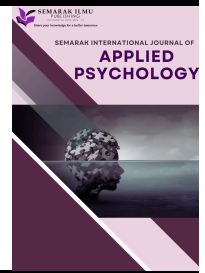




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Identity Reconstruction in Survivors of Complex Trauma

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ABSTRACT

Survivors of complex trauma often face significant challenges in reconstructing their sense of identity, which is frequently fragmented and disrupted by their traumatic experiences. This qualitative research investigates the intricate process of identity reconstruction among trauma survivors, focusing on their perceptions, key contributing factors, and the influence of support systems. Using a phenomenological approach, the study delves into the lived experiences of 12 diverse participants through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step process, facilitated by NVivo 12 software, to uncover the essence of their identity journeys. The findings reveal that survivors often perceive their identities as profoundly altered and disconnected from their pre-trauma selves, highlighting the enduring impact of trauma. Key factors aiding identity reconstruction include personal resilience, effective therapeutic interventions, and supportive social interactions. The critical role of support systems, such as family, therapy, and community, is underscored, either facilitating or hindering the reconstruction process. The research culminates in the development of the "Identity Reconstruction and Support Systems Framework" (IRSSF), a novel model that integrates essential elements of identity reconstruction with the pivotal influence of various support systems, offering comprehensive insights into the recovery pathways for complex trauma survivors. The findings of this research provide significant insights into the complex journey of identity reconstruction among trauma survivors, directly addressing the research objectives.

1. Introduction

Identity reconstruction in survivors of complex trauma is an intricate and multifaceted process that is pivotal to understanding the long-term impacts of traumatic experiences. Complex trauma, often resulting from prolonged and repeated exposure to adverse events, profoundly disrupts an individual's sense of self, leading to significant challenges in identity formation and maintenance [3]. Survivors frequently encounter profound disorientation and fragmentation of self, grappling with the loss of a coherent identity and enduring struggles in redefining their place in the world [5]. The significance of exploring this phenomenon lies in its potential to unveil the underlying mechanisms

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through which individuals navigate the arduous journey of reconstructing their identities, thereby informing therapeutic practices and interventions [17].

Existing literature on trauma has predominantly focused on the psychological and physiological repercussions, often overlooking the nuanced processes of identity reconstruction [2]. However, the resurgence of interest in trauma studies has illuminated the critical need to delve into the lived experiences of survivors, thereby fostering a more holistic understanding of trauma's aftermath [20]. This study aims to contribute to this growing body of knowledge by adopting a qualitative phenomenological approach, emphasizing the subjective experiences and personal narratives of survivors [6]. Through in-depth exploration, this research seeks to capture the essence of identity reconstruction, providing a rich and nuanced account of the challenges and triumphs faced by survivors.

The complexities inherent in identity reconstruction necessitate a comprehensive exploration of the interplay between individual experiences and broader sociocultural contexts. Survivors' narratives often reflect a dynamic and ongoing process, influenced by various factors such as social support, cultural background, and personal resilience [16]. Understanding these interdependencies is crucial for developing effective support systems and therapeutic interventions that are sensitive to the unique needs of trauma survivors [1]. Furthermore, by highlighting the diverse pathways of identity reconstruction, this study endeavors to challenge monolithic representations of trauma recovery, advocating for a more personalized and contextually grounded approach [8].

In addressing the intricacies of identity reconstruction, this research also seeks to contribute to the theoretical discourse on trauma and identity. By integrating insights from psychology, sociology, and trauma studies, the study aims to offer a multidimensional perspective on how survivors rebuild their sense of self [9]. This interdisciplinary approach not only enriches the understanding of identity reconstruction but also underscores the importance of cross-disciplinary collaborations in advancing trauma research [11].

Ultimately, this study aspires to provide a platform for survivors' voices, acknowledging their resilience and agency in the face of profound adversity [15]. By foregrounding their experiences, the research endeavors to foster greater empathy and understanding, paving the way for more effective and compassionate responses to the challenges of complex trauma [14]. As we embark on this exploration, we recognize the courage and strength of survivors, whose stories will illuminate the path towards a deeper comprehension of identity reconstruction in the aftermath of trauma [13].

1.1 Research Problem

Survivors of complex trauma frequently endure a disrupted sense of self, a profound issue that permeates their personal and social functioning [3]. The fragmentation of identity resulting from such trauma can lead to significant challenges, as individuals struggle to integrate their traumatic experiences into a cohesive self-concept [5]. This disruption not only affects how survivors perceive themselves but also impairs their ability to form and maintain relationships, pursue personal goals, and engage in everyday activities. Addressing this issue requires a nuanced understanding of the ways in which trauma shatters an individual's sense of identity and the specific mechanisms through which this fragmentation occurs [2].

