



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Transformative Powerlessness: The Role of Powerlessness in Recovery from Interpersonal Trauma

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OPEN ACCESS

PUBLISHED

31 December 2024

CITATION

Flint, T., Eytan, S., 2024.
Transformative Powerlessness: The
Role of Powerlessness in Recovery
from Interpersonal Trauma. Medical
Research Archives, [online] 12(12).
[https://doi.org/10.18103/mra.v12
i12.6041](https://doi.org/10.18103/mra.v12i12.6041)

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DOI

[https://doi.org/10.18103/mra.v12
i12.6041](https://doi.org/10.18103/mra.v12i12.6041)

ISSN

2375-1924

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study delves into the complex nature of powerlessness, a significant aspect of the suffering experienced by survivors of interpersonal trauma. While powerlessness is typically viewed as a negative attribute, spiritual teachings suggest that embracing it can lead to inner peace and calm. A phenomenological study was conducted, interviewing 49 survivors of various interpersonal traumas who turned to spirituality for recovery. Once seen as a hindrance, powerlessness became a recovery tool that enabled participants to seek help while rejecting helplessness. This process involved hitting rock bottom, experiencing Transformative Powerlessness, and ultimately submitting to spirituality and the Sublime. Interviews analysis unveiled the different components of Transformative Powerlessness and the paradoxes that exist within it. This article offers a fresh perspective on powerlessness, showcasing how accepting it in its most extreme form empowers individuals to choose life and seek help. In promoting recovery processes, caregivers, family members, and trauma survivors can utilize this innovative concept of Transformative Powerlessness.

Introduction

Interpersonal trauma is a traumatic event involving any of the following experiences: emotional abuse, emotional neglect, physical abuse, physical neglect, and/or sexual abuse in childhood and/or adulthood¹. This study aims to show how a full acceptance of powerlessness in the face of interpersonal trauma and its consequences can transform the experience from a threatening one into an empowering one^{2,3}.

Due to its numerous grief consequences, interpersonal trauma is considered to be the most devastating of personal experiences⁴. Survivors of interpersonal trauma suffer from various physiological, mental, spiritual, and functional disorders^{5,6,7}. Additionally, survivors experience a loss of trust⁵, self-blame⁸, a sense of helplessness and despair⁹, and a sense of powerlessness^{3 10}.

A sense of powerlessness was found to be a significant component in the suffering of interpersonal trauma survivors¹⁰. Thus, the recovery process should emphasize empowerment and transformation⁴. More often than not, this transformation from feeling powerless to being empowered involves a spiritual journey^{11,12,13}. In this study, we describe this phenomenon and suggest calling it Transformative Powerlessness (TP).

POWERLESSNESS

The term 'powerlessness' is often interchanged with the term 'helplessness'. Milberg et al.² clarified that while powerlessness is the perception of individuals of themselves as lacking efficacy and control over circumstances, helplessness is the perception of individuals that no one else has the ability and/or the desire to help them². When experienced simultaneously, helplessness and powerlessness generate a sense of utter despair¹³ and suffering¹⁴.

In Positive Victimology, Ronel³ distinguished between initial powerlessness, i.e. the victim's response to the actual offensive event(s), and secondary powerlessness, i.e. their response to the event's unwanted implications. Ronel³ suggested that survivors experience secondary powerlessness

when they obsessively attempt to understand why they were powerless during the offensive event in order to gain a sense of control over it and avoid future similar situations. Survivors' desire to gain control over the uncontrollable, be it the past traumatic events or the post-trauma symptoms (PTSS), causes them to suffer¹⁵ and experience self-disappointment¹⁶.

Powerlessness is usually considered as undesirable, harmful, and even life-threatening¹⁷, as it is considered to reduce and hinder the chances of recovery from interpersonal trauma¹⁸. However, other doctrines suggest differently, especially in the humanities, study of religion, and philosophy. These philosophical, religious, and spiritual methods advise individuals to quest for the experience of powerlessness, to fully accept it, find peace and tranquility within it, and even reach enlightenment via powerlessness^{19,20}. The contradiction between these two aspects of powerlessness is considered a paradox²³. In spiritual recovery, admitting to powerlessness and submitting to a power stronger than oneself is an act that frees the individual from suffering and sets them on a recovery path^{24,13}.

