

Wounds That Heal: A Photovoice Study of Post-Traumatic Growth Among Women Survivors of Domestic Violence Following Divorce

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Keywords:

Divorce, Domestic violence, Photovoice, Post-traumatic growth

Article history:

Received 23 June 2026

Received in revised form 25 June 2026

Accepted 29 June 2026

Available online 30 June 2026

Abstract. *Introduction* Domestic Violence has become a widespread issue in society, including Kupang City, with women being the primary victims. Incidents of domestic violence have both physical and psychological impacts on victims, resulting in traumatic experiences. Some women who experience domestic violence choose to divorce. Although research generally reports negative psychological adjustment among female survivors after divorce due to domestic violence, survivors may also demonstrate positive changes in their lives following the crisis caused by trauma.

Aim This study explores the forms and processes of Post-Traumatic Growth among divorced female survivors of domestic violence in the city of Kupang.

Result Thematic analysis identified five major themes: the dynamics of divorce, self-reflection, the strength to survive, rising from adversity, and making peace with life's circumstances.

Conclusion The findings indicate that although the survivors experienced traumatic events, there remained opportunities for positive personal growth through a process of self-reflection, ultimately leading to acceptance of the life circumstances they faced after divorcing due to domestic violence.

Introduction

Currently, the issue of domestic violence (DV) has become a widespread phenomenon within families. Domestic violence against women is particularly prevalent in Indonesian society (Siregar, 2024). This violent behavior is inherent in human nature and evident in everyday life through various events and actions, both intentional and unintentional (Paulino, 2017). When it occurs within the context of a relationship, it is considered Domestic Violence (DV) (Paulino, 2017).

In Indonesia, in 2025, there were 26,603 cases of violence against women, with 18.7% of them being housewives (KemenPPPA, 2025). This data also reports that East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province ranked sixth in Indonesia for the highest number of cases of violence against women, with 1,281 cases in 2025 (KemenPPPA, 2025). These findings highlight that violence against women, particularly in the domestic sphere, remains a serious issue in Indonesia, including in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province (Sooai et al., 2025).

These cases of violence deserve public attention. Women bear the brunt of domestic violence, and the perpetrators are mostly husbands, ex-husbands, or family members such as in-laws (Shorey et al., 2023). Causes of domestic violence against women include momentary anger from partners, financial and family problems, and jealousy (Cifci & Acik, 2022). Furthermore, the length of marriage, the number of children, and the husband's alcohol consumption are also factors significantly associated with domestic violence against women (Neetu Choudhary et al., 2024).

Domestic violence occurs in various forms and is detrimental to the victim. Research conducted by Turyahebwa (2023) found that the most common forms of domestic violence include physical aggression or assault by the perpetrator, such as hitting, kicking, biting, pushing, restraining, kidnapping, illegal imprisonment, violation of personal boundaries, and harassment. Perpetrators can also threaten victims, such as sexual harassment, emotional abuse, control or domination, intimidation, stalking, covert harassment, and neglect or abandonment of economic status (Turyahebwa, 2023).

Victims of domestic violence also experience long-term physical and psychological harm (Singla, 2025). While still in a marriage, women who experience violence experience direct impacts on their physical, mental, social, and financial well-being (Hing et al., 2021). The two most common impacts are physical and psychological. First, physical impacts experienced by women victims of violence include wounds, broken bones, headaches, difficulty sleeping, and digestive problems. Meanwhile, the psychological impacts experienced include symptoms

such as anxiety, sadness, difficulty sleeping, difficulty concentrating, decreased self-confidence, feelings of worthlessness, and shame (Massuaanna, 2024).

Women victims of domestic violence who have decided to leave and end their relationship with their abuser will often file for divorce. The divorce process occurs due to various interconnected issues, which can lead to ongoing disputes or arguments, such as domestic violence (Fauzia Latief et al., 2024). Women who file for divorce from their husbands indicate they have experienced various forms of domestic violence, both physical and verbal (Kartika et al., 2025).

Incidents of domestic violence experienced by women can be deeply traumatic and detrimental for victims (Suriyati, 2024). However, in some cases, women demonstrate strength and resilience to survive after leaving the relationship or deciding to divorce (Hulley et al., 2023). This condition leads to the growth of personal strength through Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG), or positive psychological changes in individuals after experiencing trauma such as domestic violence (Bryngeirsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2022). The increase in strength within survivors after divorce demonstrates their ability to process trauma to achieve positive growth. This condition serves as evidence that survivors of domestic violence who have divorced undergo positive reconstruction following the traumatic experiences they have endured.

Current research focuses more on the post-divorce impact on female survivors of domestic violence, such as traumatic experiences. There is little research emphasizing positive post-traumatic growth (PTG), especially for women who have divorced. Research by Asiyah & Amalia (2020) found that female victims of domestic violence who experienced traumatic events due to violence perpetrated by their perpetrators also experienced positive growth after their divorce.

Several previous studies have shown that women who have been divorced for one to five years have experienced psychological changes and a more positive adaptation to life (Haikal & Latipun, 2020; Sharma, 2011). This condition is influenced by various individual factors, such as the ability to express emotions, personality

traits, coping strategies, social environment, and feelings of optimism, which contribute to individuals' experiences of Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) (Farizka & Uasni, 2019).