In examining the impact of trauma on identity formation, it is crucial to consider the long-term effects and the processes through which survivors attempt to reconstruct their identities [7]. Complex trauma, often stemming from prolonged and repeated exposure to adverse experiences, deeply influences an individual's development and sense of self. Over time, these experiences can distort one's self-image, leading to persistent feelings of worthlessness, shame, and disconnection

[4]. Understanding the intricacies of this identity formation process involves exploring how survivors navigate their internal and external worlds to rebuild a coherent and positive self-identity, despite the pervasive impact of their traumatic histories [12].

The role of support systems in the identity reconstruction process is a pivotal area of investigation. Support systems, including family, therapy, and community resources, can either facilitate or hinder survivors' efforts to rebuild their identities. Effective support can provide validation, safety, and a sense of belonging, essential components for healing and identity reconstruction. Conversely, the absence of supportive networks or the presence of negative influences can exacerbate feelings of isolation and impede recovery [19]. Research in this area aims to identify the characteristics of effective support systems and the ways in which they can be harnessed to aid survivors in their journey toward identity reconstruction [10].

In conclusion, the phenomena of disrupted identity, the enduring impact of trauma on identity formation, and the critical role of support systems collectively shape the experiences of complex trauma survivors [18]. Through qualitative phenomenology research, we can delve deeply into these issues, providing a comprehensive understanding that not only highlights the struggles faced by survivors but also points toward pathways for healing and identity reconstruction. This research holds the potential to inform interventions and support mechanisms that can significantly enhance the lives of those grappling with the aftermath of complex trauma [16].

1.2 Research Objectives

The exploration of identity reconstruction among survivors of complex trauma is a crucial area of study within the realm of psychology and trauma research. Complex trauma, often resulting from prolonged or repeated exposure to traumatic events, profoundly impacts an individual's psychological and emotional well-being. Understanding the lived experiences of these individuals and the mechanisms they utilize to reconstruct their identities is essential for developing effective therapeutic interventions and support systems. This study aims to delve into these aspects through a qualitative phenomenological approach, providing deep insights into the subjective experiences of trauma survivors.

Objective 1: Exploring Lived Experiences and Identity Impact

The primary objective of this research is to explore the lived experiences of individuals who have survived complex trauma and to understand how these experiences have impacted their sense of identity over time. This involves delving into the personal narratives of trauma survivors to capture the essence of their experiences and the ways in which their identities have been shaped, challenged, and transformed by their traumatic histories. By doing so, the research seeks to highlight the nuanced and multifaceted nature of identity disruption and reconstruction in the context of complex trauma.

Objective 2: Identifying Processes and Mechanisms of Identity Reconstruction

Building on the understanding of lived experiences, the second objective is to identify the processes and mechanisms through which survivors of complex trauma reconstruct their identities. This entails examining the strategies, coping mechanisms, and internal and external resources that individuals draw upon in their journey towards rebuilding a coherent and resilient sense of self. The research aims to uncover the dynamic interplay between personal agency, resilience, and environmental factors in the identity reconstruction process, shedding light on the pathways that lead to recovery and growth.

Objective 3: Assessing the Role of Support Systems

The third objective focuses on assessing the role of various support systems in facilitating or obstructing the identity reconstruction process in survivors of complex trauma. Support systems, including family, friends, mental health professionals, community organizations, and social services, play a critical role in the recovery journey of trauma survivors. This objective aims to evaluate the effectiveness of these support systems in providing the necessary emotional, psychological, and practical support. Additionally, it seeks to identify potential barriers and challenges within these systems that may hinder the identity reconstruction process, offering insights for improving support structures and interventions.

In conclusion, this research endeavors to provide a comprehensive understanding of the identity reconstruction process in survivors of complex trauma. By exploring their lived experiences, identifying the mechanisms of identity reconstruction, and assessing the role of support systems, this study aims to contribute valuable knowledge to the field of trauma research and inform the development of more effective therapeutic and support interventions.

