

The Components of Psychological Growth in Adolescents Overcoming Bullying Experiences

Mariana. Oliveira¹, Carmen. Sánchez^{2*}

¹ Department of Clinical Psychology, University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil

² Department of Psychology, Complutense University of Madrid, Madrid, Spain

* Corresponding author email address: carmen.sanchez@ucm.es

Article Info

Article type:

Original Research

How to cite this article:

Oliveira, M., & Sánchez, C. (2025). The Components of Psychological Growth in Adolescents Overcoming Bullying Experiences. *Journal of Adolescent and Youth Psychological Studies*, 6(9), 1-9.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.61838/kman.jayps.4500>



© 2025 the authors. Published by KMAN Publication Inc. (KMANPUB), Ontario, Canada. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to explore the components of psychological growth in adolescents who have experienced and overcome bullying, with a focus on identifying transformative processes that foster resilience and positive development.

Methods and Materials: A qualitative design was employed using semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 25 adolescents aged 13–18 years residing in Spain. Participants were purposively selected based on their history of bullying victimization and evidence of recovery. Interviews, lasting 45–70 minutes, explored personal experiences, coping strategies, and perceived transformations after overcoming bullying. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. All interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically with the aid of NVivo 14 software. To enhance rigor, coding was independently performed by two researchers and cross-validated for consistency.

Findings: Three overarching themes were identified: (1) Personal Transformation, including enhanced self-confidence, emotional regulation, resilience, self-awareness, and independence; (2) Interpersonal Growth, encompassing supportive peer relationships, improved communication, empathy, rebuilding trust, family connectedness, and positive role models; and (3) Coping and Adaptive Strategies, such as cognitive reframing, problem-solving, seeking professional help, spiritual or philosophical coping, healthy lifestyle choices, creative expression, and digital resources. Participants' narratives underscored the centrality of social support, meaning-making, and proactive coping in fostering posttraumatic growth. Representative quotations illustrated the adolescents' active role in reframing adversity and reconstructing positive identities.

Conclusion: The findings demonstrate that bullying, while a significant risk factor for psychological harm, can also serve as a catalyst for psychological growth in adolescents who develop adaptive coping strategies, supportive relationships, and reflective self-awareness. These insights underscore the importance of fostering protective contexts in schools, families, and communities and highlight opportunities for therapeutic and educational interventions that promote resilience and transformation in bullied adolescents.

Keywords: Bullying; Adolescents; Psychological growth; Resilience; Posttraumatic growth

1. Introduction

Bullying has long been recognized as a pervasive form of interpersonal violence that undermines the psychological, social, and academic development of young people. Defined broadly, bullying includes repeated aggressive behavior in which there is an imbalance of power between the perpetrator and the victim, and it often manifests in physical, verbal, relational, and increasingly, digital forms (Snodgrass et al., 2024). Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to bullying, as this developmental stage is characterized by heightened sensitivity to peer relationships, identity formation, and self-concept. Research has consistently demonstrated that bullying victimization is strongly associated with adverse psychological outcomes, including internalized stigma, posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS), and depression (Boyes et al., 2020; Xu et al., 2023). At the same time, studies also suggest that adversity can catalyze personal growth, resilience, and transformation in some individuals (Cokorde Istri Ayu Laksmi & Valentina, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019).

The psychological impacts of bullying are multifaceted. Adolescents subjected to repeated victimization often report heightened levels of fear, guilt, and shame, which can become internalized and contribute to enduring trauma (Boyes et al., 2020). The interplay between victimization and stigma is particularly damaging in contexts where adolescents face additional vulnerabilities, such as chronic illness or minority status. For example, evidence from South Africa has shown that adolescents living with HIV who experience bullying are more likely to develop internalized stigma, which in turn predicts poor mental health outcomes (Boyes et al., 2020). These findings underscore that bullying is not merely a transient developmental challenge but a risk factor for long-term psychological distress.

Moreover, exposure to bullying can have severe posttraumatic consequences. Research indicates that adolescents who experience repeated bullying may develop symptoms consistent with PTSD, such as intrusive memories, avoidance behaviors, and hyperarousal (Chen, 2024). Cyberbullying, in particular, poses unique risks because of its anonymity, potential for wide audience exposure, and permanence of digital traces. These dynamics intensify the psychological impact of bullying, differentiating it from traditional face-to-face aggression (Chen, 2024). At the same time, other research has highlighted the role of mediating mechanisms such as feelings of insecurity and self-disclosure in shaping whether

adolescents develop PTSS or, alternatively, adaptive coping outcomes (Xu et al., 2023).