A positive attitude and personal strength play a crucial role in experiencing PTG (Bryngeirsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2022). Female survivors of domestic violence have demonstrated the use of various strategies that lead to higher levels of psychological functioning and contribute to positive life changes (Guggisberg et al., 2021). This process fosters PTG, which aids individuals in recovering from adverse experiences. Research on PTG offers valuable insights into the changes most likely to occur following adversity, as well as the factors influencing them (Jayawickreme et al., 2021). Furthermore, the core domains of PTG relating to others, new possibilities, personal strength, spiritual growth, and appreciation of life serve as key dimensions that provide insight into the positive growth achievable after a crisis (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Aini & Faizah (2025) report that research on PTG in domestic violence survivors needs to be expanded to accelerate victims' achievement of positive growth. However, to date, PTG research has been limited, particularly to women who have been divorced. In the context of East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), particularly Kupang City, research related to PTG with domestic violence incidents as a form of traumatic experience has not yet been conducted. In the PTG model, individuals report positive changes in their sense of meaning in life, self-understanding, and interpersonal relationships following the successful overcoming of difficulties associated with traumatic experiences (Tedeschi et al., 2025). PTG is a crucial issue that deserves further research, and it is closely related to trauma disorders (Dell'osso et al., 2022).

In the study location, Kupang City, divorce cases increased again from 2022 to 2024, reaching 338 cases, compared to other regions in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) (BPS, 2025). Data obtained from the Kupang City Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, Population Control, and Family Planning (DP3AP2KB) in 2025 showed that 113 women experienced violence, with 50 of the

victims being housewives. Furthermore, data from the Legal Aid Institute of the Indonesian Women's Association for Justice (LBH APIK) NTT shows that divorce remains the dominant case, accounting for approximately 31% of the cases handled (Lodja, 2026). This divorce rate aligns with the high rate of domestic violence in Kupang City (Lodja, 2026).

Considering the high rate of divorce due to domestic violence in Kupang City, research related to Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) is necessary to identify and reflect on survivors' experiences during the recovery process, particularly those who have divorced. Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) can contribute to adjustment to life changes after divorce and can help identify ideal recovery interventions tailored to individual needs.

Based on the above background and referring to the conditions in Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), to date the author has not found any related research that specifically explores positive post-traumatic growth or Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) in female survivors of Domestic Violence (DV), especially those who have been divorced. The author will use the photovoice method, a research method with a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach by Wang & Burris (1997), to voice and produce in-depth data related to PTG in female survivors of DV after divorce.

The author believes that by using a qualitative method through the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, the author will discover and understand the lived experiences of women survivors of domestic violence after divorce comprehensively. This leads to the involvement of women survivors of domestic violence who can directly share, reflect on, and voice their lived experiences related to Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) through the stories they tell and the photovoice technique that will be used during the data collection process. The participatory element in this photovoice study is to empower marginalized communities (in this research, women as survivors of domestic violence who have undergone divorce) to speak for themselves.

Method

This study employs the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach through the photovoice technique, a strategy that can contribute to women's health (Wang & Burris, 1997). The researcher's role in this study is as a facilitator responsible for analyzing, reflecting on, and amplifying the photovoice findings reported by participants regarding post-traumatic growth (PTG) following divorce due to domestic violence.

Participants in this study will be recruited using a non-probability sampling technique, namely purposive sampling. Participants were reached through social connections while considering the study's key research criteria. Key participants recruited to take part in this study must meet the inclusion criteria set by the author, namely: 1) They must be female survivors of domestic violence who have been divorced for more than one year, 2) Have demonstrated Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) as indicated by screening results showing high and moderate scores according to the measurement tool used; 3) Aged between 18 and 50 years; 4) Able to communicate effectively in Indonesian; 5) Willing to participate in a series of research processes using the Photovoice data collection technique until completion, 6) Agree to take part in the research by signing the informed consent form provided by the author.

The scales used in this study were not intended for statistical analysis; they were used to identify, through a screening process, those participants who best meet the key criteria set by the authors or who have demonstrated better adaptation to life following trauma. The Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory-Short Form (PTGI-SF) comprises 25 items. It has been adapted for use in Indonesia by Rahmaningsih & Retnowati (2019) among women survivors of domestic violence, with validity coefficients ranging from 0.643 to 0.964 and a high reliability coefficient of 0.949.

The data in this study will be analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility in data management (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The coding approach used in this study is

inductive. Inductive coding is the process of developing codes and themes directly from the collected data, rather than based on pre-existing theories or frameworks. Data presentation through inductive coding is used to explore practical phenomena emerging from the field findings related to Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) among women survivors of domestic violence who have gone through divorce, particularly in Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT). The thematic analysis employed consists of six stages: familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes.

The screening results were analyzed using Excel software. The following are the complete demographics of the participants and the PTG screening results that the author conducted:

Table 1.

