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## REFLECTIVE-TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACH TO MANAGING THE POSITIVE POTENTIAL OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TRAUMA IN PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT

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**Key words:** *psychological trauma, post-traumatic growth, reflective-transformational approach, resilience, personality transformation, reflection.*

This article explores the reflective-transformational approach as an innovative method for managing the positive potential of psychological trauma. Trauma is traditionally understood as a destructive experience, often associated with suffering, emotional destabilization, and long-term psychological harm. However, this article emphasizes its paradoxical capacity to serve not only as a source of pain but also as a catalyst for personal growth, value reorientation, strengthened resilience, and the development of empathy. The central argument is that trauma, when reflected upon and reinterpreted, may be transformed from a purely negative event into a constructive resource for development.

The reflective-transformational approach is grounded in the process of deep reflection on traumatic experiences. Reflection enables individuals to distance themselves from habitual responses, critically reassess old coping strategies, and integrate their past into a new framework of meaning. In doing so, the traumatic experience is not erased or denied but recontextualized as part of a broader life narrative, opening the way to personality transformation. This framework positions trauma not simply as a clinical problem to be managed but as an existential turning point that, with proper support, can stimulate long-term positive change.

Central to the approach is a five-stage model of rethinking, which guides individuals through the phases of actualizing, exhausting, and discrediting existing strategies, followed by the generation of new insights and the consolidation of transformed meanings. The model is complemented by practical methods such as reflective counselling, which provides a safe and structured environment for self-reflection, dialogical exploration, and gradual transformation.

The article also underscores the crucial role of professional psychological support in facilitating this process. Well-organized therapeutic guidance helps clients transform trauma from a source of suffering into a developmental resource.

# РЕФЛЕКСИВНО-ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЙНИЙ ПІДХІД ДО УПРАВЛІННЯ ПОЗИТИВНИМ ПОТЕНЦІАЛОМ ПСИХОЛОГІЧНОЇ ТРАВМИ В ОСОБИСТІСНОМУ РОЗВИТКУ

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**Ключові слова:** психологічна травма, посттравматичне зростання, рефлексивно-трансформаційний підхід, стійкість, трансформація особистості, рефлексія.

У статті досліджується рефлексивно-трансформаційний підхід як інноваційний метод управління позитивним потенціалом психологічної травми. Традиційно травму розглядають як деструктивний досвід, що асоціюється зі стражданням, емоційною дестабілізацією та довготривалими психологічними наслідками. Однак у статті підкреслюється її парадоксальна здатність бути не лише джерелом болю, а й каталізатором особистісного зростання, переорієнтації цінностей, посилення стійкості й розвитку емпатії. Центральний аргумент полягає в тому, що травма, осмислена та переінтерпретована, може трансформуватися із суто негативної події на конструктивний ресурс розвитку.

Рефлексивно-трансформаційний підхід ґрунтується на процесі глибокої рефлексії травматичного досвіду. Рефлексія дає індивіду змогу дистанціюватися від звичних реакцій, критично переосмислити застарілі стратегії подолання й інтегрувати минуле в нову систему смислів. У такий спосіб травматичний досвід не заперечується й не стирається, а переосмислюється як частина ширшої життєвої історії, відкриваючи шлях до особистісної трансформації. Такий підхід позиціонує травму не лише як клінічну проблему, яку варто подолати, а як екзистенційний переломний момент, що за належної підтримки може стимулювати довготривалі позитивні зміни.

Центральним елементом підходу є п'ятиетапна модель переосмислення, яка проводить індивіда через фази актуалізації, виснаження та дискредитації наявних стратегій, а далі – до формування нових інсайтів і закріплення трансформованих смислів. Модель доповнюється практичними методами, такими як рефлексивне консультування, яке забезпечує безпечне й структуроване середовище для саморефлексії, діалогічного дослідження та поступової трансформації.

У статті також підкреслюється ключова роль професійної психологічної підтримки в цьому процесі. Добре організоване терапевтичне супроводження допомагає клієнтам трансформувати травму з джерела страждання на ресурс розвитку.

**Problem Statement.** Psychological trauma is a widespread phenomenon that significantly impacts mental health, social functioning, and overall life satisfaction. Global research indicates that between 60% and 70% of adults report experiencing at least one traumatic event in their lifetime, while around 10–20% develop long-term psychological difficulties such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, or anxiety [1]. Among refugees and migrants, the prevalence of trauma-related symptoms is even higher: studies show that up to 35–40% of refugees meet diagnostic criteria for PTSD, while

nearly 50% experience severe psychological distress associated with forced displacement, loss, and acculturation stress [2; 3].