Despite the risks, evidence increasingly points to the possibility of posttraumatic growth (PTG)—a positive psychological transformation following exposure to adversity. Adolescents who navigate the challenges of bullying sometimes report increased appreciation of life, stronger interpersonal relationships, and a greater sense of personal strength (Cokorde Istri Ayu Laksmi & Valentina, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019). Longitudinal studies of disaster-affected adolescents have shown that PTG trajectories can persist and even strengthen over time (Zhou et al., 2019). Similarly, cross-cultural findings suggest that meaning-making and resilience can mediate the relationship between victimization and later well-being (Ratcliff et al., 2025).

The factors that shape whether bullying leads to long-term trauma or to growth are diverse. For instance, family adversity and the quality of peer and school relationships strongly moderate the impact of bullying (Liu et al., 2024). Adolescents from families characterized by instability, conflict, or low support are at heightened risk of experiencing compounding mental health difficulties when subjected to bullying (Liu et al., 2024). Conversely, protective factors such as social support, spirituality, and self-compassion have been identified as crucial resources in fostering resilience and PTG (Fitria, 2024; Kerinina & Kusristanti, 2023). In this regard, adolescents' lived contexts—family, peer group, school, and community—play an essential role in shaping their psychological responses to bullying.

Bullying experiences are also intertwined with broader developmental and sociocultural contexts. Research on autistic adolescents has demonstrated that puberty, school adjustment, and peer dynamics interact with bullying exposure to shape emotional outcomes (Dawe-Lane et al., 2025). Similarly, studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that pre-pandemic bullying victimization and pandemic-related discrimination jointly contributed to deteriorating mental health in minority adolescents, highlighting the role of contextual stressors in compounding the effects of bullying (H. Yang, 2024). For refugee adolescents, overcoming adversity has been associated not only with PTSS but also with transformative experiences of growth and identity reconstruction (C. Yang, 2024). Together, these studies emphasize the necessity of situating bullying within the wider psychosocial and cultural environment in which adolescents live.

Interventions play a crucial role in supporting adolescents who have experienced bullying. Modular cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), for instance, has shown promise in addressing the cognitive distortions and emotional challenges faced by victims of bullying (Cooley, 2023). Hospital-based violence intervention programs have also been effective in integrating psychosocial support with medical care for adolescents exposed to violence (Krock et al., 2023). Furthermore, therapeutic approaches such as narrative exposure therapy have been piloted successfully among marginalized youth populations, such as transgender and gender-diverse adolescents, reducing PTSS and enabling meaning-making in the aftermath of trauma (Julian et al., 2024). These findings suggest that therapeutic interventions tailored to adolescents' unique contexts can play an important role in fostering resilience and growth.

At the same time, protective psychosocial resources appear to be particularly influential in adolescents' capacity to achieve psychological growth. Self-compassion has been shown to buffer the effects of trauma and promote PTG in vulnerable populations such as orphans and adolescents without fathers (Fitria, 2024). Spirituality has similarly been linked to growth outcomes, especially among adolescent girls who have faced relational violence (Kerina & Kusristanti, 2023). In war-affected youth, social support and personality traits interact to promote PTG, underscoring the importance of both internal and external resources (Panjikidze et al., 2019). Such evidence highlights that adolescents' pathways to growth are not uniform but are mediated by individual, relational, and contextual factors.

From a global perspective, bullying has been recognized as a widespread problem with significant implications for adolescent mental health across diverse cultural contexts. A cross-national study spanning 65 countries found that different forms of bullying exert varying effects on adolescent mental health, and that protective factors such as school connectedness and supportive peer relationships mitigate these impacts (Man et al., 2022). These findings underscore the universality of bullying as a developmental risk factor while also pointing to the importance of culturally responsive approaches to intervention and support.