1.3 Research Questions

The phenomenon of identity reconstruction in survivors of complex trauma is an intricate and multifaceted process that demands a nuanced understanding of human resilience and adaptability. Complex trauma, which encompasses repeated and prolonged exposure to traumatic events, often results in profound disruptions to an individual's sense of self. This qualitative phenomenological study aims to delve deeply into the lived experiences of these survivors, examining how their identities are perceived and reconstructed throughout their journey. By exploring the temporal shifts in self-perception, identifying critical factors in identity reconstruction, and understanding the role of support systems, this research seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on trauma recovery and psychological resilience.

Research Question 1: How do survivors of complex trauma perceive their identity before, during, and after their traumatic experiences?

Understanding identity perception involves examining how individuals viewed themselves before the trauma, how their self-concept changed during the traumatic experiences, and how they perceive their identity in the aftermath. This inquiry is pivotal because it provides insights into the internal shifts and struggles that survivors endure, offering a chronological perspective on the evolution of self-identity in the context of trauma.

Research Question 2: What are the key factors and experiences that contribute to the reconstruction of identity in survivors of complex trauma?

This aspect of the research aims to uncover the specific elements that facilitate the rebuilding of a fragmented self. These factors may include personal coping mechanisms, therapeutic interventions, significant life events, and moments of self-discovery. By pinpointing these critical components, the study hopes to illuminate the pathways through which survivors navigate their identity reconstruction, providing valuable information for developing effective support and intervention strategies.

Research Question 3: In what ways do support systems influence the identity reconstruction process for survivors of complex trauma?

Support systems, including family, friends, healthcare professionals, and community networks, play a crucial role in the recovery journey. This research aims to understand how these external sources of support impact the survivors' efforts to rebuild their sense of self. It will explore the types of support that are most beneficial, the timing and nature of such support, and the overall significance of a supportive environment in the identity reconstruction process. By doing so, the study aims to highlight the importance of a holistic and supportive approach to trauma recovery.

The research questions outlined in this study are designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of identity reconstruction in survivors of complex trauma. By examining the perceptions of identity before, during, and after trauma, identifying key factors in the reconstruction process, and evaluating the role of support systems, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to the field of trauma recovery. The findings of this research have the potential to inform both theoretical frameworks and practical interventions, ultimately aiding in the development of more effective support mechanisms for survivors of complex trauma.

1.4 Trauma Recovery Model (TRM)

An existing model that can be effectively used to guide the research on "Identity Reconstruction in Survivors of Complex Trauma" is the **Trauma Recovery Model (TRM)**. The Trauma Recovery Model is a comprehensive framework that combines psychological and social perspectives to understand and facilitate recovery from complex trauma. It is designed to provide a structured pathway for individuals and practitioners to navigate the complexities of trauma recovery.