Participant demographics and PTG screening results

No	Pseudonym	Age	Highest Level of Education	Religion	Profession	The timing of the divorce	PTG Screening Results
1	Anna	42 Years	Secondary School	Islam	Housewife	2013	108 (high)
2	Risna	46 Years	Bachelor's degree	Protestant Christianity	Civil servants	2024	119 (high)
3	Sky	41 Years	Master's degree	Protestant Christianity	Civil servants	2022	74 (moderate)
4	Bunga	48 Years	Secondary School	Catholic	Civil servants	2012	112 (high)
5	Amy	45 Years	Bachelor's degree	Protestant Christianity	Civil servants	2018	102 (high)

Result

Based on the results of the thematic analysis, this study identified five main themes with 22 associated sub-themes, namely:

Theme 1: Divorce Dynamics

Subtheme 1, Forms of domestic violence: Participant Sky described experiencing domestic violence in the form of verbal psychological abuse, such as insults, verbal harassment, boundary violations, and gaslighting (psychological manipulation carried out by the perpetrator). In addition, participant Bunga revealed that the domestic violence experienced involved physical abuse inflicted by her ex-husband.

"Throughout my previous marriage, I was trapped in it; you may have noticed that from some of the things I reflected on earlier. Physically, no, rarely not just rarely, but almost not at all. Except when we had a debate or an argument that became so intense that there was pulling back and forth, not pushing; there was never really physical violence, almost none at all. It was more verbal. In the form of words, in the form of disrespect, insults, humiliation, and verbal abuse, it was absolutely overwhelming. So overwhelming that it made me unable to recognize my own worth, to realize that I had value, that I existed." (798–812, participant Sky interview).

"He was a drunk. If he was drunk and I reprimanded him, I was the one in the wrong. As husband and wife, we don't like it when our husband is like that. Especially when there are children, the children will definitely see it. So it becomes a bad example. Before we had children, he still liked to get drunk, and I knew he drank. I hoped that after we had children, he would stop behaving like that, but instead it got even worse. And if I reprimanded him, he would say I was a bad wife, and he would hit me." (833–844, interview with participant Bunga).

Subtheme 2, Physical Condition: Participants Risna, Sky, and Bunga revealed that after divorcing due to domestic violence, they experienced physical changes such as being better able to take care of themselves, improved physical fitness, and greater physical comfort because they were no longer subjected to violence.

"Yes, physically, the difference is huge. Back then, I felt really neglected, but now I can take care of myself—I can. Back then, I was like I wasn't being taken care of at all, but now I can take good care of myself." (1099–1014, interview with participant Risna)

"Physically, at the beginning, it actually became easier for me to do all kinds of things." (888–890, interview with participant Sky).

"It's not that I'm fat, but my body just feels better, because people don't hit me like that anymore." (910 - 915, interview with participant Bunga).

Subtheme 3, Psychological Condition: Participant Bunga reported that in the early stages of her life following the divorce, she experienced stressful circumstances. Still, over time she no longer focused on that experience.

"At first, when you've just broken up, you're bound to feel a little stressed out. But after that, it passes; time goes by, and I don't think about it anymore." (905–908, interview with Bunga).

Sky, a participant, also revealed that after getting a divorce due to domestic violence, she experienced profound psychological effects, namely anxiety.

"But unfortunately, I had to deal with anxiety again, which eventually led to psychosomatic symptoms. I've been struggling with this for 3–4 years, and I'm still dealing with it now. But I feel freer, not in a negative sense, as if I can do bad things, but freer to express who I truly am. Mentally, it's very clear: I don't need to be apprehensive about how to talk to other people; I no longer pick and choose my friends; I no longer, even when it comes to simply saving a phone number, have that overwhelming fear" (890–903, interview with participant Sky).

Theme 2: Self-Reflection

Subtheme 1, Reflections on Women's Self-Worth: Participant Risna revealed that after divorcing her husband due to domestic violence, she began to reflect on herself in a new light, realizing that she had autonomy over her own life (control), was capable of empowering herself without economic exploitation, and demonstrated her self-worth through her self-defined values as a woman.

"I can just be myself now. Because back when I was with my husband, everything revolved around him. Now I'm my own person; I can do anything. I can manage things on my own, and I feel like I'm truly valuable. Back then, I just worked for him—everything was for him. Even my paycheck went straight to him. Every time I got paid, I'd give it to him right away. Now I can finally be myself." (1086–1095, interview with participant Risna).

Subtheme 2, Reflections on Spiritual Life: Participant Amy revealed that when she went through a divorce due to domestic violence, she blamed God for what had happened as a way of evaluating her spiritual life. However, Amy has since reflected on the situation and realized that there is still a silver lining or positive value in the decisions she made regarding her relationship with her ex-husband, as well as in the impact those decisions have had on her life.

"It's true that at the very, very beginning, I often blamed God, or rather, it wasn't really about prayer. Before I prayed, sometimes when I was alone, I'd say, "God is cruel. God doesn't love us. Why does God have to give us such a huge trial?" So, that's when I blamed God and felt disappointed in Him. But now that I've been seeking God more, I've gradually come to realize that this is God's plan. There's a silver lining. Maybe, and this is just my take, the good part is that my ex-husband has debts everywhere. So, I don't think about that anymore; that's his own problem. There are actually a lot of things I can compare now with how things were before we separated" (304–320, interview with participant Amy).

Subtheme 3, The Desire to Move Forward with Life: Participant Amy shared that after experiencing domestic violence and divorce, she developed a desire to move forward with life. This desire has kept her strong to this day. Participant Bunga also

expressed a similar sentiment, noting that even though she had gone through experiences of violence and divorce, she still has a desire to move forward with her life.