Theoretical and empirical work further suggests that rumination and maladaptive cognitive processes play a crucial role in determining whether adolescents experience PTSD or PTG after bullying or trauma exposure (Wang et al., 2020). While persistent rumination may exacerbate distress, constructive reflection and meaning-making can pave the way for psychological growth. Similarly, studies of

sexual minority adults have identified resilience, social support, and meaning in life as factors promoting PTG following adolescent bullying experiences (Ratcliff et al., 2020). These insights underscore the importance of understanding adolescents' subjective processes of coping and adaptation.

Finally, the mechanisms through which bullying contributes to either psychological impairment or psychological growth remain complex. On one hand, studies document significant associations between bullying and heightened risks of depression, anxiety, and PTSS (Cui, 2024; Li, 2023). On the other, empirical findings increasingly point to the possibility of adolescents emerging stronger, more self-aware, and more connected after such experiences (Ratcliff et al., 2025; Sikorová & Strakošová, 2022). The coexistence of risk and growth highlights the dual potential outcomes of bullying, reinforcing the importance of exploring not only the harms but also the resilience-building processes that adolescents undergo.

Against this background, the present study focuses on identifying the components of psychological growth in adolescents who have overcome bullying experiences in Spain.

2. Methods and Materials

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a qualitative research design with an exploratory orientation to identify the components of psychological growth in adolescents who had experienced and overcome bullying. A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria: adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18, residing in Spain, with personal experiences of being bullied and having demonstrated resilience and recovery following these experiences. In total, 25 participants (13 females and 12 males) were included in the study. Recruitment was facilitated through collaboration with secondary schools, youth support centers, and mental health professionals who provided access to adolescents willing to share their experiences. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from both adolescents and their parents or guardians.

2.2. Measures

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. An interview guide was developed to

ensure consistency while allowing flexibility to explore individual narratives. The guide included open-ended questions focusing on adolescents' lived experiences of bullying, the coping strategies they employed, the role of family, peers, and school, and the personal transformations they perceived after overcoming bullying. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in quiet and private settings within schools and youth centers to provide a safe environment. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes and was audio-recorded with permission. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual factors. Data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached, meaning that no new themes or insights emerged from additional interviews.

2.3. Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic content analysis. NVivo 14 software was employed to facilitate the coding and organization of data. The analysis proceeded in several stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, (2) initial coding of significant statements and phrases, (3) categorization of codes into subthemes, and (4) synthesis of

subthemes into overarching themes representing components of psychological growth. To enhance rigor, the coding process was conducted independently by two researchers and then cross-validated to ensure consistency. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved collaboratively. Reflexive memos were maintained throughout the analysis to account for researcher subjectivity and to strengthen the credibility of findings.

3. Findings and Results

The study included 25 adolescents from Spain who had experienced and overcome bullying. Of the participants, 13 were female (52%) and 12 were male (48%). The participants' ages ranged from 13 to 18 years, with the largest group being 16-year-olds ($n = 7$, 28%), followed by 15-year-olds ($n = 6$, 24%), 17-year-olds ($n = 6$, 24%), 14-year-olds ($n = 4$, 16%), and 13- and 18-year-olds (each $n = 1$, 4%). In terms of school level, 15 participants (60%) were enrolled in lower secondary education, while 10 participants (40%) were in upper secondary education. Regarding family background, 18 participants (72%) reported living with both parents, while 7 participants (28%) lived in single-parent households.

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Concepts of Psychological Growth in Adolescents Overcoming Bullying Experiences