The theory of Spiritual victimology²⁵ suggests that as long as trauma victims reject the notion of powerlessness, they occupy a state of victimized self-centeredness, a state of viewing all personal experiences from a victim's perspective. A prominent example is the 12-step program, a spiritual program for coping with substance use disorder and other dangerous behaviors¹⁹, in which the individual is directed to fully accept the experience of their powerlessness in the face of their compulsive behavior, allowing them to be free of their victimized self-centeredness and turn to help from others around them and from God of their understanding¹³.

Often, turning for help emerges from the experience of "hitting rock bottom"^{3,21}, which is a subjective experience, perceived as the lowest point the individual can endure. The rock-bottom experience can facilitate an opportunity for the survivor to be relieved from a victim identity and

from victimized self-centeredness²⁶, to live a meaningful life¹⁵, to choose between hope and despair⁹, and to take a leap into faith²⁷ and into spirituality¹². Therefore, experiences of hitting rock bottom are often considered turning points.

TURNING POINTS

Turning points are critical moments consisting of significant low points, promoting recovery engagement and marking a reference point from where future events will be viewed²⁸. Research shows survivors will go through turning points in the recovery and transformation process from interpersonal violence^{29,30} ²⁸.

In a meta-analysis study, Sinko et al.²⁸ found that turning points are a vital component in the recovery process from gender-based trauma. Moreover, In an exploration of the post-traumatic growth of individuals with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Llewellyn-Beardsley et al.²⁹ showed that turning points serve to construct a new and better narrative for recovering individuals. Additionally, Flint & Ronel¹² showed that turning points are critical for the process of spiritual recovery from interpersonal trauma.

SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION

Transformation is a process of internal change and development; it implies growth to one's highest potential or best self, which affects one's worldview, behaviors, and thoughts³¹. Moreover, in a study on spiritually-based recovery from sexual trauma, survivors described that becoming the best version of themselves was vital for their spiritual transformation, as it brought them as close as possible to the Sublime²⁶.

Pargament¹³ suggested that spiritual transformation is related to a perceptual change of the world, a significant change in the spiritual behavior of the individual, and a radical change in connection to the Sublime. Pargament adds that spiritual transformation includes changing ways of connecting with the Sublime. According to Pargament¹³, spiritual transformation often arises from trauma as individuals may find that their previous methods of connecting with the Sublime, which held significant

value and meaning, no longer suffice. Thus, spiritual recovery becomes necessary.

SPIRITUAL RECOVERY

Spirituality is the movement between seeking out and dwelling in a connection with the sacred³², a developing dimension of human existence that changes and evolves throughout life³³ and finding divine meaning in life events^{5,34}. Recovery is an ongoing process: it creates a "new sense of self and of purpose within and beyond the limits of the disability"³⁵. The 12-step program regards recovery as a process that involves an ongoing effort to maintain it, emphasizing that neglecting the practices might result in a relapse^{19,36}.

An innovative model of spiritually-based recovery from PTSD describes four phases: first, the trauma survivor experiences **three-dimensional disappointment** and disconnection from self, others, and the Sublime³⁷. Second, **despair** or hitting rock bottom, including **Transformative Powerlessness**. Third, **leap into spirituality** and submission to the Sublime. Fourth, **spiritual yearning**, mutual forgiveness, and spiritual growth. In spiritual victimology, it is suggested that as a part of the spiritual recovery process from trauma, transformation occurs from a state of victimized self-centeredness to a focus on a loving God³⁷. As part of this process, a profound perceptual change occurs: from seeing powerlessness as negative, unwanted, and dangerous to a renewed perception of powerlessness as an inevitable part of life and as a pathway to recovery. The current study demonstrates the crucial role of Transformative Powerlessness in survivors of interpersonal trauma recovery process.

