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Post-Traumatic Growth in Cancer Survivors: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Posttraumatic growth (PTG) is the term used to describe positive psychological changes that occur in an individual as a result of coping with a crisis or extreme trauma, such as cancer. PTG encourages spirituality, stronger interpersonal bonds, a heightened sense of life's worth, and an understanding of one's own power. The literature on the features of PTG in Indonesian cancer patients is analysed and summarised in this study. The PRISMA principles are followed in this review's systematic literature review methodology. Strict inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to choose the articles, and PTG and cancer-related keywords were used to search the Google Scholar, Garuda, and Sinta databases. Nine research journals published in Indonesia between 2018 and 2025 were examined. According to the study's findings, PTG in cancer patients develops as a result of social support, spiritual fortification, and self-acceptance. Spiritual and philosophical shifts in life, better social interactions, increased self-strength, a greater appreciation for life, and the appearance of new opportunities are all important markers of PTG. PTG is influenced by both external (social support from friends, family, and the community) and internal (resilience, optimism, self-empathy, and spirituality) elements. According to the findings, sophisticated psychosocial interventions are essential for promoting cancer patients' post-traumatic growth. It is intended that this study will be used as a guide for the creation of psychological therapies and the enhancement of cancer patients' quality of life in Indonesia.

Keywords: Cancer, Post-Traumatic Growth

INTRODUCTION

Cancer is one of the chronic diseases that is the major cause of morbidity and mortality in Indonesia and worldwide. Breast cancer is the most common type of cancer, especially in women (Putri & Suarya, 2024). Diagnosing cancer and going through long treatments like chemotherapy or mastectomy can be quite stressful. This trauma can affect cancer patients' physical, mental, social, and sexual health. Women diagnosed with cancer, including breast cancer, frequently encounter intricate emotional difficulties, encompassing worry, tension, loss of self-identity, and alterations in social interactions (Putri & Suarya, 2024). Nonetheless, not all individuals who undergo traumatic experiences related to cancer ultimately find themselves in detrimental psychological states. In contrast, several individuals display indicators of good development referred to as post-traumatic growth (PTG). Post-traumatic growth is when someone has positive changes in their mental health because they are trying to deal with a big crisis or tragedy. Some parts of this idea are being more aware of your own strength, having better relationships with other people, being more grateful for life, and being more spiritual. Recent research shows that PTG is a good psychological transformation that people go through when they are going through a major crisis or tragedy, such as cancer (Blickle et al., 2024). PTG includes being more conscious of your own strength, having stronger spiritual connections, being more grateful for life, and having deeper interactions with other people. PTG is an interesting idea in the context of cancer since it shows that going through a lot of pain might lead to a more meaningful existence.

Social support is a significant factor thought to facilitate the development of PTG. Social support encompasses emotional, instrumental, informational, and affective aid provided by individuals in close proximity, including family, friends, partners, communities, or healthcare professionals. Social support is extremely advantageous for women who are cancer survivors, facilitating their treatment and physical recovery while also fostering psychological resilience and reframing the traumatic experiences they have endured (Chabirah et al., 2020). Numerous studies demonstrate that the quality and quantity of social support obtained serve as significant predictors of the level of post-traumatic growth (PTG) among cancer survivors. For instance, assistance from other survivors in support groups or communities can make you feel very connected and validated emotionally (Bayraktar & Ozkan, 2023). In the meantime, continuous and kind support from family members is also an important part of making someone feel protected and giving them new hope after a cancer diagnosis. Nevertheless, despite a multitude of studies investigating the correlation between social support and post-traumatic growth (PTG), the findings frequently differ according on cultural setting, cancer type, and research approach (Bayraktar & Ozkan, 2023). Consequently, a systematic literature evaluation is essential to thoroughly encapsulate empirical findings and discern prevalent patterns or research deficiencies within this domain. This methodical approach will yield a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of social support on the post-traumatic growth process in female

cancer survivors. Given this context, the study seeks to examine and integrate scientific literature concerning the influence of social support on post-traumatic growth in female cancer survivors. This research, employing a comprehensive literature review methodology, aims to yield both theoretical and practical contributions, especially in the formulation of psychosocial interventions that enhance quality of life and foster positive psychological development within this demographic.