"I don't want to keep living in sadness; I know this is something no one else should ever go through, but since I'm in this situation, I have to be able to move forward with my life. That's what has kept me going until now" (705-709, interview with participant Amy)

"It's like this. I just want to get on with my life. Because people say that life is full of both hardships and joys. My hardships have indeed come in the form of this domestic violence and divorce. But even after going through the abuse and divorcing my ex-husband, whether I like it or not, I still have to keep living my life—that's the bottom line. I want to live my life with my children." (892-901, interview participant Bunga).

Theme 3: The Strength to Rise Again

Subtheme 1, Reconnecting With The Nuclear Family: Participant Anna reported that being welcomed back by her immediate family brought her closer to them emotionally; similarly, participant Risna highlighted the happiness she felt after reuniting with her immediate family.

"Oh, during the marriage, since I was living with my husband, we weren't that close. I mean... After the divorce, we became even closer because I spent more time with my family; back then, I spent more time at home with my ex-husband" (595-600, interview participant Anna)

"What I mean is, back then, when I was with my husband, I never got together with my family like this. But now that I'm no longer with my husband, I'm happy to spend time with my family through both good times and bad. Back then, with my husband, it was basically just the two of us; he could spend time with his family, but he wasn't allowed to do the same with my family or my friends." (297-307, interview participant Risna).

Subtheme 2, Receiving Family Support: Participant Risna revealed that after her divorce, she received instrumental support from her family in the form of assistance with her daily living expenses.

"What I mean is, basically, if there's any kind of shortage, I'll just say so, and they'll definitely help out, first of all, whatever it is, like if we're short on something, like if we're short on rice, or if I'm having a hard time, they'll help. I've never actually had to ask, but my relatives and I really care about each other, so we help each other out. We have this kind of spiritual bond. Later, when they come to visit, I have the most children; my siblings only have one or two, while I have five; actually, now there are seven, including my grandchildren, and even more with the grandchildren. So when they come over, sis, and when they go home, they give us money, bring vegetables, or buy meat like chicken or tofu; they'll give us one chicken, and the neighbors next door get one too. Basically, that's how it is; we just love to share. That's how it is, sis; we're like siblings." (1226-1236, interview participant Risna).

Subtheme 3, Strengthening Social Relationships: Participants Bunga and Amy emphasized that their involvement with their social circles, such as close friends and acquaintances, helped them provide informative support in the form of advice, suggestions, and guidance, while still respecting personal values, as expressed by participant Bunga.

"This is my best friend. She was the first one to know about that problem from the very beginning, and she's the kind of person who laughs a lot and is funny; she's also very religious. So she always pays attention to me, giving me advice and support. Basically, she gives me her thoughts, but she also says it's entirely up to me. But she always makes me laugh, takes me out, and invites me places like that. Even though we work at different offices, whenever we meet, she always makes me laugh..." (570-583, interview participant Bunga).

"Hanging out with friends helps me stay strong. As it happens, a lot of my friends already know about it, so they invite me to hang out. That's what makes it so that I have friends around me who can help me not think about the problems I'm facing. But they encourage me so that I can bounce back". (144-152, interview participant Amy).

Subtheme 4, Finding Stress-Coping Strategies: Participant Risna explained that activities such as taking a break (spending a little time outdoors) or going for a walk help her manage stress more effectively and rejuvenate both her body and mind.

"This is so much more refreshing. So I let them go. I worked so hard so they could go on a trip like this. Back then, I never did anything like this". (833-836, interview participant Risna)

Participant Bunga expressed a similar view regarding the stress coping strategies she uses to manage stressful situations. Unlike participants Anna and Risna, Bunga prefers to focus on her work to take her mind off her worries.

"Work basically, as long as I'm working, I can definitely do it. I don't really like playing video games, but I'm not too fond of them either. So, when I'm working, whatever's weighing on my mind just goes away. I've been doing this job from the very beginning, from when I first started until now, and I really like it. If it keeps growing, maybe I'll modify the work app a bit." (710-718, interview participant Bunga, see figure 1).

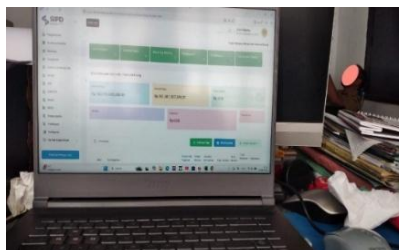


Figure 1. Picture taken by Bunga – this is the work I have been doing for a long time, and it helps me forget my problems

Theme 4: Rise from adversity

Subtheme 1, Children As A Source Of Strength: Participant Sky echoed this sentiment, explaining that she was able to stay strong and bounce back because of her children, a responsibility stemming from her marriage.

"This second photo shows me holding hands with my child. The caption I wrote reads: "Those little hands clasped tightly don't mean they're without wounds, but that they're learning to be strong even in silence." I actually took this right before we both went to sleep. Since physical touch is my child's primary love language, we were holding hands, and I tried to capture the moment in this photo. I also feel that this handhold I captured represents my responsibility to keep moving forward after the separation I went through. I described that separation in the caption as a "wound," and on this journey, the separation I chose to make did indeed leave a wound. But even after feeling that pain, I'm still learning to be strong because this small handhold reminds me to keep fighting. Even in silence, and by "in silence," I mean that this handhold conveys quite a lot without me having to share my pain with many people. Perhaps that's one way—whether it's a strength or a weakness, I'm not sure, but I want to show that, even in silence, I keep moving forward and fighting. Because my child's handhold compels me to take responsibility for whatever happens in life" (121-153, interview participant Sky, see figure 2).