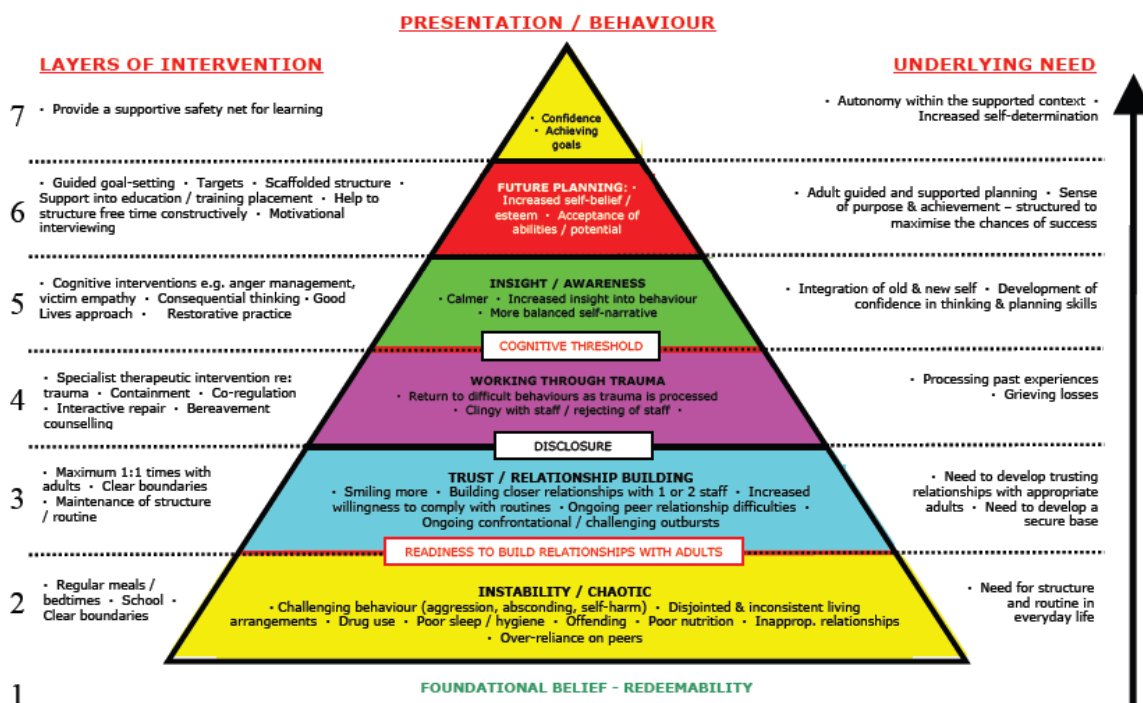


Fig. 1. Trauma Recovery Model (TRM)

1.4.1 Key components of TRM

Referring to Figure 1, The Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) offers a comprehensive framework blending psychological and social perspectives to navigate the complexities of trauma recovery. This research was delved into its key components, explore its application to research on identity reconstruction in survivors of complex trauma, and highlight the benefits of utilizing TRM in qualitative phenomenology studies. The TRM comprises three pivotal components:

- **Safety and Stabilization:** The initial step involves establishing physical and emotional safety, fostering an environment where survivors feel secure and supported.
- **Remembrance and Mourning:** Encourages survivors to process and make sense of their traumatic experiences, acknowledging and grieving their losses and changes.
- **Reconnection and Integration:** Focuses on rebuilding a coherent sense of self, fostering reconnection with oneself and others, and finding meaning and purpose.

The TRM's key components offer a structured pathway for understanding and facilitating recovery from complex trauma, emphasizing safety, processing traumatic experiences, and rebuilding a sense of self.

1.4.2 Application to the Research

TRM provides a robust framework for researching identity reconstruction in survivors of complex trauma:

- **Disrupted Sense of Self:** TRM's Safety and Stabilization component highlights the importance of establishing safety for addressing fragmented identities, while Reconnection and Integration elucidates the process of reconstructing the self.
- **Impact of Trauma on Identity Formation:** Utilizing TRM's Remembrance and Mourning phase facilitates exploring how traumatic memories shape identity formation, while Reconnection and Integration identifies stages and processes of identity reconstruction.
- **Role of Support Systems:** TRM underscores the significance of supportive environments in recovery and emphasizes how various support systems contribute to or hinder the reconstruction process.

By applying TRM to research, researcher gain insights into how trauma impacts identity formation and how support systems influence the reconstruction process, informing interventions and support strategies for survivors.

1.4.3 Benefits of using TRM

Utilizing TRM offers several advantages. Its holistic approach addresses psychological and social aspects of trauma recovery comprehensively. The model provides a structured pathway for research and data analysis, facilitating a systematic exploration of identity reconstruction. Grounded in clinical practice and research, TRM offers an evidence-based framework supported by empirical findings.

By employing TRM, researcher can adopt a holistic approach, follow a structured pathway, and rely on evidence-based practices, enhancing the depth and rigor of qualitative phenomenology studies on identity reconstruction in survivors of complex trauma.

2. Methodology

This research aims to delve into the intricate process of identity reconstruction among survivors of complex trauma. Complex trauma often leaves individuals grappling with a fragmented sense of self, impacting various aspects of their lives. Understanding the dynamics of identity formation and reconstruction post-trauma is crucial for informing effective interventions and support systems. The Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) provides a robust theoretical framework, integrating psychological and social perspectives, which aligns well with the multifaceted nature of identity reconstruction in this population.

2.1 Research Design

This qualitative study employs a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of survivors of complex trauma. Phenomenology allows for an in-depth examination of participants' subjective experiences, capturing the nuances of their identity journey post-trauma. Through this approach, the researchers seek to uncover the essence of identity reconstruction among survivors, offering rich insights into their perceptions and processes.

2.2 Participants

The participants in this study were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they had experienced complex trauma and were in the process of reconstructing their identities. The criteria for inclusion were:

- Adults (18 years and older) who identify as survivors of complex trauma.
- Individuals who have engaged in therapeutic or self-guided efforts towards identity reconstruction.
- Participants willing to share their experiences in detail during in-depth interviews.

A total of 12 participants were recruited for this study, providing a diverse range of experiences across different ages, genders, and backgrounds.