The phenomena of posttraumatic growth (PTG) in cancer patients has emerged as a significant area of interest within health psychology, particularly in light of rising survival rates among cancer patients attributable to advancements in medical technology. PTG denotes affirmative psychological transformations encountered by persons subsequent to experiencing traumatic events, such as cancer diagnosis and treatment. This idea shows that even if patients are going through a lot of pain and stress, there is a chance for them to grow mentally, spiritually, and socially, even more than they were before they were diagnosed with cancer. Cancer, especially breast cancer, is an illness that can hurt both your body and your mind, as well as your quality of life. The process of diagnosis, treatment, and adaption to body changes frequently induces significant stress, anxiety, and despair. However, numerous studies suggest that the experience of confronting cancer can act as a catalyst for personal development, heightened spirituality, and significant transformations in one's outlook on life. A systematic literature analysis on post-traumatic growth (PTG) in cancer patients establishes that this growth process does not directly arise from the traumatic event itself, but rather from the individual's endeavours to cope with and contemplate the challenging experience. PTG manifests in various fundamental dimensions, including self-reconstruction, enhancement of spiritual and religious beliefs, recognition of new life meanings, and alteration of social and familial ties. This indicates that cancer trauma may act as a trigger for substantial beneficial transformation.

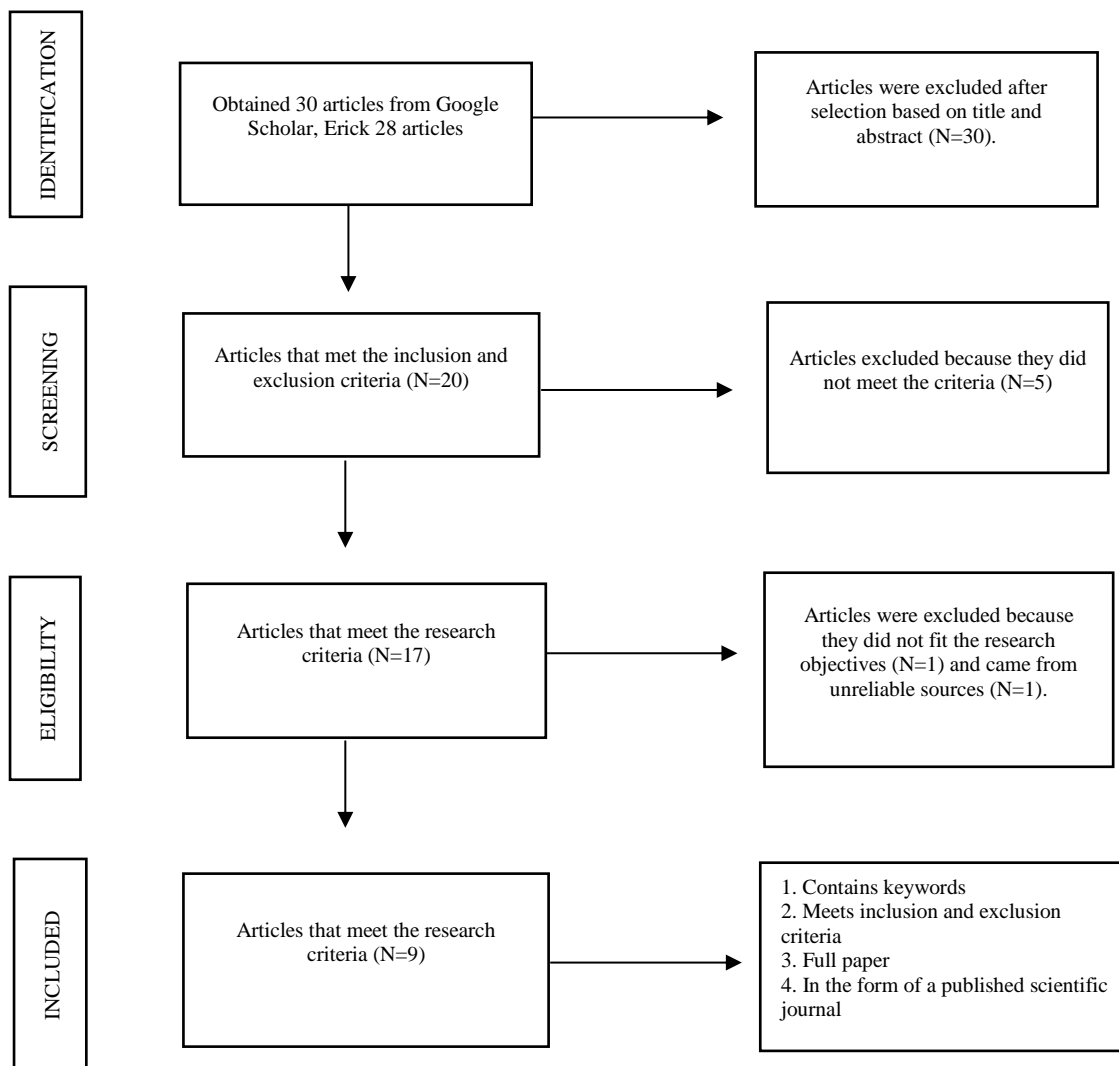
There are several different things that can cause PTG to happen in cancer patients. External variables, including social support from family, friends, and healthcare professionals, have been established as the fundamental elements in the processes of adaption and psychological development for patients. On the other