Figure 2. Picture taken by Sky - a small hand tightly clasped, not meaning without wounds, but learning to be strong even in silence

Subtheme 2, Strengthening Spiritual Relationships With God: Participant Anna described her spiritual growth by achieving the highest honor in Islam: performing the Umrah pilgrimage with her mother.

"Oh, this is truly amazing; it's like I've reached the pinnacle. You know, people going on the Umrah need everything: money, time, and so on. Alhamdulillah, maybe this is the answer to all my prayers, all my suffering, and everything I've been through. Being able to go to the House of God is truly amazing. Being called, especially since I'm going with my mother, is truly extraordinary, because traveling there, to a foreign country, isn't that easy; we have to go through this process, and that, and all sorts of things; that's just how it is". (378-389, interview participant Anna).

Personal Development: Participant Risna spoke of how their increased inner strength has led to the mental resilience needed to stay strong and bounce back for the sake of their children.

"I've always been strong actually, I've always been strong. But now that I've made it this far on my own, I'm even stronger. Because now that I've made it this far on my own, I'm even stronger dealing with the kids and taking care of them myself." (1277-1282, interview participant Risna).

Participant Sky shared that after her divorce, she was able to engage in activities she enjoyed while also developing her skills in making handicrafts.

"So this is actually one of the things I've been doing to fill my time after the breakup. Before, it had never crossed my mind to learn a new skill to fill the void or keep myself busy. These handmade knots were created to show that I'm spending my time on positive activities that actually have economic value. It's not that I don't have a job, but this is more about filling that void with positive activities that I might never have had the chance to do before. The meaning might be simple, but I've named them "Sweet Knots," and this name conveys a positive message. So this is actually the name of my small business, which I've illustrated in the four photos I've combined—they feature handicrafts and handmade knots" (208-228, interview participant Sky, see figure 3).



Figure 3. Picture taken by Sky - sweet knot

Subtheme 4, Healthy Relationship Boundaries: Participant Anna described her boundaries in interpersonal relationships, particularly regarding future partners.

"Yes, of course, if we want to start a family again, what we're aiming for is definitely to be happy. So if we're going to suffer all the time emotionally, what's the point of getting married? What's the point of getting married if we're just going to suffer? So, of course, never choose the wrong person." (768-773, interview participant Anna).

Similar sentiments were expressed by participants Sky and Amy, who discussed the criteria for setting boundaries in building relationships, particularly regarding potential partners seeking to form a bond.

"Yes, at the very least, the people close to me share my perspective when it comes to evaluating things. In the past, I might have overlooked the fact that, after all, what difference did it make?"

At the very least, the way he views life, his vision and mission, and the standards he sets for himself in everything he does are, at the very least, the same as mine". (1011-1019, interview participant Sky).

"As for other criteria, if, for example, there's someone close to me, I'd look for specific traits; I'd check those traits first. Basically, if they don't get drunk, don't gamble, and don't use harsh language, those are the traits I look for. But right now, I have no intention of getting close to anyone else, because I have my own fears, for example, that someone might seem nice at first but then change later on. So for now, I'd rather just stay with my kids." (580-591, interview participant Amy).

Subtheme 5, Career Transformation Toward Independence: Anna, one of the participants, explained that after her divorce, she faced challenges in finding a job; however, once she found one, she was able to save money to meet her basic daily needs and send her child to school until graduation.

"Work and save money. After a divorce, it's automatically hard to find a job, right? And on top of that, I didn't go to school as my younger siblings did. So I have very little experience. Then I was asked to help out at a store. Well, it seems like that's how I'll be able to save up enough to support my child until they finish school". (907-905, interview participant Anna).

Sky, a participant, revealed that after divorcing her abusive husband, many opportunities arose related to work, one of which was being entrusted with a leadership position.

"I've accomplished a lot lately; my work has improved, and I've gained a great deal of trust since my breakup; I don't know why. Maybe that's what my coworkers have noticed, too. There have even been achievements I never expected; for example, I was given the opportunity to take on a leadership role. So I feel like this is a blessing for me, and I finally feel like I'm being properly valued". (1056-1066, wawancara partisipan Sky).

Finding Meaning In The Role Of A Single Mother: Participant Anna explained that, as a single mother, she needs to work harder to cover her daily living expenses, including her child's and family's needs, as well as savings for her retirement. This situation illustrates the full extent of Participant Anna's responsibility as the head of her small family.

"Well, that's life; we have to eat. We have a lot of needs, too. So we have to work extra hard. Especially since we're single or single mothers. Naturally, we have to work a lot. Even though we're not employees, we're just entrepreneurs; we have to keep trying. So we can put food on the table every day, save for our old age, provide for our children, and support our families. That's just how it is. The main thing is, as people say, the kitchen fire has to keep burning". (308-317, interview participant Anna).