Method

A qualitative-phenomenological method was used to obtain an authentic first-hand description from participants^{38,39}. The use of phenomenology fitted this research, as it enabled obtaining extensive narrative information about the personal perceptions of individuals who experienced Transformative Powerlessness as an integral component of their recovery process from interpersonal trauma.

PARTICIPANTS

The research sample consisted of individuals who experienced interpersonal trauma and found spirituality to be their main recovery capital ($n = 49$), 40 of whom identified as women and 9 as men. Participants' ages ranged from 23 to 75 ($M = 44$). Origin of participants was highly diverse: Israel ($n=29$), Europe ($n = 9$), USA ($n = 8$), South Africa ($n = 2$), and South America ($n = 1$).

Trauma reported included sexual abuse ($n = 33$), domestic violence ($n = 11$), physical abuse ($n = 9$), cults ($n = 7$), robbery ($n = 2$), and kidnapping ($n = 1$). Some participants reported multiple traumas ($n = 25$). Spiritual paths reported included 12-step program, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Dharma, Mormonism, Shamanism, and new-age spirituality; 12 declared spiritual influences were eclectic and included at least 2 of the above.

A maximum-variation approach was used to recruit research participants with diverse characteristics to capture the diversity of this phenomenon within a relatively small sample (Patton, 2002). This meant applying a single parameter, namely, the perception of spirituality as a recovery capital from interpersonal trauma, to ensure the largest pool of prospective participants. An online ad was published on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp: 25 were recruited by this method; 4 were recruited by ads published in centers for trauma treatment; 7 were recruited by direct recruiting³⁸; and 13 were recruited by snowball method (Patton, 2002).

The authors conducted Semi-structured interviews, mostly face-to-face at a venue of the participant's choosing. Other interviews were via video chat and through phone calls. The interviews averaged 1.5 hours in duration. Interviews were recorded and conducted as open conversations while guided by a series of open-ended questions. For all participants, these questions mainly addressed their perception of the spiritual recovery process from interpersonal trauma, focusing on resources and recovery capital. Next, the interviewer asked about the participant's turning points, followed by

questions about their perceptions of spirituality and powerlessness (such as "What resources aided you with your recovery from interpersonal trauma?", and "how did spiritual recovery transform affected different aspects of your life?" In a bid to elicit a self-reflecting exploration of the topic⁴⁰. The interviews were then transcribed into verbatim.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis was conducted using the interpretative phenomenological analysis method, chosen for its flexibility, which enables examination of new areas⁴¹, such as Transformative Powerlessness. The analysis coding team consisted of the two authors, both of whom are involved in research and treatment in the field of spiritual recovery. The analysis began with the authors familiarizing themselves with the participants' narratives while noting observations and reflections about their content, thus acquiring an initial impression and sense of continuity⁴².

In the second stage, the authors converted these notes into identified themes that reflected the participants' accounts and the authors' interpretations of them while highlighting their differences and common features, such as their stances on Transformative Powerlessness. Next, in a more focused analysis, the authors looked for links between the themes in each case, then refined these themes through a higher level of abstraction to group them into superordinate themes⁴¹. The final stage involved an iterative process of cross-case analysis, resulting in themes that were presented in a narrative format with supporting verbatim extracts.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The study was approved by our university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and met accepted ethical benchmarks for qualitative studies with sexual assault survivors⁴³. Due to the topic's extreme sensitivity, voluntary consent was emphasized: participants signed a consent form and were assured they could withdraw at any time. In phone or video interviews, the consent form was read to participants, who gave their recorded verbal consent.

Extreme efforts were made to create a Trauma-Informed safe and comfortable environment, to increase a sense of control over the information participants were sharing, and to avoid re-traumatization^{44,45} the researchers introduced themselves as involved for many years in trauma and recovery, thus producing a trauma-informed therapeutic setting⁴⁴.

Participants were assured that confidentiality would be fully maintained by removing all identifying details about them; they were also given the option of contacting the interviewer afterward with any concerns about the interview topics and a chance to receive a copy of the findings. Finally, they were assured of professional support by a referral to consultation services after the interviews if needed one.