2.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. This method allows for flexibility in exploring topics in detail while ensuring that key areas related to identity reconstruction are covered. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, descriptive accounts of the participants' experiences, such as:

- Can you describe your experience of living with the effects of complex trauma?
- How would you describe your journey towards reconstructing your identity?
- What challenges and facilitators have you encountered in this process?
- How have your relationships and social interactions influenced your identity reconstruction?

Additionally, supplementary data such as participant journals or creative expressions may be collected to enrich the understanding of participants' experiences. Interviews lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and were conducted in a private setting, either in person or via secure video conferencing platforms, to ensure participant comfort and confidentiality. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

2.4 Data Analysis

The data analysis followed Colaizzi's seven-step process of phenomenological analysis, which involves:

1. **Familiarization:** Reading the transcripts multiple times to become immersed in the data.
2. **Identifying significant statements:** Extracting phrases and sentences that directly relate to the phenomenon of identity reconstruction.
3. **Formulating meanings:** Interpreting the meanings of these significant statements.
4. **Clustering themes:** Grouping formulated meanings into themes that capture the essence of the participants' experiences.
5. **Developing an exhaustive description:** Integrating the themes into a comprehensive description of the phenomenon.
6. **Producing the fundamental structure:** Condensing the exhaustive description into a succinct statement that captures the core of identity reconstruction in complex trauma survivors.
7. **Member checking:** Returning to the participants to validate the findings and ensure they accurately reflect their experiences.

Additionally, qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo 12, will be utilized to facilitate data management and organization. This combination of rigorous manual analysis and technological support ensures a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the data, leading to rich and nuanced findings.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical guidelines to protect participants' rights and well-being. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were aware of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality was maintained by assigning pseudonyms to all participants and anonymizing any identifying information in the transcripts. Data were stored securely, and only the research team had access to the recordings and transcripts.

2.6 Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed:

- **Credibility:** Prolonged engagement and member checking were used to enhance the accuracy of the findings.
- **Transferability:** Thick descriptions of the participants' experiences and contexts were provided to allow readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other settings.
- **Dependability:** An audit trail was maintained, documenting the research process and decisions made throughout the study.
- **Confirmability:** Reflexivity was practiced, with the researchers acknowledging and reflecting on their own potential biases and influences on the research.

2.7 Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity was employed throughout the research process to acknowledge and address

the researcher's biases, assumptions, and preconceptions. Reflexive journaling and peer debriefing will be utilized to reflect on the researcher's influence on data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

3. Results

The results of this study are organized around the three primary research questions, with the findings derived from the analysis of the semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 12 participants. Each theme corresponds to the research objectives and captures the essence of identity reconstruction among survivors of complex trauma. These themes were derived from the data analysis following Colaizzi's seven-step process, facilitated by NVivo 12 software.

Objective 1: Exploring Lived Experiences and Identity Impact This objective aim to explore the lived experiences of individuals who have survived complex trauma and to understand how these experiences have impacted their sense of identity over time. The themes and sub-themes could include:

Theme 1: Fragmentation of Identity

Participants consistently described a fragmented and evolving sense of self through the stages of their trauma experiences. This fragmentation often manifested as feelings of disconnection from their previous selves and a sense of being "lost" or "broken."

- Sub-theme 1: Identity Before Trauma

Participants described their pre-trauma identity as stable and coherent. Many reported having a strong sense of self and clear life goals.

Quoting some of them:

Before the trauma, I felt very sure of who I was. I had a clear direction in life and felt confident in my abilities. (R1, F, 25 years old)

I had a strong sense of belonging and purpose. My identity was closely tied to my family and career. (R5, M, 20 years old)

I had a clear sense of who I was and what I wanted in life. The trauma shattered that image entirely. (R3, F, 19 years old)

- Sub-theme 2: Identity During Trauma

During the traumatic experiences, participants reported a significant disruption in their sense of identity. Many felt a loss of control and fragmentation of self.

Quoting some of them:

During the trauma, I felt like I was losing myself. It was like parts of me were breaking away, and I couldn't hold on to who I used to be. (R7, F, 30 years old)

I was in survival mode. My sense of identity became very blurred. I couldn't recognize myself in the mirror. (R11, F, 29 years old)

I felt like I was no longer myself. It was as if I was watching my life from the outside, detached and disconnected." This detachment often persisted, causing ongoing identity confusion and self-doubt. (R10, M, 21 years old)

- Sub-theme 3: Identity After Trauma

Post-trauma, participants experienced a complex process of identity reconstruction. This phase involved re-evaluating their self-concept and finding new ways to integrate their traumatic experiences into their identity.