hand, internal elements are things like spirituality, hope, resilience, and the ability to look at terrible events in a new way. The interplay between these two factors establishes a distinctive dynamic for each patient in attaining PTG. The studies examined in the systematic literature review underscore the significance of psychosocial therapies in facilitating post-traumatic growth (PTG). Different methods, like cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness, peer support, and health education, have been shown to help cancer patients improve their PTG. These interventions not only assist patients in coping with stress and adverse emotions but also enhance feelings of appreciation, hope, and life meaning following challenging experiences. Intriguingly, post-traumatic growth (PTG) does not consistently exhibit a linear relationship with quality of life; certain research indicate that both extremely high and extremely low levels of PTG are linked to superior mental and physical health in comparison to intermediate PTG levels. This indicates that the post-traumatic growth process is intricate and fluid, shaped by patients' views, coping mechanisms, and social and cultural circumstances. The occurrence of PTG in cancer patients creates avenues for the formulation of innovative therapeutic models that emphasise the positive attributes and strengths of patients, rather than solely mitigating unpleasant psychological symptoms. So, healthcare workers can use a strong grasp of PTG to create more complete and meaningful rehabilitation programs that improve patients' overall quality of life. The overall picture of PTG in cancer patients from the results of the systematic literature review shows that there is a lot of room for growth and finding new purpose in life after going through cancer trauma. This phenomena emphasises the significance of social support, psychosocial therapies, and the enhancement of patients' internal variables as essential elements of the post-cancer recovery and adaptation process.