Results

The analysis indicated a profound personal transformation in the recovery process from post-trauma symptomology. It appears that this transformation resulted from changes in the perception of powerlessness from a threatening experience to one of growth and development. Three prominent themes emerged: (a) turning points, (b) Transformative Powerlessness, and (c) spiritual recovery.

Turning points: "You've tried everything; try turning to Him."

First, participants described a recognition of the negative sense of initial and secondary powerlessness resulting from the trauma(s) and its consequences. Miriam, an observant Jew, a 12-step member, and a repeat victim of sexual assaults, portrayed:

I was about to meet with someone to be abused again, as many times before; it was raining, I missed the bus, and then it hit me – I'm truly, utterly powerless.

Prior to their acceptance of powerlessness, participants felt guilty for being unable to change what had happened to them. Henry, a Jewish cult survivor, described: "I've been through things, you

know, difficult experiences, I'm not so young, but in that place, I felt, I felt so weak, and I blamed myself for that..."

At their lowest point participants experienced not only powerlessness, but also a sense of helplessness, as Debora, a Jewish survivor of domestic sexual abuse, described: "the feeling was that I couldn't do anything to improve my situation, and worse, nobody cared." Gina, a Reform Jew and a cult survivor added: "There was nothing I could do, and I felt as if no one cared for me; they pulled me out [of the cult] and left me powerless and neglected."

When participants simultaneously experienced powerlessness and helplessness, they felt utter despair. Olga, a Mormon survivor of domestic sexual abuse, said: "I was so lonely at this stage, I felt despair and that I have nothing to do." Not only did this despair disconnect participants from others, it also disconnected them from the Higher Power, leading them to believe that there was no point in asking for any help. Sandra, a devout Protestant, 12-step member, and an assault survivor, elaborated:

After everyone left me and I left them, I was attached to nothing. At the mercy of the flashbacks and nervous breakdowns... so lonely and depressed that I saw no point in turning to Jesus or man.

The sense of despair was a rock bottom experience, serving as a turning point where participants had to decide between surrendering to despair and searching for hope. Saul, a 12-step member who was raped in childhood, described: "I arrived at the program, and there I did the same as I did before, when I committed to death. This time I committed to life". Their decision to rise from despair encouraged participants to perform a leap into spirituality, signifying a reference point for the continuation of their journey. Gil, a 12-step member who suffered childhood trauma, said:

I had a bottle of alcohol and drugs – I had already drunk, and I could

drink more and die. Then I looked up from the pit and said to myself – you've tried everything; try turning to Him.

In retrospect, participants appreciated the turning point as a vital part of their spiritual journey, as Michel, a Yoga teacher who was molested in childhood by her uncles, portrayed:

It's an awakening experience, spiritually. It really connects, for me, with my path. 'Cause, yeah. It's possible that that's what I needed, some sort of BANG! A slap in the face. And this [an abusive relationship] was some slap! A real wake-up call.

In this crucial moment, the acceptance of powerlessness aids participants, as they find an opportunity for recovery. Jenny, a Christian who was assaulted by her platoon members, elaborated:

I could not see more suffering and pain and people that I cannot help. And then it hit me: I AM POWERLESS, really, not as a 'catchphrase', it is the truth, I can only ask for help and maybe get it. This was when I started recovering.

Transformative Powerlessness: "This powerlessness at the bottom really is a gift."

Findings show that participants' experience of turning points established a new conceptualization of powerlessness – from a negative dangerous and threatening one to a vehicle of personal transformation, as Eran, a survivor of domestic violence and a 12-step member, elaborated:

We admitted that we were powerless... It's crazy; everything I did in life was the opposite, including the drugs. But when I realized that I am powerless not only about the drugs and the abuse but about everything in the world, what a liberation it is; you can just live and start loving.

With their renewed understanding of the transformative nature of powerlessness, participants were able not to give in to despair and to ask for help. As Debby, a religious Jew who was sexually abused by her community rabbi, described: "To trust is to be in a position that I am willing to let go and be weak, at least temporarily"; thus experiencing a movement from a victimized self-centered position to a help-seeking one. Debby further declared: "I was powerless, but eventually, from this lack of power, I gained great powers."