Category (Theme)	Subcategory	Concepts (Open Codes)
1. Personal Transformation	Development of Self-Confidence	Speaking up, Asserting personal boundaries, Believing in abilities, Positive self-talk
	Emotional Regulation	Managing anger, Reducing fear responses, Developing patience, Mindful breathing
	Self-Awareness	Recognizing personal strengths, Identifying emotions, Reflection on past experiences
	Resilience Building	Perseverance in adversity, Optimism, Learning from failures, Growth mindset
	Sense of Independence	Taking responsibility, Relying less on approval, Autonomy in decisions
2. Interpersonal Growth	Post-Traumatic Growth	Finding meaning in hardship, Increased appreciation of life, Personal maturity
	Peer Support Networks	Building trustworthy friendships, Seeking allies, Group belonging
	Improved Communication	Active listening, Clear expression of needs, Conflict resolution skills
	Empathy Toward Others	Understanding others' suffering, Offering emotional support, Compassionate behavior
	Rebuilding Trust	Learning to rely on peers again, Selective openness, Forgiving cautiously
3. Coping and Adaptive Strategies	Family Connection	Increased reliance on parents, Open family dialogue, Shared coping strategies
	Social Engagement	Volunteering, Helping peers, Community participation, Joining social clubs
	Positive Role Models	Mentorship from teachers, Guidance from counselors, Inspiration from older peers
	Cognitive Reframing	Seeing bullying as a challenge, Changing negative thoughts, Reinterpreting experiences positively
	Problem-Solving Skills	Identifying solutions, Strategic thinking, Planning steps to act
	Seeking Professional Help	Counseling sessions, Psychoeducational workshops, Therapeutic interventions
	Spiritual/Philosophical Coping	Prayer, Meditation, Belief in justice, Finding purpose
	Healthy Lifestyle Choices	Engaging in sports, Balanced diet, Relaxation activities, Sleep hygiene
	Creative Expression	Journaling, Drawing/painting, Music, Theater or drama
	Digital Coping Tools	Online peer forums, Mental health apps, Inspirational videos, Online communities

Category 1: Personal Transformation

Development of Self-Confidence. Many participants described a significant shift in their confidence levels after overcoming bullying. They reported becoming more assertive and developing belief in their own abilities. One participant stated, *"Before, I used to stay quiet even if someone insulted me, but now I can say, 'Stop. That's not okay.'"* This newfound assertiveness was often accompanied by positive self-talk and a greater sense of self-worth.

Emotional Regulation. Adolescents highlighted learning to manage their emotions more effectively, particularly anger and fear. Several shared that mindful breathing and relaxation helped them gain composure. A 15-year-old participant explained, *"When I feel nervous, I just take a deep breath instead of crying like I used to."* Emotional regulation was described as essential in reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilience.

Self-Awareness. The experience of bullying also fostered greater self-awareness. Participants reflected on their strengths and weaknesses, and many reported being able to identify and articulate their emotions more clearly. As one adolescent expressed, *"I learned who I really am through the hard times, and I know better what triggers me."* This awareness empowered them to respond rather than react impulsively.

Resilience Building. Several participants reported that enduring bullying had strengthened their perseverance and optimism. They framed adversity as an opportunity to learn and grow. A 16-year-old remarked, *"Every time I got back up after being pushed down, I felt stronger. I realized I can survive more than I thought."* Such narratives highlighted the emergence of a growth mindset among participants.

Sense of Independence. Participants emphasized becoming more independent and less reliant on peer approval. Many mentioned that they took more responsibility for their decisions. One adolescent shared, *"I stopped caring so much about what others thought. Now, I choose what's good for me."* This sense of autonomy was perceived as liberating and empowering.

Post-Traumatic Growth. For some, overcoming bullying led to deeper life reflections and a sense of maturity. They described gaining appreciation for life and recognizing meaning in their experiences. A 17-year-old noted, *"Bullying made me stronger, but it also made me value kindness and life much more."* These narratives reflect the long-term transformative potential of adversity.

Category 2: Interpersonal Growth

Peer Support Networks. A dominant theme was the importance of supportive friendships. Participants emphasized seeking allies and building trustworthy connections. One participant stated, *"I found friends who stand by me, and that makes all the difference."* Belonging to a group offered them a buffer against future bullying incidents.

Improved Communication. Adolescents reported developing more effective communication skills. They learned to express their needs clearly and listen actively to others. As a 14-year-old explained, *"I learned to say what I feel instead of keeping everything inside."* Conflict resolution skills were also reported as a positive outcome.

Empathy Toward Others. Experiencing bullying increased adolescents' capacity for empathy. Many described becoming more compassionate toward others in distress. One participant explained, *"I know how painful it is, so now I help my classmates when I see them sad."* This empathy was perceived as a source of personal strength.

Rebuilding Trust. For several adolescents, bullying had initially led to mistrust, but overcoming it helped them selectively rebuild trust. As one explained, *"It took time, but I learned to trust again, only with people who truly deserve it."* Forgiveness, though cautious, was often part of this process.