METHOD

This literature review adheres to PRISMA principles about article search, result extraction, and systematic process description. The search for articles was done with Google Scholar, Garuda, Sinta, and databases. We looked for research papers that looked at posttraumatic growth and social support in people with cancer around the world (both cervical and breast cancer). We used Boolean connectors to search for the keywords: ("posttraumatic growth" OR "posttraumatic growth inventory") AND ("breast cancer/cervical cancer") AND ("social support"). The last search for articles took place on March 2025. The researchers also set up a number of rules for who could and couldn't join. The table below shows both criteria:

Criteria	Description
Inclusion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The articles used were published between 2018 and 2025. 2. They were scientific journals that had been published. 3. They contained keywords relevant to the research conducted, namely posttraumatic growth and cancer. 4. The articles came from reliable sources.
Exclusion	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Articles that are not used are those published before 2018 2. Articles in the form of books or final projects 3. Articles that are not full papers 4. Articles from unreliable sources

The PRISMA paradigm has various steps, such as finding, screening, checking eligibility, and analyzing conclusions (included). The following systematic literature review diagram gives more information:



The literature evaluation in this study utilized a systematic methodology grounded in the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework, encompassing four principal phases: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. During the identification phase, researchers gathered data from multiple databases, including Google Scholar, Garuda, and Sinta, yielding a total of 58 articles: 30 from Google Scholar and 28 from other sources. Next, during the screening stage, an initial selection was made based on the title and abstract to see if the research focus was right for them. At this point, 30 articles were thrown out because they didn't have anything to do with the issue being reviewed. The process moved on to the eligibility stage, where articles were checked again based on criteria for inclusion and exclusion, such as whether the article was complete (full-text), whether the source was valid, and whether it was relevant to the research keywords. At this point, 8 articles were left out. Five of them didn't satisfy the requirements, and three of them weren't from credible sources or weren't relevant to the research goals. After a thorough screening process, 20 papers were determined to match all criteria and were incorporated into the final analysis. These articles, published from 2018 to 2025 in scientific journals, contained entire papers and were pertinent to the study keywords and topic, specifically post-traumatic growth and social support for cancer survivors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Research findings on cancer patients, especially concerning their positive experiences post-trauma. Cancer patients must confront post-traumatic stress, as they encounter intricate physical and psychological difficulties arising from their diagnosis and treatment. Cancer sufferers can be any age, from young individuals to older people. PTG helps cancer patients find new purpose in their lives, improve their quality of life, make their social ties stronger, and deepen their spirituality after going through tragedy. It is therefore imperative to foster and augment posttraumatic growth, particularly for cancer patients, enabling them to adapt and lead more significant lives following the challenges posed by their condition. The table below gives further information about the systematic literature review.

No	Title (Year)	Method	Research Results
1	Posttraumatic Growth among Breast Cancer Survivors after Undergoing Mastectomy (Putri & Suarya, 2024)	Literature review	PTG in breast cancer survivors after mastectomy includes stages, indicators, and motivating factors such as social support and spiritual coping. PTG can be a target for intervention to improve the quality of life of survivors.
2	Impact of Posttraumatic Growth on the Quality of Life in Woman with Breast Cancer	Quantitative, cross-sectional	PTG is significantly related to the quality of life of breast cancer patients. Influencing factors: social relationships, new opportunities, internal strength, spirituality, and life expectancy.
3	Post-Traumatic Growth in Female Breast Cancer Survivors (Zahara & Minerty, 2021)	Qualitative, phenomenology	The PTG process in breast cancer survivors occurs through the positive meaning of traumatic experiences, increasing motivation to live and the meaning of life. Social support and positive coping are key.
4	Posttraumatic Growth in Female Survivors (Apriliani et al., 2022)	Qualitative, case study	Four female cancer survivors demonstrated positive changes in the form of an appreciation of life, improved social relationships, personal strength, spiritual transformation, and the emergence of new possibilities after cancer.
5	Post-Traumatic Growth in Cervical Cancer Patients Following Hysterectomy (Surjoseto, 2024)	Qualitative, case study	All subjects demonstrated positive changes toward higher levels in three main aspects: changes in self-perception, improved quality of relationships with others, and changes in life philosophy. The dimension of changes in life philosophy was the most dominant. This post-traumatic growth process was supported by social support and increased spirituality. The subjects were able to develop themselves toward better psychological growth than before, as well as becoming more open, empathetic, and active in social and spiritual life after experiencing the trauma of hysterectomy.
6	Relationship among post-traumatic growth, spiritual well-being, and perceived social support in Chinese women with gynecological cancer (Feng et al., 2024)	Quantitative, cross-sectional design	This study found that spiritual well-being, perceived social support, younger age, and religious belief were significantly positively associated with post-traumatic growth in gynecological cancer patients. The PTGI subscale with the highest score was Appreciation of Life, while the lowest was New Possibility. Family support was the most influential social factor. Regression results showed that these variables together explained 13% of PTG variation. Clinical implications: interventions to enhance PTG should focus on strengthening social support (especially family) and spiritual support for gynecological cancer patients.
7	Post-traumatic Growth in Adult Breast Cancer Patients After Mastectomy (Mahleda, M., & Hartini, 2016)	Qualitative, case study	The research findings indicate that breast cancer patients after mastectomy initially experience negative emotions such as sadness, disappointment, and lack of self-confidence. However, through the process of reflection and self-expression, these negative emotions can transform into positive emotions. The research subjects were able to develop themselves toward better psychological growth, reflected in three main dimensions: changes in self-perception, improved relationships with others, and changes in life philosophy. This post-traumatic growth process is influenced by emotional stability, social support, and belief in God. Thus, middle-aged women can adapt better and build new goals and perspectives in their lives after mastectomy.
8	Post-traumatic Growth after Cancer: A Scoping Review (Menger et al., 2021)	Scoping review	PTG in cancer patients is associated with positive health behavior changes. Longitudinal studies are needed to understand PTG pathways