A similar situation was described by participant Sky, who revealed that after divorcing due to domestic violence, he found the strength to take on the dual roles of father and mother—something he had never expected to be able to do.

“My strength is that I’m strong enough to fulfill the role of both a mom and a dad to my child. I used to be very worried, but so far, I haven’t encountered any shortcomings; I’ve been able to fulfill that role.” (1001-1006, interview participant Sky).

The Emergence Of A New Life Orientation: Participant Sky believes that despite all the life experiences she has gone through, from domestic violence to divorce, there is still room for hope in her life. This hope, in turn, serves as a driving force, encouraging Sky to grow and move toward a better life.

“Okay, actually this photo of the moon was taken in my backyard because I was already intrigued by the sight of the moon on my way home from work. And then, wow, the moon was actually really big at that moment. So I intentionally took the photo from my backyard that night because, well, when I said, “Oh, look at the moon!” it was actually there. The meaning behind it is that sometimes the moon’s light is visible, and sometimes it isn’t because we can’t be certain, or perhaps due to the limitations of our knowledge, we can’t know when the moon will appear or when it won’t. But the underlying message is that there’s always light there. There’s always something bright, and when I took that photo, it illustrated that behind all our ignorance, there’s always hope, reflected through the moonlight. So sometimes we notice the moon is there, sometimes it isn’t, but there’s always the certainty that the moon or the light reflected by it will definitely be there, even if it’s sometimes dim or invisible; it never truly disappears”. (39-62, interview participant Sky, see figure 4).



Figure 4. Picture taken by Sky - Sometimes it fades, but it never disappears

Theme 5: Making peace with life’s circumstances

Namely Relationships With The Ex-Husband’s Family: Participant Anna revealed that her relationship with her ex-husband’s family, with whom she had previously been in conflict, has improved, driven by her desire to achieve a healthy resolution (closure) and her preference to put the past behind her to lead a more peaceful life now.

"Things are fine now. So, when we run into each other at events, we shake hands. We've started greeting each other. Sometimes they also ask how my child is doing. Yeah, things are fine; they're fine. It's not like it used to be. Because at first, everyone was still pretty heated. But as time has gone by, well, why bother fighting? It's pointless anyway. We don't gain anything from constantly fighting after all; let's just live in peace from now on". (649-659, interview participant Anna).

Reorientation Of The Meaning Of Family: Sky believes that a complete family is everyone's dream, but as long as she cannot find happiness for herself, that happiness is meaningless.

"It's true that a complete family is everyone's dream in social life. But if we can't find ourselves in that relationship, I think it's pointless. Because as we go through life until it all comes to an end, what matters is that we can be happy and bring happiness to those around us". (1242-1249, interview participant Sky).

Participant Amy explained that, for her, "family" currently refers to her time with her children, without the involvement of her partner, whose domestic violence has caused her emotional pain.

"I see my family now as just me and the kids, even though we live modestly, as long as we're happy and there's no violence, so we're closer; I've also become closer to the kids. We can go out and do whatever we want, and even when we're at home, we can still have a blast, share stories, and ask each other's opinions. They can also talk about anything, whether it's their problems with school or their relationships with their boyfriends. So that's what I've felt since we separated". (769-781, interview participant Amy).

Increased Gratitude: Participant Anna talked about her daily activities, which make her feel grateful for life. This led her to reflect on the importance of appreciating the simple, small things in life, such as carrying out daily activities.

"Yeah, as usual, our days are spent cleaning the house, taking care of our parents, and looking after our nieces and nephews; that's what our daily life is like. Cleaning the house, sometimes cooking, making sure the house is clean, it just makes us feel more grateful". (39-44, interview participant Anna).

Sky also expressed gratitude for her job. She shared that even after going through a traumatic life event, she still has a job that makes her feel blessed.

"Actually, at the time, I wasn't really looking for an idea either, because when it was explained to me, I felt that the photo I took didn't have to be staged or look a certain way. So I wanted to capture it exactly as it appeared in my mind. This was when I was sitting at my desk; I took the photo, and the room was still empty. This serves as a reminder for me to be grateful. Even though I've made some major decisions that aren't exactly something to be proud of, I'm still blessed through my work. Work that allows me to get by and also feel proud of myself, proud in the sense that even though there have been separations in my personal life, God still blesses

me through good work, very good work that provides for my livelihood. That's why I chose "deeply blessed". (401-422, interview participant Sky).

Time For Recovery: According to participant Bunga, time plays a very important role in the healing process following a divorce caused by domestic violence. After separating from her ex-husband, participant Bunga was able to get back on her feet and described time as a catalyst for growth.

"Yeah, as time goes by, everything gets better; the hard times eventually turn into happy ones. Anyway, time heals me. People say that, as time goes by, everything is bound to get better. This is a photo I took of a wall clock; it symbolizes that, after breaking up with him, I was able to pick myself up slowly, and here I am today". (774-782, interview participant Bunga).

Finding New Happiness: Participant Anna revealed that after leaving a relationship marked by domestic violence, which had long made her feel trapped, she experienced a new psychological shift upon leaving the relationship, described as a sense of relief and being able to breathe freely. Similarly, participant Risna expressed the same sentiment regarding a newfound happiness, describing the psychological changes she experienced, namely feeling freer and, in particular, having improved relationships, as she was no longer under pressure.