Despite the recognition of trauma as a global health challenge, several critical problems remain:

1. Limited accessibility to professional psychological support, particularly for vulnerable groups such as refugees, migrants, or individuals with disabilities. Barriers include financial constraints, language difficulties, stigma surrounding mental health, and insufficient availability of trained professionals.

2. Narrow focus of many therapeutic approaches on symptom reduction and damage control, which often overlooks trauma's latent potential for positive transformation and growth [4].

3. Lack of integrative and culturally sensitive methods capable of addressing the complexity of trauma in diverse populations across different cultural, linguistic, and social contexts [2; 5].

4. Insufficient training of specialists and lack of systemic integration of trauma-informed practices into educational, healthcare, and community-based frameworks, resulting in fragmented or inconsistent support [1; 3].

These challenges highlight an urgent need for a systematic and theoretically grounded approach that not only mitigates the negative effects of trauma but also utilizes its constructive potential. This article proposes the reflective-transformational approach, which emphasizes reflection and inner transformation as key mechanisms for rethinking traumatic experiences. Such an approach aims to transform trauma from a source of suffering into a developmental resource, fostering personal growth, resilience, and existential reorientation.

**Purpose of the Article.** The primary purpose of this article is to substantiate the reflective-transformational approach as a conceptual and practical framework for managing the positive potential of psychological trauma as a condition for personal growth. While traditional perspectives on trauma often emphasize its destructive consequences – such as emotional suffering, loss of control, or long-term psychological disorders – the article argues that trauma also contains a latent constructive dimension. Specifically, it demonstrates that with appropriate reflection and therapeutic guidance, traumatic experiences can be reinterpreted not only as challenges to be compensated for but also as powerful catalysts for growth, transformation, and resilience.

The article seeks to provide both theoretical and methodological justification for this approach. On the theoretical level, it draws upon the body of research on post-traumatic growth [4], which highlights how adversity may lead to positive changes in life values, deeper empathy, strengthened interpersonal relationships, and an expanded vision of life possibilities. On the methodological level, it outlines structured practices such as reflective counselling [2; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 13] and presents a five-stage model of rethinking traumatic experiences. This model illustrates how reflection and inner transformation enable individuals to exhaust outdated coping mechanisms, confront inner crises, and ultimately discover new meanings and strategies that become integrated into their daily lives.

A key purpose of the article is to demonstrate that trauma management should not be understood solely

as damage control or compensation for psychological harm. Instead, it must also be seen as an opportunity to stimulate personality growth, existential reorientation, and the development of new life priorities. Reflection is presented as a central mechanism in this process [5; 6; 7; 8; 9], serving as the bridge that transforms destructive experiences into constructive resources. By fostering reflective awareness, individuals are able to reinterpret painful events, assign them new meaning, and convert them into sources of strength, wisdom, and resilience.

Although psychological trauma is undeniably painful, the article emphasizes its significant potential for personal transformation. This phenomenon, widely recognized as post-traumatic growth [1; 4; 10; 11], is characterized by positive changes that arise from overcoming life's adversities. The reflective-transformational approach thus provides a framework that not only acknowledges the suffering associated with trauma but also highlights the constructive possibilities it contains. By integrating reflection and inner transformation into therapeutic practice, trauma can be transformed into a resource for development, contributing both to individual healing and to broader processes of human growth and flourishing.

**Results of Research.** The study revealed that psychological trauma represents a profound emotional shock resulting from extreme or painful situations that exceed an individual's usual adaptive mechanisms. Such experiences disrupt a person's sense of safety, integrity, predictability of the world, and control over life [1]. Trauma shakes the foundations of identity and challenges one's assumptions about stability and security. However, the findings also demonstrate that trauma, while destabilizing and painful, carries within it a significant positive potential. This potential manifests in opportunities for inner growth, personal transformation, and enhanced resilience when the traumatic experience is consciously processed, reflected upon, and meaningfully integrated into one's life narrative.

The analysis of existing literature confirmed that this positive dimension of trauma has been extensively examined within the framework of post-traumatic growth. The works of Joseph and Linley [4] provide a comprehensive theoretical and practical basis for understanding the mechanisms of growth following adversity, while the seminal research of Tedeschi and Calhoun [11] remains foundational for conceptualizing post-traumatic growth as measurable and observable phenomena. In addition, sources from popular psychology, such as *Psychology Today* [10] and *PositivePsychology.com* [9], highlight the transformative role of crises in fostering value reorientation, strengthening empathy, and deepening interpersonal connections. This convergence of theoretical, empirical, and applied perspectives

suggests that trauma, though painful and destabilizing, may also function as a powerful developmental stimulus that redefines life trajectories.

