exposure to violence and support) to the model.

The interaction term reveals the differential roles of exposure to violence and support on positive and negative affect while not significantly changing the rest of the findings. The model may support the possibility that exposure to violence in the presence of social support will actually help people remain resilient against negative emotion and may foster positive ones, which are associated with PTG. The implications of these results will be elaborated next.

5. Discussion

The current study set out to explore and test a model accounting for teachers' sense of psychological growth in the aftermath of exposure to violence. Our model is predicated on positive psychology's Salutogenic approach, suggesting that individual and interpersonal level factors work together to determine the extent to which teachers exposed to violence against them may also experience positive growth (alongside detrimental outcomes known from the literature). Our findings shed light on several factors that influence the post-traumatic growth of teachers and strengthen the understanding regarding this process. This chapter discusses the main results and their contribution to the existing literature. In addition, the implications of the results for practice, policy, and future research are considered.

5.1. Preliminary Insights from the Descriptive Data

The descriptive and univariate analyses performed offer several insights. First, the study found support for the existing body of evidence associating exposure to violence with negative outcomes, a significant positive correlation between violence and negative emotional reactions was found. Previous studies have also indicated that exposure to violence may lead to negative emotional reactions (Moon & McCluskey, 2020; Stahl-Gugger & Hammig, 2022). Seconded, our initial analysis also revealed another correlation that concerned a positive relationship between social support and positive emotions. This finding is consistent with the research literature that indicates that social support acts as a buffer against negative experiences and thus reduces their impact (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2014; Henson et al., 2021; García et al., 2022; Prati & Pietrantoni, 2009; Richardson, 2016; Wu et al., 2019).

Another association found in our study concerns the relationship between age,

exposure to violence and positive emotions. This correlation provides intriguing insights regarding the interrelationships between these variables. The findings indicated that age is positively related to positive emotional reactions. The socio-emotional selectivity theory (Carstensen et al., 1999) holds that as people grow older, they prioritize goals with more emotional meaning, which leads to focusing on positive information over the negative. Accordingly, older teachers may have more effective coping mechanisms in dealing with violent incidents, these mechanisms allow them to preserve or increase positive emotions. On the other hand, we found that age was negatively related to exposure to violence. This finding can be attributed to several factors. For example, older teachers often have more experience and skills in preventing the escalation of violent situations including high classroom management skills, conflict resolution and creating a positive learning environment (Brouwers & Tomic, 2000; Spilt, Koomen, & Thijs, 2011). In addition, older teachers may be less exposed to violent incidents due to their age and status. Studies show that in many societies older people are treated with more respect, which may serve as a protective factor against incidents of violence (Harris, 1993; Ruggiano & Perry, 2019). Further research could focus on the role of different demographic variables and their influence on teachers' experiences in the context of violence and on their emotional and growth outcomes.

5.2. Insights from Testing the Full Model

The findings from the Path Analysis provided deeper insights into our proposed model. The findings partially supported mediated relationships. That is, exposure to violence is positively related to negative emotions, while social support is related to positive emotions, and these have shown a relationship to post-traumatic growth. These findings align with other research that suggests that while exposure to traumatic events can trigger negative emotions, it can also lead to resilience and growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

The moderation-mediation model provided deeper findings and indicated that social support indeed moderates the relationship between exposure to violence and the reduction of negative emotions and potentially facilitates post-traumatic growth. This finding emphasizes the importance of social support as a protective buffer against the negative emotions from exposure to violence and in fostering post-traumatic growth. As mentioned earlier, previous studies have emphasized that social support is a critical resource in dealing with trauma (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2014; Henson et al., 2021; García et al., 2022; Prati & Pietrantoni, 2009; Richardson, 2016; Wu et al., 2019).

When the interaction between exposure to violence and social support was examined, a negative relationship was found with negative emotions. This finding indicates that social support in dealing with violent experiences may contribute to resilience against negative emotions and foster positive emotions which can be relevant to post-traumatic growth. The interaction effect further emphasizes the importance of social support as a significant dynamic factor in dealing with the

experience of violence and having an impact on the emotional reactions and post-traumatic growth experiences of the teachers.

5.3. Possible Implication for Practice and Research

The research findings have significant implications for schools and education systems. Policy leaders should include interventions that focus on improving and building social support systems among teachers. Such support systems can be helpful in reducing the negative effects of exposure to violence. The support systems should include formal mechanisms within the schools (support programs, peer support groups, and counseling services) and informal mechanisms within and outside the schools. Also, there is a need to create initiatives that focus on the well-being and emotional resilience of teachers while recognizing the role of violent events in shaping their emotional experiences and the potential for their growth from these events. As evidenced by the findings of our research, the power of social support to improve the effects of violence and thus contribute significantly to a more inclusive, flexible and supportive educational environment.

5.4. Study Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

The limitations of the study relate to the teachers' self-report. Their answers may be affected by various biases such as social desirability, memory biases and introspective limitations. Further research could combine self-report data with observation or interviews to address this limitation. Also, it is possible that personality traits, past traumatic experiences, coping skills or the severity of the events may be related to the degree of post-traumatic growth. Recognizing these limitations is a crucial part of our research process and creates opportunities for further research to improve our understanding of the post-traumatic growth processes of teachers. Moreover, Follow-up studies could test the effect of different forms of social support, formal versus informal, on posttraumatic growth. It is also possible to conduct a qualitative study that will deal with the ways in which social support functions as a buffer against negative emotions and as a leader of positive emotions and growth.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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