Quoting some of them:

After the trauma, I had to rebuild myself from scratch. It was a long journey of self-discovery and trying to make sense of what happened. (R2, M, 28 years old)

I started to see myself differently. The trauma changed me, but I also found strengths I didn't know I had. (R8, F, 31 years old)

Rebuilding myself has been a long process. I am not the person I was before, but I am slowly discovering who I am now. (R6, F, 26 years old)

Objective 2: Identifying Processes and Mechanisms of Identity Reconstruction This objective seeks to identify the processes and mechanisms through which survivors of complex trauma reconstruct their identities. The themes and sub-themes might include:

Theme 1: Processes of Identity Reconstruction

Participants identified several key factors and experiences that facilitated their journey toward reconstructing their identities. These included self-reflection, therapeutic interventions, and finding new meaning or purpose in life.

Quoting some of them:

Journaling became my lifeline. Writing about my experiences and my feelings helped me make sense of what happened and who I am becoming. (R4, F, 27 years old)

Taking time to reflect on my experiences helped me to piece together my new identity. I learned a lot about myself in the process (R9, M, 30 years old)

Journaling was crucial for me. They allowed me to process my thoughts and emotions and understand how the trauma shaped me (R12, F, 24 years old)

Theme 2: Resilience and Agency

Survivors highlighted the importance of personal resilience and taking proactive steps in their recovery. This included setting new goals, engaging in creative activities, and establishing new routines.

Quoting some of them:

I started painting as a way to express myself. It's something I never did before, but it's helping me rebuild my sense of self. (R3, F, 19 years old)

Setting small, achievable goals gave me a sense of accomplishment and a path forward." (R6, M, 26 years old)

Theme 3: Therapeutic Interventions

Professional therapy was identified as a significant factor in aiding identity reconstruction. Various therapeutic approaches helped participants navigate their trauma and rebuild their sense of self.

Quoting some of them:

Therapy was a turning point for me. It helped me understand my trauma and start piecing together who I want to be now. (R11, F, 29 years old)

Therapy was a game-changer. My therapist helped me to see patterns and connections that I couldn't on my own (R8, F, 31 years old)

EMDR therapy helped me to process my trauma and reclaim parts of my identity that I thought were lost. (R2, M, 28 years old)

Objective 3: Assessing the Role of Support Systems This objective explores on assessing the role of various support systems in facilitating or obstructing the identity reconstruction process in survivors of complex trauma. The themes and sub-themes could include:

Theme 1: Positive Impact of Support Systems

Participants consistently emphasized the critical role that support systems played in their identity reconstruction. Supportive relationships with family, friends, therapists, and community groups provided essential emotional and practical assistance.

Quoting some of them:

My family was my rock. They reminded me of who I was and supported me as I found my way back. (R6, M, 26 years old)

Joining a support group for trauma survivors was life-changing. Hearing others' stories made me feel less alone and more understood. (R12, F, 24 years old)

My family stood by me and reminded me of my strengths, which was crucial in my recovery journey. (R11, F, 29 years old)

Theme 2: Negative Influence

Some participants also experienced negative influences from their support systems, which hindered their identity reconstruction. Lack of understanding, invalidation, and stigmatization were common issues.

Quoting some of them:

Not everyone understood what I was going through. Some people were dismissive or invalidated my experiences, which made it harder to heal. (R4, F, 27 years old)

There were times when I felt judged or stigmatized by people who didn't get it. That was really tough to deal with. (R9, M, 30 years old)

I struggled a lot because my friends didn't understand what I was going through. Their dismissal made it harder for me to heal. (R8, F, 31 years old)

This study's findings illustrate the multifaceted nature of identity reconstruction among survivors of complex trauma. The results highlight how trauma disrupts identity, the key processes and experiences that contribute to rebuilding a sense of self, and the significant influence of support systems in facilitating or hindering this process. These insights offer valuable contributions to understanding the lived experiences of trauma survivors and underscore the importance of tailored support systems in aiding their recovery journey.

3.1 Identity Reconstruction and Support Systems Framework (IRSSF)

Identity Reconstruction and Support Systems Framework (IRSSF) was developed specifically tailored to the identity reconstruction process in survivors of complex trauma. This framework integrates the key elements of identity reconstruction with the critical role of various support systems.