Family Connection. Family relationships were strengthened as participants relied more on parents and siblings for support. They reported more open communication at home. A participant shared, *"I started talking to my mom about everything, and that made me feel safe again."* This support was critical for recovery.

Social Engagement. Participants described increased participation in community and school activities. Joining clubs and volunteering provided opportunities for new social roles. A 16-year-old remarked, *"Helping others in the community gave me purpose and new friends."* Social engagement was often linked to feelings of belonging and recognition.

Positive Role Models. Adolescents often highlighted the impact of mentors, such as teachers or counselors, who provided guidance and encouragement. One participant explained, *"My teacher always believed in me, and that gave me the courage to believe in myself."* These role models reinforced positive self-perceptions.

Category 3: Coping and Adaptive Strategies

Cognitive Reframing. Participants frequently described reframing their experiences of bullying in a more constructive light. They reinterpreted adversity as a

challenge that led to growth. A participant noted, *"I stopped seeing myself as a victim and started seeing myself as a fighter."* This reframing was a turning point in their recovery.

Problem-Solving Skills. Adolescents emphasized learning how to identify solutions and plan strategies to address problems. One explained, *"Instead of panicking, I think about the steps I can take to fix things."* Such skills were seen as transferable to school and personal challenges.

Seeking Professional Help. Some participants highlighted the importance of professional support. Counseling and psychoeducational programs were mentioned as key in their recovery. As one participant put it, *"Talking to a counselor gave me tools I never had before."* These interventions were described as life-changing.

Spiritual/Philosophical Coping. For several adolescents, spirituality and philosophy were coping resources. They turned to prayer, meditation, or personal beliefs about justice. One 17-year-old shared, *"When I prayed, I felt calmer, like someone was listening."* Such coping mechanisms added a layer of meaning to their experience.

Healthy Lifestyle Choices. Many adolescents adopted healthier routines as part of recovery. Engaging in sports, eating well, and ensuring proper sleep were described as strategies to feel stronger. A participant noted, *"When I started playing basketball, I felt healthier and more confident."*

Creative Expression. Adolescents also used creative outlets such as journaling, art, and music to cope with emotional pain. A participant explained, *"Writing in my diary helped me get the pain out."* Such activities provided safe channels for self-expression.

Digital Coping Tools. Finally, some participants turned to digital resources for support. Online peer groups, inspirational videos, and mental health apps were used to foster resilience. One adolescent stated, *"I joined an online community where people shared their stories—it made me feel less alone."*

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore the components of psychological growth in adolescents who had overcome bullying experiences. Through qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with 25 Spanish adolescents, three overarching themes emerged: Personal Transformation, Interpersonal Growth, and Coping and Adaptive Strategies.

Each theme encompassed multiple subthemes, such as self-confidence, emotional regulation, resilience, empathy, rebuilding trust, cognitive reframing, and creative coping. Together, these findings provide new insights into how adolescents navigate the aftermath of bullying, reconstruct their identities, and discover opportunities for personal development.

One of the most salient findings was the theme of personal transformation, where participants reported developing greater self-confidence, emotional regulation, self-awareness, and independence. This aligns with prior research documenting that adolescents can experience posttraumatic growth (PTG) after bullying victimization, with outcomes such as increased personal strength and greater appreciation of life (Cokorde Istri Ayu Laksmi & Valentina, 2020; Zhou et al., 2019). In particular, participants in this study emphasized learning to assert personal boundaries and developing autonomy in decision-making, consistent with findings that adolescents often reconstruct their sense of self following victimization (Xu et al., 2023).

Emotional regulation was described as an important process in recovery, as adolescents learned to manage anger, fear, and shame. These findings mirror previous evidence that rumination and maladaptive cognitive patterns mediate the relationship between negative emotions and trauma outcomes (Wang et al., 2020). When adolescents were able to transform maladaptive rumination into constructive reflection, they reported positive changes in emotional resilience, reinforcing the dual potential of bullying to result in either distress or growth.

Self-awareness and resilience-building also emerged as powerful outcomes, reflecting adolescents' capacity to identify strengths and reframe adversity as an opportunity for learning. Prior work demonstrates similar results, with meaning-making and resilience mediating the link between bullying severity and adult well-being outcomes (Ratcliff et al., 2025). The current findings extend this literature by illustrating adolescents' own accounts of resilience as a lived, dynamic process.