The empirical and theoretical synthesis presented in this study underscores that the reflexive-transformational approach provides a particularly valuable framework for managing the constructive potential of trauma [2; 3; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 13]. Unlike approaches that concentrate primarily on symptom reduction, stabilization, or damage control, this model emphasizes deliberate reflection as the key mechanism of transformation. Reflection enables individuals to step back from automatic reactions, analyse their experiences with greater awareness, and recognize the insufficiency of habitual coping strategies. Through this process, clients can ultimately generate new interpretations of traumatic events that foster resilience, meaning-making, and empowerment.

The research also highlights that the process of transformation is not linear or automatic; rather, it unfolds through phases of struggle, crisis, and renewal. Clients may experience setbacks, doubts, or resistance before reaching moments of insight and breakthrough. Professional guidance and supportive dialogue are especially important at these turning points, ensuring that individuals are not left isolated in their struggles but are guided toward constructive rethinking [12].

In this context, trauma management is understood as a structured system of purposeful actions undertaken by both the specialist and the client. These actions include organizing the recovery process, regulating emotional states, developing reflective capacities, and mobilizing internal and external resources to overcome the consequences of trauma. The evidence indicates that when such actions are embedded within a reflexive framework, clients are more likely to achieve long-term changes in resilience, identity reconstruction, and existential orientation. Thus, the reflexive-transformational approach positions trauma not only as a challenge to be endured but also as an opportunity for reorientation, growth, and renewal.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that this approach has applications beyond individual therapy. Group sessions, community programs, and educational contexts can also benefit from reflective practices that transform trauma into a developmental resource [3; 14]. For populations affected by large-scale crises, such as refugees or caregivers of people with disabilities, the reflexive-transformational approach offers structured ways to process shared experiences and convert them into sources of collective resilience and solidarity.

Taken together, these results demonstrate that trauma management through reflection is a dynamic and structured process rather than a spontaneous or accidental phenomenon. This insight naturally leads

to the Five Stages Model of Reflective Re-thinking, which offers a systematic pathway for understanding how individuals move from the destabilization caused by trauma toward the creation of new meanings, resources, and personal growth.

**Five Stages Model of Reflective Re-thinking.** The results of the research indicate that transformation after trauma is not random but follows a structured and dynamic process. To describe this process, the Five Stages Model of Reflective Re-thinking was used as a theoretical and practical framework [2; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9]. This model explains how individuals gradually move from the destabilization caused by trauma toward the reconstruction of meaning, resilience, and personal empowerment. Each stage involves its own psychological challenges and opportunities, and professional support is often required to ensure safe progression.

**Stage 1: Actualization of Meanings and Coping Tools.**

At the outset, individuals draw upon the personal meanings and coping strategies they already possess. These resources may include cultural beliefs, family traditions, or previously successful problem-solving methods. Trauma, however, often exceeds the adaptive capacity of these strategies. The stage is characterized by active but limited attempts to mobilize known resources.

Example: A refugee displaced by war may initially cope by clinging to routines from their past life, while a parent of a child with a disability may try to apply earlier caregiving strategies in an entirely new and overwhelming context.

**Stage 2: Exhaustion of Existing Strategies.**

As time passes, individuals realize that familiar methods no longer bring relief or stability. Efforts to use the same coping mechanisms lead to frustration, fatigue, and eventually burnout. Although destabilizing, this stage is essential, as it forces individuals to recognize the limitations of their habitual responses.

Example: A trauma survivor relying on avoidance or denial may notice these strategies only intensify their anxiety and isolation, creating a vicious cycle of exhaustion and despair.

**Stage 3: Discreditation and Inner Conflict.**

In this phase, the inadequacy of old strategies becomes undeniable. Individuals may feel powerless, guilty, or incapable of overcoming their trauma. Inner conflict arises between the desire to maintain familiar ways of coping and the recognition that these methods are insufficient. This stage is emotionally painful but represents a crucial turning point, opening the possibility for rethinking fundamental assumptions.

Example: A caregiver of a child with complex needs may realize that traditional notions of “good

parenting” fail to capture the reality of constant medical demands, leading to painful feelings of failure and self-doubt.

Stage 4: Insight and Generation of New Meanings.