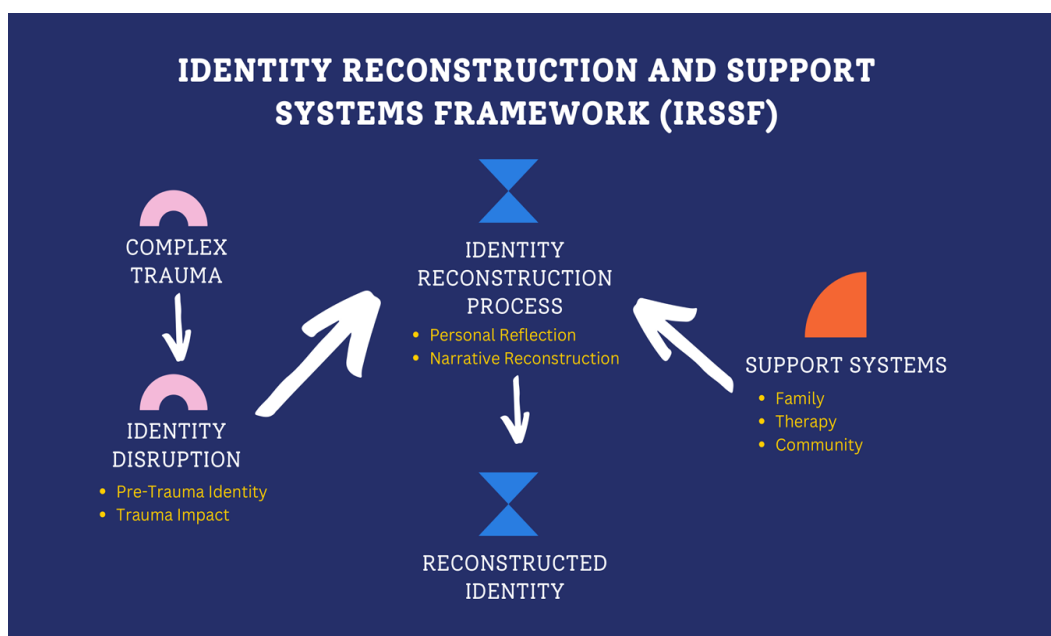


Fig. 2. Identity Reconstruction and Support Systems Framework (IRSSF)

Based on Figure 2, here is the diagram representing the Identity Reconstruction and Support Systems Framework (IRSSF):

- **Complex Trauma** leads to **Identity Disruption**.
- **Identity Disruption** initiates the **Identity Reconstruction Process**.
- **Support Systems** (including Family, Therapy, and Community) play a critical role in the **Identity Reconstruction Process**.
- The outcome of this process is the **Reconstructed Identity**.

This framework visually captures the flow from complex trauma through disruption, the role of various support systems in aiding the reconstruction process, and the ultimate goal of achieving a reconstructed identity.

1. Complex Trauma Leads to Identity Disruption

This refers to repeated, prolonged exposure to traumatic events, often within interpersonal contexts. Examples include childhood abuse, domestic violence, or long-term captivity. Unlike single-event trauma, complex trauma has pervasive and deep-seated effects on an individual's psychological and emotional health.

Identity Disruption: The intense and ongoing nature of complex trauma severely impacts an individual's sense of self. Survivors often experience a fragmented or disrupted identity. This can manifest as confusion about one's personal identity, feelings of lost identity, and difficulties in maintaining a consistent sense of self across different contexts and over time. Identity disruption is characterized by:

- **Fragmented self-perception:** Difficulty in understanding or describing oneself coherently.
- **Emotional instability:** Heightened emotional responses and mood swings.
- **Behavioral inconsistencies:** Engaging in behaviors that are not aligned with one's perceived identity or values.

2. Identity Disruption Initiates the Identity Reconstruction Process

This is the journey survivors embark upon to rebuild their sense of self after experiencing identity disruption due to complex trauma. This process involves:

- **Self-Reflection:** Survivors engage in deep self-reflection to understand the impact of trauma on their identity.
- **Meaning-Making:** They attempt to make sense of their traumatic experiences and integrate these into a coherent narrative of self.
- **Reframing:** Reconstructing their identity involves reframing past experiences and redefining their self-perception, often shifting from a victim identity to a survivor identity.
- **Resilience Building:** Developing coping mechanisms and resilience to manage the emotional aftermath of trauma.