Transformative Powerlessness included an understanding of powers that are greater than man, any man. Stella, a 12-step member and a sexual violence survivor, explained:

First to get the person to understand that there is a destructive greater power, that is out of my control, that kills me. And just the same, there is a greater power that wants what's best for me, cares for me, wants to help me.

As participants apprehended the existence of beneficial powers greater than themselves, they sought out the presence of the Higher Power. Eliana, a childhood abuse survivor and a 12-step member, stated: "This powerlessness at the bottom really is a gift; it pushes you to seek help from God of your understanding." This placed participants in a humbling position, as Miriam described: "I have to give up my pride and anger and ask God for help." Jack, a Catholic survivor of robbery and assault, elaborated:

It was so lonely, I had no one (...). It was unbearable. I had to ask for help, and since I felt like I could trust no one, I cried for God.

The experience of Transformative Powerlessness induced letting go of illusions of control over the traumatic event(s) and its consequences, as Shiri, a Jewish survivor of childhood sexual abuse, stated: "I accepted the fact that I had no power over my abusers, I had no chance." This led participants to be relieved of self-blame, as Henry demonstrated:

I was disconnected, I did not know what to do, I was longing to be with God; but only when I recognized that I am not guilty and that I could not do anything, and that I was and I am powerless, and only God can be there for me, did I begin my recovery.

Additionally, the new comprehension of God as a positive helping power involved letting go of accusing God. Shiri further described this: "I also understood that God was not to blame (...) I accept his help in any way it came along."

Furthermore, letting go of illusions of control evoked a renewed connection with God, as Ariel, a Christian survivor of childhood abuse, described:

As I drifted away from God because of the events, I tried more and more to control my life. It didn't work. Anyway, when I gave up on this, on wanting to control my life, I could ask God for help and get back to my former connection with Him, and, you know what? It was even a much better connection.

Spiritual recovery: "It's possible to be free of suffering."

The renewed connection participants established with the Sublime as a result of Transformative Powerlessness facilitated spiritual submission and initiated a spiritually based recovery process. Fatma, a Muslim and a mindfulness teacher, and a survivor of domestic violence, described:

Once I accepted that it was not God's doing, that God gave people all options and they chose wrong, I could again see God as loving and just. I invited this God to accompany me while I continued my journey.

Grasping new spiritual ideas was perceived as a gradual process, which included letting go of maladaptive cognitions and patterns, and adopting new ones. Helena, a 12-step member and a survivor of sexual violence, described:

To notice that the thoughts are negative and destructive and making you relapse over and over into the ongoing crisis. And then, little by little they become positive (...) There are concerns, but we grow from the soul.

Though committed to spirituality, participants still experienced emotional and psychological upheavals which construct the recovery process. April, a Jewish incest survivor, stated: "It enabled me to appreciate myself, to know that I have powers that I wasn't aware of (...). You're being broken again and again, and this power to rebuild yourself is beyond reason."

Despite the inability to be relieved of the pain of PTSS, participants described the ability to be relieved of suffering, as Saul demonstrated: "It's possible, possible to be free of suffering and of all the junk and garbage I carried."

Moreover, participants used their renewed spirituality as an applicable way of living, as Amir, a Jewish cult survivor, demonstrated:

Since then, since that notion of being powerless and asking for God's help became a part of my life, I use it all the time. I sit down and remind myself that I might not be able to get up, and it will be OK!!! You see, I ceased to be afraid. I am not willing to be afraid anymore.

In addition to overcoming fears, participants applied spirituality to cope with the sense of arbitrariness, as Gail, a yoga instructor who was assaulted by senior teacher, described: "randomness, if you don't understand what's behind it... is very hard to cope with. And with spirituality, there's something that... helps me cope with powerlessness, that it's okay to be powerless." From applying spirituality, participants drew strength which was perceived as stronger than the power the perpetrators used to have over them, as Jacklin, a Christian cult survivor,

described: "They, the cult leaders, became less powerful once I became a believer again."