A second major theme was interpersonal growth, which highlighted the importance of peer support, communication, empathy, trust, family connection, and positive role models. Adolescents consistently emphasized the protective role of supportive friendships and family bonds, echoing studies that identify social support as a central factor in buffering the adverse effects of bullying and promoting PTG (Fitria, 2024; Panjikidze et al., 2019). For example, family support was

described as critical for regaining a sense of safety and belonging, consistent with research showing that family adversity increases vulnerability to mental health problems, whereas supportive environments foster recovery (Liu et al., 2024).

The finding that adolescents developed greater empathy toward others who were suffering resonates with studies demonstrating that traumatic experiences can enhance compassion and prosocial behavior (Kerinina & Kusristanti, 2023). Spirituality and compassion have been linked to PTG among adolescents exposed to relational trauma, and similar processes of empathy were evident in this study as participants reported being motivated to help peers facing similar difficulties.

Rebuilding trust and developing communication skills also emerged as central. Adolescents spoke about carefully selecting who to trust after being betrayed, while also learning to articulate their needs more clearly. Such findings are consistent with evidence that bullying experiences compromise feelings of security but that self-disclosure and selective openness can mediate recovery and growth (Xu et al., 2023). The importance of positive role models—teachers, counselors, or peers—was likewise emphasized, aligning with intervention research highlighting the impact of supportive adults on resilience outcomes (Cooley, 2023; Krock et al., 2023).

The third theme involved coping and adaptive strategies, ranging from cognitive reframing to healthy lifestyle changes and digital tools. Adolescents frequently reported that reframing bullying experiences as challenges rather than as definitive victimization was pivotal to their recovery. This resonates with evidence that meaning-making processes are key mediators between trauma exposure and PTG (Ratcliff et al., 2020).

Problem-solving skills were also widely mentioned, illustrating adolescents' efforts to respond proactively to difficulties. These findings complement research on violence intervention programs, where skill-building components help adolescents develop strategies for navigating challenging contexts (Krock et al., 2023). The role of professional support was also highlighted, with participants crediting counseling and therapeutic interventions as sources of new coping tools. This aligns with studies documenting the effectiveness of modular cognitive-behavioral therapy (Cooley, 2023) and narrative exposure therapy (Julian et al., 2024) in alleviating PTSS among adolescents exposed to bullying or other traumas.

Spiritual and philosophical coping strategies were also present, including prayer and meditation, which mirror findings from studies linking spirituality with PTG in adolescents (Kerinina & Kusristanti, 2023). Healthy lifestyle choices such as sports and balanced routines were noted, reinforcing evidence that active coping behaviors support well-being after trauma (Man et al., 2022). Creative expression through journaling, art, and music provided additional avenues for self-expression, echoing research that highlights the therapeutic benefits of expressive activities in adolescent recovery. Finally, the use of digital coping tools—such as online peer forums and inspirational content—underscores the relevance of contemporary digital environments in adolescents' lives. While prior studies have pointed to the risks of digital exposure in relation to violent or bullying content (Cui, 2024), the present findings reveal that adolescents can also use digital platforms constructively to build resilience.

Taken together, these findings reinforce and extend prior literature on bullying and adolescent mental health. The coexistence of risk and growth mirrors previous conclusions that bullying can lead to both PTSD and PTG depending on mediating factors (Chen, 2024; Wang et al., 2020). The emphasis on family and peer support aligns with global research showing that protective relational contexts moderate the impact of bullying across cultures (Man et al., 2022). Similarly, the centrality of meaning-making, self-compassion, and spirituality reflects findings from studies of vulnerable adolescents worldwide (Fitria, 2024; Kerinina & Kusristanti, 2023).

This study also resonates with work on diverse populations. For example, research on autistic adolescents indicates that school adjustment interacts with bullying experiences to influence emotional outcomes (Dawe-Lane et al., 2025), while studies on minority adolescents during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the compounding effects of discrimination and pre-existing victimization (H. Yang, 2024). Our findings extend this evidence by demonstrating that adolescents in Spain, too, reconstruct their identities and coping repertoires through complex interactions between personal, relational, and contextual factors.