"That new happiness comes from within. It's as if my inner self, which used to feel trapped, has finally been set free. Being able to breathe freely like that is a new kind of happiness for me". (991-995, interview participant Anna).

"Yes, I'm happier, freer. I'm not under pressure anymore like I used to be, like when I couldn't do anything at all. Imagine if I'm just hanging out with a good friend of mine, if I'm walking with him, or we run into each other on the street, you're not allowed to look at other people. Because here, if you even try to say hello, it'll end up being a big deal". (852-859, interview participant Risna).

Discussion

The first finding of the study concerns the forms of DV experienced by divorced female survivors. Survivors highlight physical violence and psychological violence, including verbal abuse, violation of personal boundaries, and gaslighting or psychological manipulation. Physical violence dominates, especially during conflicts between partners. Survivors also reported experiencing psychological violence in the form of verbal abuse from ex-husbands. Verbal violence, although less visible than physical violence, is increasingly recognized due to its psychological and emotional consequences through mechanisms such as humiliation, harassment, ridicule, and

threats, all of which aim to damage the victim's self-esteem (Hamamra et al., 2025). Survivors also reported experiencing gaslighting from ex-husbands as a form of DV. Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation that causes victims to doubt their perception of reality, usually leading to loss of self-control and emotional and mental instability (Klein et al., 2026). This study found that gaslighting by perpetrators made survivors feel worthless.

After experiencing DV and undergoing divorce, women survivors need to find space to achieve PTG. This study found that survivors engage in self-reflection as a process of achieving PTG, described in the second theme. This reflection is intentional rumination, which refers to deliberately and deeply thinking about something to cope with negative events and potentially leading individuals toward growth (Ravelo et al., 2024). The findings reveal that survivors engage in various forms of reflection to find meaning in their experiences and discover the strength to survive and rise from crises. Survivors consciously reflect to release traumatic experiences and build resilience to continue striving in a positive way. These findings show an important relationship between intentional rumination and the process of achieving PTG. This reflection also contributes to the release of negative emotions related to trauma, such as sadness or distress after a crisis. Self-reflection in this study concerns self-worth, spiritual life, and the desire to continue living.

The survivors' initial reflections concerned their self-esteem as women. After experiencing violence and separating through divorce, female survivors developed a new understanding of their self-worth. The findings of this study indicate that survivors underwent cognitive changes in how they viewed their self-esteem. They no longer saw themselves within the framework of being worthless survivors of violence but instead developed a new understanding that women are valuable, possess worth, and are capable of being their authentic selves. Being a survivor does not mean remaining weak and powerless; rather, responsibility toward themselves and their families enabled the survivors to cultivate the strength to rise again and recognize the value of their self-worth as strong women. The findings of this study

show that survivors developed a new perspective on their traumatic past, transforming it into a positive outlook through the process of reflection (Bokore, 2026).

The second reflection relates to spiritual life. As members of a society living within a collective spiritual culture in Kupang City, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), survivors developed spiritual reflections concerning their experiences of domestic violence and divorce, as well as the involvement of the Creator. This study found that survivors of domestic violence reflected on their spiritual lives in ways that not only helped them recover but also enabled them to discover new meaning and greater depth in their spiritual existence. The reflections on spiritual life were related to failed marriages caused by domestic violence, as well as divorce.

However, the survivors were able to find new and positive meaning from these experiences in relation to their connection with the Creator. One survivor described reflecting on her relationship with spirituality while still experiencing inner struggles because she had not yet found wholehearted commitment. This condition indicates that the survivor did not experience a decline in spirituality but rather demonstrates that there was still an active spiritual awareness to recognize and reflect upon the emotions that arose. After engaging in reflection, the survivor found determination and steadfastness, although she continued to experience inner struggles.

The findings also show that during her experience of domestic violence and divorce, one participant blamed God for what had happened to her. After engaging in spiritual activities and a process of faith reflection, the survivor came to realize that God had still provided positive value through the life experiences she had endured, such as being spared from the negative consequences of her former husband's behavior. These findings are consistent with previous research conducted by Winkel et al. (2023), which found that although spirituality is not associated with negative trauma outcomes, it can help individuals engage in constructive reflection to develop positive outcomes and achieve PTG.

The third reflection identified in this study serves as a foundation for survivors to achieve PTG. Survivors who engage in reflection as part of their recovery generally undergo changes, including trauma processing that may manifest in various situations (Davies et al., 2016). This study found that reflection for recovery among survivors of domestic violence who had gone through divorce refers to the desire to move forward with their lives after experiencing traumatic events. Survivors reported that after experiencing domestic violence and divorce, they developed a desire to live a life free from violence. They also preferred to move forward by letting go of negative emotions, such as profound sadness, particularly those associated with the domestic violence inflicted by their former husbands. These findings represent a starting point for survivors to recognize the meaning of their self-worth, identify protective factors, and rise from the traumatic experiences they endured. Letting go of negative emotions, particularly feelings of sadness, also indicates that survivors have established a new priority: to pursue a better life rather than remain trapped in the suffering caused by domestic violence.