Applying spirituality allowed participants to find God in every detail of existence and to approach the Sublime in their own personal manner. As Karen, a Catholic who suffered from domestic abuse and school bullying, described: "The feeling was that there isn't anyone I could trust, I am powerless and helpless, I had to turn to something – I turned to nature and mother earth for help."

This personalization of the connection with God led to living a spiritually oriented life. Eli, a Jewish childhood abuse and cult survivor, described: "I go to the beach every day, I thank the Creator for this, and I re-connect to Him, Her, Them... it brings me forgiveness and comfort." Jenny simply added: "I became thankful for everything."

Finally, participants described their spiritual aspirations of total powerlessness and submission to the Higher Power. Dora, a 12-step member and a survivor of sexual violence, elaborated:

Today, I want to be a leaf that glides with the wind. But from, you know, that... that I know exactly who is sailing the leaf, from the bottom and from the top. You know what I mean? That the top is sailing the leaf, and I'm just, like, just letting go and am willing to sit on the leaf and not, not even to paddle. It's... I wish!

Discussion

The findings showed how full acceptance of powerlessness facilitated a process of transformation, gradually relieving IPT survivors of their suffering, and sending them on a path of spirituality-based recovery. The findings revealed three main themes: (a) turning points, (b) Transformative Powerlessness, and (c) spiritual recovery.

The first theme, turning points, described how significant low points, experienced as hitting rock bottom, promoted recovery and served participants as a reference point, altering their present perception of past and future events. The second theme,

Transformative Powerlessness, described a dramatic change in the perception of powerlessness and a revelation of its potentially positive transformative nature. The third theme, spiritual recovery, included various ways in which subsequent to establishing a connection with the Sublime, survivors persisted in strengthening this spiritual connection and thus deepened their recovery.

Although the three main themes stood out as different from each other, this division was somewhat artificial. The process of Transformative Powerlessness was found to be a process of profound and significant lasting personal change. Therefore, in accordance with Johnson & Zitzmann's⁴⁶ description of the nature of spiritual change as a process, this significant transformation occurred in a flowing manner and not in clear precise steps. Additionally, previous studies show that spiritual recovery can herald lasting and sustainable change^{25,13}, as well as an improvement in the lives of trauma survivors. Findings suggest that Transformative Powerlessness is an as-yet undescribed missing link, which generates a change from despair to recovery.

Current findings show that as long as participants realized but did not accept their powerlessness, they experienced initial and secondary powerlessness, and struggled with attempts to control the uncontrollable (i.e., the trauma, the PTSS, and future events), a spiritual struggle⁴⁷ which delayed their recovery³. However, when the realization of powerlessness was accompanied by its acceptance, participants experienced what might be considered an evolution of their view on their powerlessness to a transformative one. Once the transformation occurred, powerlessness was found to be more than what previous research described as unwanted^{2,16,48}, but rather desired and sought after, and led participants to spiritual recovery.

The sequence that led participants to Transformative Powerlessness began with their recognition of despair at rock bottom, serving as a turning point. This is in line with previous literature^{28,49}. Since powerlessness is one of the two

components of despair, recognizing and accepting it dissolved the feeling of despair, and participants found new hope. Subsequently, the other component of despair – helplessness – was dissolved, and participants were able to reach out for help. However, since the essence of interpersonal trauma is trauma inflicted on one human being by another, and survivors experience disappointment from their significant others¹⁶, reaching out for others' help was problematic for participants. We suggest that this is why participants preferred to reach out for help beyond the human realm and thus turned to spirituality.

This process of reaching for the Sublime rather than for other human beings is unlike the direction of most recovery methods. In the 12-step program²², turning to the Sublime is suggested only subsequent to turning to others (third and second step, respectively). Additionally, turning to the Sublime allowed participants to overcome the shame associated with interpersonal trauma^{8,50}, a shame that might have prevented them from reaching out for help to begin with. Furthermore, participants described the magnitude of the suffering inflicted on them by the trauma and its consequences as such that only a power beyond this world could help relieve them. This is consistent with previous research, which showed that survivors turn to the Higher Power in their most desperate times^{5,47,51,13}.