Through reflection, therapeutic dialogue, or self-analysis, individuals begin to develop new perspectives and coping strategies. Insights emerge, offering relief and a renewed sense of agency. Trauma is reinterpreted not simply as a source of harm but as a transformative experience that generates wisdom and strength.

Example: A war survivor may discover that their suffering deepens their empathy, inspiring them to support other displaced families. A parent of a child with disabilities may shift from despair to advocacy, seeing their experience as a unique opportunity to contribute to systemic change.

Stage 5: Application and Consolidation of New Resources.

The final stage involves testing, reinforcing, and integrating new meanings into daily life. These strategies become stable parts of identity and worldview, forming the foundation for long-term resilience and empowerment. Professional support focuses on sustaining progress and preventing regression.

Example: An individual who reframed loss as a motivation to live authentically may pursue a new career in counselling or advocacy. A caregiver may establish peer-support groups, thereby consolidating personal growth and extending it to others.

Summary of the Model. The Five Stages Model demonstrates that trauma is not merely a disruption but a developmental stimulus. By moving through actualization, exhaustion, discreditation, insight, and consolidation, individuals can reframe destructive experiences into meaningful resources. This structured pathway highlights that transformation requires conscious reflection, professional support, and sustained effort [2; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9].

Key Findings. The findings of the study can be summarized in six central points, each supported by empirical evidence, theoretical analysis, and practical illustrations.

**1. Psychological trauma, though disruptive, contains the capacity to become a developmental resource when subjected to conscious reflection and professional guidance.**

Trauma does not have to remain solely a source of suffering. Through structured reflection and therapeutic dialogue, clients can reinterpret traumatic experiences, discovering new meanings and opportunities for growth. Professional support ensures safety and prevents re-traumatization, making reflection a transformative rather than harmful process [4; 11].

Example: A parent overwhelmed by caregiving responsibilities may, through reflexive counselling,

reframe exhaustion as resilience and discover new strategies for balancing care with self-compassion.

**2. Post-traumatic growth is supported by empirical evidence, confirming that adversity may lead to value shifts, strengthened resilience, and enhanced empathy.**

Extensive research demonstrates that individuals often undergo profound positive changes after adversity [1; 4; 10; 11]. Trauma compels a reassessment of priorities, with less emphasis on external success and more on relationships, authenticity, and existential meaning. Resilience emerges as individuals prove to themselves that they can cope with crises, while empathy deepens through shared vulnerability.

Example: A refugee who has lost their home may develop stronger family bonds and solidarity within the diaspora, becoming more attuned to the suffering of others.

**3. The reflective-transformational approach provides a structured framework through which trauma can be managed not only to reduce harm but also to initiate long-term positive changes.**

Unlike symptom-focused interventions, this model integrates healing with development [2; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9]. Reflection allows individuals to move beyond stabilization toward growth, enabling them to construct new life narratives and strategies. This structured framework ensures that trauma-related growth is intentional and sustainable.

Example: An accident survivor initially seeking therapy for anxiety may, through reflection, discover a renewed sense of purpose and shift their career toward helping others in rehabilitation.

**4. Reflection emerges as a central mechanism in transforming traumatic experiences into sources of meaning, self-awareness, and personal empowerment.**

Reflection enables individuals to step outside automatic responses, critically examine their inner processes, and reinterpret painful experiences. It supports both cognitive reappraisal and emotional regulation, enhancing self-awareness and personal agency [6; 7; 8; 9].

Example: A survivor of domestic violence may, through reflection, move beyond self-blame, reconstruct their identity, and later become an advocate for others.

**5. Trauma management involves active collaboration between client and specialist, creating conditions for rethinking and reconstructing life priorities.** Transformation cannot occur in isolation. Clients’ willingness to engage in reflection must be matched with specialists’ ability to guide and support. Collaboration turns therapy into a co-created process that integrates trauma into life as a resource rather than a burden [12].

Example: A migrant struggling with cultural dislocation may, with the help of a therapist,

transform feelings of alienation into a renewed sense of belonging.

**6. Trauma has a collective dimension, and post-traumatic growth can unfold not only on the individual level but also within groups and communities.**

Trauma experienced collectively opens unique opportunities for shared resilience and solidarity [3; 14]. Group reflection fosters social bonds and transforms suffering into communal strength.

Example: A community of war-displaced families, through group sessions, may not only reduce individual suffering but also build collective visions of integration, advocacy, and social renewal.