Importantly, this study contributes to the growing recognition that adolescents are not merely passive victims of bullying but active agents who can transform adversity into opportunities for growth. This aligns with international research on PTG trajectories after disasters and violence (Panjikidze et al., 2019; Zhou et al., 2019) and supports a

paradigm shift toward resilience- and growth-focused approaches in adolescent mental health.

5. Limitations & Suggestions

While the findings of this study provide important insights into psychological growth in adolescents overcoming bullying, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted with a relatively small sample of 25 participants from Spain, which limits the generalizability of results to other cultural and geographic contexts. Second, reliance on self-reported narratives may have introduced recall bias, as adolescents may have reconstructed or reinterpreted their experiences retrospectively. Third, the study design did not include a longitudinal component, making it difficult to track changes in psychological growth over time. Finally, although NVivo software supported rigorous thematic analysis, the interpretive nature of qualitative research means that researcher subjectivity may have influenced theme identification despite efforts to ensure credibility and reflexivity.

Future studies could address these limitations by incorporating larger and more diverse samples across multiple countries to compare cultural differences in adolescent growth after bullying. Longitudinal designs would allow for examination of how growth unfolds across developmental stages and how enduring these changes are into adulthood. Mixed-methods approaches could integrate quantitative measures of resilience and PTG with qualitative narratives to capture both breadth and depth of adolescent experiences. Additionally, future research could investigate the role of digital environments in greater detail, examining how online communities and social media can simultaneously contribute to risk and resilience among bullied adolescents.

The findings of this study highlight several practical implications for educators, counselors, and policymakers. Schools should prioritize the creation of safe environments that foster peer support, open communication, and trust-building, as these were central to adolescents' reported growth. Counseling and therapeutic programs should integrate meaning-making, cognitive reframing, and self-compassion strategies, as these were shown to promote resilience. Families should be supported in strengthening open dialogue and emotional connection with adolescents, given the pivotal role of family bonds in recovery. Finally, digital platforms should be leveraged to provide adolescents

with accessible resources for coping and connection, transforming online spaces from potential sources of harm into tools for psychological growth.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who cooperated in carrying out this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this article.

References

- Boyes, M., Pantelic, M., Casale, M., Toska, E., Newnham, E. A., & Cluver, L. (2020). Prospective Associations Between Bullying Victimization, Internalised Stigma, and Mental Health in South African Adolescents Living With HIV. *Journal of affective disorders*, 276, 418-423. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2020.07.101>
- Chen, J. (2024). Differential Effects of Bullying and Cyberbullying in Adolescent PTSD. *TMBLS*, 7, 107-111. <https://doi.org/10.62051/msd7ca94>
- Cokorde Istri Ayu Laksmi, D., & Valentina, T. D. (2020). Posttraumatic Growth Among Adolescents Victims of Bullying. *Psikologia Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Penelitian Psikologi*, 15(1), 13-25. <https://doi.org/10.32734/psikologia.v15i1.4342>
- Cooley, J. L. (2023). Modular Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Victims of Bullying: A Case Report. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/95mqa>
- Cui, X. (2024). The Association Between Adolescents' Exposure to Violent Content and Bullying Behaviour. *International*