In addition, participants described how turning to the Sublime empowered them. This embodies the concept of the 12-step program, suggesting that the act of accepting powerlessness is the foundation of the recovery process²⁰. This is consistent with a study on the application of the 12-step programme by survivors of sexual trauma who are also recovering addicts¹³. Current findings show that this is also true for other interpersonal trauma survivors who reached out for the help of the Sublime.

Participants made a powerful decision to leap into faith and spirituality in their darkest, weakest hour. Supposedly, this leap is made in no-choice situations, where the individual turns to the sublime

with an absurd trust beyond logic^{52,27}. However, findings suggest that though this was perceived as a lack of choice, a choice was in fact made. By accepting powerlessness, participants made a brave, powerful decision to choose hope over despair, ultimately choosing life over death. This leap does not mean that survivors miraculously overcame all the consequences of their traumas and rose above the depth of their despair, but that through experiencing Transformative Powerlessness they gained a means to cope.

The leap into faith marked only the beginning of participants' spiritual recovery, as making the decision to live and recover turned out to be a decision they had to make daily. This remaking of the decision is consistent with the nature of recovery processes, which demanded ongoing maintenance³⁵. In recovery methods based on the 12-step programme, accepting and admitting powerlessness should be practiced repeatedly²⁰. Correspondingly, current findings show that reaccepting of their lack of control and powerlessness proved to be the fuel for maintaining participants' recovery.

Shults and Sandage³² described spirituality as an ongoing relational process of seeking-out and dwelling-in a connection with the sacred. However, current findings suggest that after experiencing Transformative Powerlessness, the process of seeking and dwelling is not one of connection and disconnection to the sublime but rather strengthening and deepening this connection to God. Furthermore, participants described their connection to God of their understanding as a renewed connection. This is explained by previous studies, which showed that children sense a natural, instinctive connection to God^{53,54}.

Since participants have already experienced the power embedded in Transformative Powerlessness, they could recognize that when they experienced distance from God of their understanding, they experienced a withdrawal to their victimized self-centeredness²⁶. In these moments, their spiritual yearning – seeking reconnection and remembering

the connection¹² – was an act that served to keep them connected to the sublime. This is in line with the notion of spiritual struggle^{11,47}, which challenged participants' renewed faith.

As findings show, the process of Transformative Powerlessness holds several paradoxes. First, the experience of powerlessness can be both unwanted and threatening and desired and enlightening. Second, Transformative Powerlessness is described as a leap into faith and spirituality and simultaneously as a process that must be maintained. Third, accepting powerlessness was empowering, as it led participants to seek help. This is consistent with previous studies, showing that recovery from trauma and victimization can lead to a transformation from a passive individual to an active one^{25,13,55,56}. Fourth, from a weak position of despair, participants practiced strength as they decided to choose life and submit to the Sublime.

Conclusions

This study is important for survivors of interpersonal trauma, their caregivers, and researchers. The findings of this study show that total acceptance of powerlessness as part of a spiritual process might provide a vital coping strategy. We are all powerless in the face of what the world holds for us, and more often than not, our attempts to control different circumstances prove to be futile. Therefore, control is merely an illusion, and powerlessness is a fact, not an option.

Traumatic events prove that in the most brutal way possible and without a shadow of a doubt. Moreover, as long as survivors struggle with their powerlessness, they are bound to fail, and they will feel guilty for not being able to change what has occurred to them. Thus, recognizing and accepting powerlessness is vital for survivors' recovery since it allows them to see the world as it is, accept that they were victimized, and go onward with their lives.

In victims' assistance, it is advisable for researchers and therapists to change their own perspective on powerlessness: rather than encouraging their clients

to fear and reject it, suggest that they embrace the notion of Transformative Powerlessness. Further research should focus on the paradoxical nature of spirituality and powerlessness and the various ways the illusion of control harms survivors' recovery processes.

Conflict of Interest:

None.

Funding Statement:

None.

Acknowledgements:

The authors would like to thank Professor Nati Ronel from the Department of Criminology at Bar Ilan University, under whose dedicated guidance some of the findings in the article were collected and whose original ideas served as inspiration for us.

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