Implications. The results of this research highlight the necessity of integrating the reflective-transformational approach into psychological counselling and therapeutic practices [2; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9]. Traditional trauma interventions often prioritize stabilization, symptom reduction, or damage control, which, while essential, remain insufficient to unlock the full developmental potential of trauma. By focusing on reflection and the conscious re-interpretation of traumatic experiences, practitioners can help clients transform trauma into a catalyst for growth rather than solely a source of suffering. This paradigm shift from “treating pathology” to “stimulating growth” represents a significant innovation in the field of trauma therapy.

A central implication of the study is the recognition of reflection as the primary mechanism of transformation. Conscious reflection enables clients to revisit their traumatic experiences from a new perspective, identify the limitations of outdated coping strategies, and create new meanings that support long-term resilience and empowerment. Therapists, therefore, must not only provide symptom relief but also cultivate reflective capacities in their clients. This can be achieved through structured methods such as open-ended questioning, narrative reconstruction, dialogical exploration, and reflexive counselling practices. By encouraging clients to re-examine and reinterpret their life narratives, professionals create opportunities for post-traumatic growth that extend beyond immediate recovery.

Another key implication concerns the strengthening of emotional resilience. The reflective-transformational approach provides structured opportunities for clients to rehearse, test, and consolidate new coping mechanisms. Through this process, resilience emerges as a form of “psychological immunity”, equipping individuals to face future stressors with greater adaptability and confidence [1; 10]. This resilience is not merely reactive but preventive, ensuring that individuals can respond to crises in ways that minimize long-term harm.

The findings also carry significant implications for existential reorientation and the optimization of

personal resources. Trauma often disrupts foundational beliefs about meaning, justice, and purpose. By guiding clients through reflection, practitioners can facilitate the reconstruction of these existential frameworks, enabling individuals to shift their life priorities toward authenticity, compassion, and self-actualization. This transformation enriches not only individual well-being but also contributes to the flourishing of families, communities, and societies.

Beyond individual therapy, the reflective-transformational approach demonstrates broad applicability in group work, educational contexts, and community-based interventions [3; 14]. Group reflection fosters solidarity, empathy, and collective resilience. Educational institutions can incorporate reflective practices into curricula to equip students with lifelong skills for coping with adversity. Community programs that use reflective methods can strengthen social cohesion, reduce stigma, and create opportunities for collective healing.

Finally, the integration of reflective-transformational methods into professional training and public policy is imperative. By equipping future therapists, educators, and community leaders with reflective tools, societies can better respond to the growing burden of trauma in a globalized world marked by migration, conflict, and rapid change. Embedding reflection as a cultural norm within trauma-informed practices will help reframe trauma from an exclusively destructive force into a potential catalyst for renewal and growth [2; 5; 9; 13].

### **Outcomes**

**Theoretical Outcomes.** The research validates the reflective-transformational approach as an effective framework for managing the positive potential of trauma [2; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 13]. It demonstrates that trauma-related growth is not a random or spontaneous occurrence but a structured, reflective process that follows identifiable stages [4; 11]. The study expands the existing discourse on post-traumatic growth by emphasizing the centrality of reflection as the mechanism through which old coping strategies are exhausted, discredited, and replaced by new, more adaptive frameworks of meaning.

**Practical Outcomes.** On the practical level, the study highlights the importance of professional psychological support in guiding clients through the reflective process [2; 5; 9; 13]. Reflexive counselling emerges as a particularly valuable method, offering both safety and structure for individuals to critically engage with their traumatic experiences. The dual process of external guidance and internal reflection strengthens not only symptom relief but also the sustainability of post-traumatic growth [1; 10]. The research underscores that this approach can be effectively applied beyond individual therapy, including in groups, education, and community interventions [3; 14].

**Overall Conclusion of Outcomes.** Taken together, these outcomes show that the reflective-transformational approach enriches both theory and practice. Theoretically, it deepens our understanding of trauma as a dual phenomenon that contains both risk and developmental potential. Practically, it equips therapists, educators, and community leaders with concrete methods for guiding individuals and groups through trauma toward resilience, empowerment, and authentic personal transformation [2; 3; 5; 6; 7; 8; 9; 13; 14].

Practically, it equips therapists, educators, and community leaders with concrete, evidence-based methods for guiding individuals and groups through trauma toward resilience, empowerment, and authentic personal transformation [2; 3; 5; 6; 10; 11; 12; 13; 15; 16; 17]. By cultivating reflection, creating structured spaces for dialogue, and mobilizing both individual and collective resources, practitioners can help ensure that trauma becomes not just a wound to be healed, but a foundation for sustainable growth and flourishing.

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