9	Post-traumatic Growth Experience of Breast Cancer Patients(Huang et al., 2025)	Systematic review	PTG in breast cancer patients is predominantly found in the domains of interpersonal relationships and spirituality. Interventions should focus on the 1–3 year post-diagnosis phase.
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Discussion

Posttraumatic growth (PTG) in cancer patients is a multifaceted psychological phenomena characterized by diverse dimensions of positive transformation subsequent to diagnosis and therapy. According to a review of nine Indonesian research journals (2018–2025), PTG manifests through the processes of self-acceptance, social support, and spiritual strengthening. To investigate patients' subjective experiences, the majority of studies utilize a qualitative-phenomenological method, focusing primarily on breast cancer as the target group. Research conducted by Apriliani et al. (2022) identified internal factors, including spirituality, optimism, and resilience, as the fundamental elements of post-traumatic growth (PTG). Patients who can contemplate the spiritual significance of their condition generally possess a greater respect for their life and personal resilience. External variables, including familial and community support, can expedite post-traumatic growth, especially in patients following mastectomy (Putri & Suarya, 2024).

The interplay between these two elements generates the dynamics of psychological growth. Patients get social support here that helps them adapt to their situation. PTG develops incrementally rather than instantaneously. A study by Feng et al. (2024) identified three prevalent patterns: (1) the shock phase after to diagnosis, (2) acceptance facilitated by social and spiritual support, and (3) self-transformation characterized by alterations in life vision. In 67% of instances, PTG manifestations resulted in enhanced quality of interpersonal connections and a heightened appreciation for life (Zahara & Minerty, 2021). Because of physical limits after treatment, the chance to do new things (new possibilities) goes down.

Research, including Surjoseto (2024) and Zahara & Minerty (2021), underscores the significance of group therapy and self-compassion-based therapies in fostering post-traumatic growth (PTG). Programs that combine spiritual practices (such prayer and meditation) with support from other survivors have the best outcomes in making patients' lives better. These results are consistent with the notion provided by Richard G. Tedeschi, Jane Shakespeare-Finch, and Kanako Taku (2006), which asserts that post-traumatic growth (PTG) is contingent upon a holistic ecosystem and individual character. While the majority of studies indicate that PTG produces favorable outcomes, certain investigations have identified that prevailing conditions affect the results. Economic and occupational factors affect PTG in younger patients (Apriliani et al., 2022); nevertheless, for middle-aged people, emotional stability and familial support are paramount.

In 78% of investigations, indicators of spirituality were the most important signs of PTG. Cancer patients exhibited heightened worship intensity, a fortified believe in God, and the capacity to perceive their sickness as a “test of life” that imparts insight. For instance, a study (Zahara & Minerty, 2021) discovered that seven middle-aged breast cancer survivors underwent substantial spiritual development through self-reflection and prayer, aiding them in managing their physical state post-mastectomy. Changes in life philosophy also showed themselves in a deeper respect for time, health, and the things that are most important in life. Additionally, social support, including family, friends, and survivor communities, is a factor in 65% of PTG cases. Patients who receive emotional and instrumental assistance are more inclined to disclose their experiences, cultivate empathy, and enhance interpersonal relationships. A study by Surjoseto (2024) on cervical cancer survivors indicated that familial support facilitated the alleviation of social isolation and the construction of a new, more affirmative identity. The capacity to withstand cancer therapy cultivates awareness of intrinsic strengths, including resilience, optimism, and self-empathy. Research (Putri & Suarya, 2024) indicates that individuals with a heightened sense of self-responsibility are more inclined to experience post-traumatic growth (PTG) through self-acceptance and the regulation of negative emotions. Additionally, this phenomenon was observed in cervical cancer survivors post-hysterectomy, who altered their self-perception to foster greater independence, and Cancer Patient Resilience noted an enhancement in gratitude for fundamental aspects such as the capacity to engage in routine activities or enjoy familial interactions. A study (Ayni et al., n.d.) indicated that 89% of breast cancer participants said that being grateful for life was the best sign of PTG, especially after going through important treatment phases. Nonetheless, despite being the lowest-scoring indication (34%), several individuals discovered new options following trauma, including career transitions, participation in survivor communities, or support for health programs.