- Journal of Education and Humanities*, 17(2), 57-59.
<https://doi.org/10.54097/pr16er83>
- Dawe-Lane, E., Saunders, R., Flouri, E., & Mandy, W. P. L. (2025). Emotion and Peer Problems in Autistic Adolescents: The Role of Puberty, School Adjustment and Bullying. *JCPP Advances*.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jcv2.12305>
- Fitria, A. Z. N. (2024). Compassion for Trauma: Role of Self Compassion in Posttraumatic Growth of Fatherless Among Orphanage Adolescents. *Jurnal Ilmu Perilaku*, 8(1), 22-32.
<https://doi.org/10.25077/jip.8.1.22-32.2024>
- Guanizo, M. (2021). Suicide Ideation Among Early Adolescents in Selected Academic Institutions: A Basis for Specialized Guidance and Counseling Program. *International Journal of Research Studies in Education*, 10(14).
<https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrse.2021.a068>
- Julian, J. M., Conn, B. M., Chavez, M., Zubareva, N., & Wages, E. (2024). Narrative Exposure Therapy to Reduce Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms Among Transgender and Gender Diverse Adolescents and Young Adults: A Pilot Study. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000752>
- Kerinina, A., & Kusristanti, C. (2023). Spirituality and Posttraumatic Growth in Adolescent Girls With Dating Violence Experience. *Journal an-Nafs Kajian Penelitian Psikologi*, 8(1), 83-97. <https://doi.org/10.33367/psi.v8i1.3656>
- Krock, M., Burkhart, K., & Barksdale, E. M. (2023). Psychosocial Treatment of an Adolescent in a Hospital-Based Violence Intervention Program. *Children*, 10(6), 1018.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/children10061018>
- Li, C. (2023). The Relationship Between School Bullying and Mental Health Among Adolescents. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*, 31(1), 110-115.
<https://doi.org/10.54254/2753-7048/31/20231861>
- Liu, M., Liu, A. C. Y., Lin, W., Yu, X., & Wu, X. (2024). Patterns of Family Adversity and Bullying Involvement in Adolescents: Association With Mental Health Problems. *Journal of adolescence*, 97(3), 861-870.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/jad.12462>
- Man, X., Liu, J., & Xue, Z. (2022). Effects of Bullying Forms on Adolescent Mental Health and Protective Factors: A Global Cross-Regional Research Based on 65 Countries. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 19(4), 2374. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042374>
- Panjikidze, M., Beelmann, A., Martskvishvili, K., & Chitashvili, M. (2019). Posttraumatic Growth, Personality Factors, and Social Support Among War-Experienced Young Georgians. *Psychological Reports*, 123(3), 687-709.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0033294118823177>
- Ratcliff, J. J., Miller, A. K., Monheim, C. L., & Rice, C. J. (2025). Posttraumatic Growth and Meaning in Life Mediate the Relationship Between Severity of Adolescent Bullying Victimization and Adulthood Health Outcomes. *Journal of interpersonal violence*.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605251343203>
- Ratcliff, J. J., Tombari, J. M., Miller, A. K., Brand, P. F., & Witnauer, J. E. (2020). Factors Promoting Posttraumatic Growth in Sexual Minority Adults Following Adolescent Bullying Experiences. *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 37(7-8), NP5419-NP5441.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520961867>
- Sikorová, L., & Strakošová, T. (2022). Posttraumatic Growth in Children and Adolescents With Type 1 Diabetes. *Pielęgniarstwo XXI Wiek / Nursing in the 21st Century*, 21(3), 158-162. <https://doi.org/10.2478/pielxxiw-2022-0024>
- Snodgrass, M. A., Smith, S. L., & Gregus, S. J. (2024). Understanding Children and Adolescents' Experiences Being Bullied: A Mixed-Methods Study. *Trends in Psychology*.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s43076-024-00385-0>
- Tabbasam, U., Amjad, A. I., Ahmed, T., & Xing, Q. (2023). Comparison of Self-Strength, Seeking Help and Happiness Between Pakistani and Chinese Adolescents: A Positive Psychology Inquiry. *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion*, 25(3), 389-402.
<https://doi.org/10.32604/ijmhp.2023.024130>
- Wang, W., Wu, X., & Lan, X. (2020). Rumination Mediates the Relationships of Fear and Guilt to Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Posttraumatic Growth Among Adolescents After the Ya'an Earthquake. *European Journal of Psychotraumatology*, 11(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2008198.2019.1704993>
- Xu, Y., Ye, Y., Zha, Y., Zhen, R., & Zhou, X. (2023). School Bullying Victimization and Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms in Adolescents: The Mediating Roles of Feelings of Insecurity and Self-Disclosure. *BMC psychology*, 11(1).
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01065-x>
- Yang, C. (2024). Influences of Prepandemic Bullying Victimization and COVID-19 Peer Discrimination on Chinese American Adolescents' Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *School Psychology*, 39(1), 20-30.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000554>
- Yang, H. (2024). Posttraumatic Growth Experiences of North Korean Adolescent Refugees Living in South Korea: A Qualitative Case Study. *Psychological Trauma Theory Research Practice and Policy*, 16(Suppl 3), S679-S687.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001668>
- Zhou, X., Zhen, R., & Wu, X. (2019). Trajectories of Posttraumatic Growth Among Adolescents Over Time Since the Wenchuan Earthquake. *Journal of adolescence*, 74(1), 188-196.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.06.009>