Furthermore, after reflecting on self-worth as women, spiritual life, and the desire to continue living, DV survivors who have divorced can recognize and find a foundation for survival from their crisis experiences. This is an initial foundation for survivors to adapt again to life after crisis before demonstrating growth. Survivors reported four survival foundations: reconnection with the nuclear family, family support as a protective factor, strengthening social relationships, and finding adaptive stress-coping strategies. These four themes serve as a foundation that enables survivors to endure and use available resources so that trauma does not disrupt daily life.

After gaining survival strength as a foundation, survivors transform into recovery and growth. This is not only the ability to survive but also indicates psychological development to a higher level beyond the initial point after traumatic experiences. Women DV survivors who have gone through divorce experience various forms of growth after the crisis, even emerging with new forms of growth

beyond PTG boundaries, such as children as a source of strength, establishing interpersonal boundaries, discovering the meaning of family roles, and understanding new life orientations.

The final theme of this study is reconciliation with life conditions. This indicates that women DV survivors who have divorced have accepted their crisis experiences, recognized that the wounds are part of life, and used them as experiences for growth. The findings refer to changes in relationships with the ex-husband's family that caused harm, reorientation of the meaning of a complete family, increased gratitude, time that supports healing, and finding simple new happiness. In addition, reconciliation with life conditions shows that survivors can accept the recovery process and return to a normal life without trauma (Barbas Marques Pereira & Nunes da Silva, 2025).

This study revealed several new and interesting findings. These new findings can provide additional perspectives related to Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) among female survivors of domestic violence who have divorced. This study identified several new components that fall outside the scope of PTG or beyond the five aspects of PTG identified by Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004). The new findings in this study emphasize the processes involved in achieving PTG, namely reflection and the release of negative emotions. Tedeschi & Calhoun (2004) noted that reflection plays a crucial role in achieving PTG. However, they did not specify which reflective model is associated with the trauma individuals experience. In this case, the author identifies the models of reflection experienced by female survivors of domestic violence who have gone through a divorce, an event that provided a traumatic experience, namely: reflection on their self-worth as women; reflection on spirituality, particularly regarding their ended marriage; and reflection on moving forward with life, which served as a turning point for achieving PTG. This model of reflection offers new insights into PTG research regarding post-traumatic recovery among women survivors of domestic violence who have gone through a divorce, particularly in Indonesia. Another interesting finding from this study is the establishment of

boundaries in healthy relationships. Previous research on post-traumatic growth (PTG) has emphasized deep social connectedness after trauma, without addressing boundaries in those relationships. In this study, survivors reported developing relationship boundaries rather than merely forming deep bonds. The boundaries they established referred to their ability to avoid similar traumatic events such as domestic violence and to maintain their psychological safety and mental health.

Conclusion

This study found that women who are survivors of domestic violence in Kupang City and have gone through a divorce have experienced various positive changes related to post-traumatic growth (PTG). Although they have experienced traumatic and crisis-inducing events such as domestic violence and divorce, survivors can still experience growth as a result of the decisions they have made. This demonstrates that in every life journey, there is an opportunity for individuals to grow rather than remain stuck in crisis or despair after a divorce.

The findings of this study provide insight that women who are survivors of domestic violence and have gone through a divorce can achieve PTG through varied experiences depending on their personality and supportive environment. This study identified five themes related to post-traumatic growth (PTG) among female survivors of domestic violence who have gone through a divorce, such as divorce dynamics, self-reflection, resilience, recovery from adversity, and coming to terms with one's life circumstances. PTG is an ongoing process aimed at achieving maximum growth; it is not merely about adaptation. These findings provide evidence that there is certainly room for growth in every disruptive life journey, whether physical or psychological.

Suggestion

Participants in this study are expected to maintain their PTG, particularly those focused on the strength to survive and recover from adversity (growth). Participants also learned that simple daily activities demonstrate appreciation for life

and contribute to the development of PTG. The findings also emphasize intentional reflection and self-disclosure, which participants can use to gain social support and positively reflect on their life experiences. The community can play a practical role as the primary source of support for survivors of domestic violence to prevent social isolation, particularly that associated with the stigma of being a single mother. Through this research, the community can also serve as agents in providing education about healthy relationships, thereby breaking the cycle of violence within the household. Such programs can be implemented in the community through schools and public service organizations.

Future research should focus on a more specific population, particularly survivors with moderate levels of PTG, to obtain more in-depth data and emphasize the process of achieving PTG. Studies should also explore barriers that hinder PTG among female survivors, as these factors were not fully identified in the present study. Further research may investigate the psychological experiences of survivors who have achieved PTG or apply other positive psychology frameworks, such as authentic happiness. Because all participants in this study were employed, future studies should include survivors without economic independence to provide a broader understanding of recovery. Action research using participatory approaches, such as participatory video, may also offer valuable insights and practical interventions to support survivors' recovery and empowerment.

Acknowledgement

This study was not funded by any institution and was conducted independently. The author would like to thank Rumah Harapan GMIT in Kupang for connecting the author with one of the participants.

Author contribution

EJAH is the lead author of this study and contributed to the research topic, methodology, analysis results, and discussion. MKPAK, RPM, and YD contributed to the revision of the research topic, methodology, and data analysis.

Competing interest

There were no conflicts of interest during the conduct of this study.

Funding

This study was conducted independently using funding provided to the principal investigator, Eduardus Julio Angga Huky.

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