Numerous interrelated factors affect post-traumatic growth (PTG) in cancer patients. These aspects can be categorized into internal (individual) and external (social environment) elements, together with cognitive and spiritual processes encountered by an individual undergoing cancer trauma. The first study, which was almost all of them, indicated that social support was the most important factor in determining PTG in cancer patients. This includes emotional, instrumental, informational, and affective support from friends, partners, communities, and healthcare professionals. Studies show that cancer survivors who get a lot of social support, especially from family and friends, are more likely to see positive improvements in their lives following cancer trauma (Putri & Suarya, 2024). Social support also gives you a sense of safety, new hope, and emotional validation during the rehabilitation process, which are all very important.

The second is personal strength and resilience. PTG is highly affected by resilience, which is the ability of a person to survive and recover from stressful events. According to research by Zahara and Minerty (2021), patients who are more resilient and hopeful are better able to deal with stress, accept their illness, and find new meaning in their experiences. Self-empathy, the desire to recover, and the ability to adapt are additional crucial factors that can help predict PTG levels. Thirdly, coping mechanisms and cognitive processes, including positive evaluation and problem-focused methods, along with the capacity to reflect on and interpret experiences favorably, are significantly correlated with PTG levels. Purposeful rumination and constructive cognitive processing assist patients in converting unpleasant ideas into avenues for development. According to the concept (Richard G. Tedeschi, Crystal L. Park, 1998), the fourth aspect is spirituality and religious practice as a significant element in encouraging PTG, particularly within Indonesian society.

International research indicates that active coping and positive reinterpretation are significant contributors to the facilitation of post-traumatic growth (PTG). Research (Mahleda, M., & Hartini, 2016; Apriliani et al., 2022) indicates that engaging with God through prayer, worship, and spiritual reflection assists patients in discovering meaning and achieving inner tranquility. Spirituality serves as a source of strength during disease, while also enhancing hope and self-acceptance. The fifth element is that personal traits including age, degree of education, income, and past life events can also affect PTG. Some research indicate that younger patients prioritize fresh chances and social connections, whereas middle-aged patients emphasize spirituality and self-acceptance. Also, having an open and flexible attitude makes it easier for post-traumatic experiences to happen. The kind of cancer, how far along it is, the kind of treatment (such chemotherapy or mastectomy), and how long it has been since the diagnosis all affect the rate of PTG. Patients who have invasive operations such as mastectomy or hysterectomy often encounter more significant psychological challenges; nevertheless, they may also experience enhanced personal growth if provided with adequate coping mechanisms and support.

CONCLUSION

According to a comprehensive literature assessment of nine Indonesian research journals, cancer patients undergo posttraumatic growth (PTG) in response to the traumatic experiences associated with cancer diagnosis and treatment. Five primary signs of PTG are: more spirituality, a greater appreciation for life, more personal strength, stronger social interactions, and fresh chances in life. This growth doesn't happen all at once; instead, it happens in stages of shock, acceptance, and self-transformation, which are characterized by shifts in how one sees life and its significance.

PTG in cancer patients can be affected by internal characteristics including resilience, optimism, self-empathy, and spirituality, as well as external elements like support from family, friends, the community, and healthcare professionals. Social support, which gives people a sense of safety, new hope, and much-needed emotional validation throughout recovery, has been shown to be the most prevalent and important component in speeding up the PTG process. Patients can also deal with stress and discover new meaning in cancer by thinking about themselves and using flexible coping mechanisms. The findings suggest that comprehensive psychosocial interventions, including group counselling, spiritual enhancement programs, and familial support, are crucial for maximising post-traumatic growth in cancer patients. By taking into account the identified PTG characteristics and indicators, it is envisaged that cancer patients might have a more meaningful recovery process, improve their quality of life, and build better psychological resilience to confront future obstacles

CLOSING REMARKS

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