3. Support Systems Play a Critical Role in the Identity Reconstruction Process

Various support systems are crucial in aiding the identity reconstruction process. These systems provide the necessary emotional, psychological, and social support that facilitates recovery and rebuilding of a stable identity. The main support systems include:

- **Family:** Family can offer unconditional love, a sense of belonging, and a safe space for survivors to express their emotions and experiences. Family support can help:
 - **Validation and Acceptance:** Providing validation of the survivor's experiences and acceptance of their changing identity.
 - **Stability and Security:** Offering a stable environment that fosters emotional security.
- **Therapy:** Professional therapy plays a significant role in guiding survivors through the complex process of identity reconstruction. Therapists can:
 - **Facilitate Self-Understanding:** Help survivors explore and understand the impact of trauma on their identity.
 - **Provide Coping Strategies:** Equip survivors with strategies to cope with emotional and psychological challenges.
 - **Support Narrative Formation:** Assist in creating a coherent and empowering personal narrative.
- **Community:** Community support, including peer support groups and social networks, can offer a sense of belonging and shared experiences. Community support can:

- Normalize Experiences: Help survivors see that they are not alone and their experiences are shared by others.
- Empowerment: Foster empowerment through collective identity and community resilience.

○

4. The Outcome of This Process is the Reconstructed Identity

This is the ultimate goal of the identity reconstruction process. A reconstructed identity represents a coherent, stable, and integrated sense of self that incorporates the traumatic experiences without being defined by them. Key aspects of a reconstructed identity include:

- Integrated Self-Perception: A coherent understanding and acceptance of oneself, integrating both pre-trauma and post-trauma identities.
- Emotional Regulation: Improved ability to manage and regulate emotional responses.
- Behavioral Consistency: Alignment of behaviors with one's reconstructed identity and values.
- Empowerment: Feeling empowered and resilient, with a renewed sense of purpose and direction in life.

3.2 Comparison Between the Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) and Identity Reconstruction and Support Systems Framework (IRSSF)

The Trauma Recovery Model (TRM) and the Identity Reconstruction and Support Systems Framework (IRSSF) are both essential tools for understanding and facilitating recovery in survivors of complex trauma, yet they approach the process from different perspectives and emphasize distinct aspects of recovery. The TRM is a comprehensive framework that combines psychological and social perspectives, providing a structured pathway for individuals and practitioners to navigate the intricacies of trauma recovery. It encompasses various stages of recovery, focusing on stabilization, symptom reduction, and integration of traumatic experiences into a coherent sense of self. TRM emphasizes a broad spectrum of interventions, recognizing the multifaceted nature of trauma recovery, which includes psychological, social, and sometimes pharmacological components.

In contrast, the IRSSF specifically hones in on the process of identity reconstruction post-trauma, emphasizing the crucial role of support systems in this journey. While the TRM provides a generalized roadmap for overall recovery, the IRSSF offers a more targeted approach to understanding how survivors rebuild their identities after experiencing complex trauma. It highlights the central role of support systems, such as family, therapy, and community, in facilitating this reconstruction process. The IRSSF diagrammatically represents the flow from trauma-induced identity disruption through the engagement with support systems to achieve a reconstructed identity, offering a clear, visual representation of the interconnections and dependencies in this specific aspect of recovery.

Ultimately, while both models aim to aid in the recovery of trauma survivors, the TRM provides a broader, more holistic approach to recovery, addressing a wide range of recovery needs. In contrast, the IRSSF zeroes in on the identity reconstruction aspect, providing detailed insights into how support systems can specifically aid in rebuilding a survivor's sense of self. These frameworks can be used complementarily, with TRM offering a foundational recovery structure and IRSSF providing specialized guidance on identity reconstruction within that broader recovery journey.

4. Conclusions

This research aimed to unravel the intricate process of identity reconstruction in survivors of complex trauma, exploring how their sense of self is disrupted and subsequently reformed. Through

a qualitative, phenomenological approach, we delved into the lived experiences of 12 individuals, shedding light on the profound impact of trauma on identity and the crucial role of support systems in facilitating recovery. The study employed Colaizzi's seven-step process of phenomenological analysis, supported by NVivo 12 software, to meticulously analyze the rich data collected from in-depth interviews. The development of the Identity Reconstruction and Support Systems Framework (IRSSF) offers a novel perspective on understanding and supporting identity reconstruction in trauma survivors.

The findings of this research provide significant insights into the complex journey of identity reconstruction among trauma survivors, directly addressing the research objectives. Firstly, it was found that survivors perceive their identity as significantly fragmented and altered by their traumatic experiences, often describing a profound sense of disconnection from their pre-trauma selves. This aligns with the first research objective of exploring how trauma impacts identity over time. Secondly, the study identified key factors and experiences that facilitate identity reconstruction, such as personal resilience, meaningful therapeutic interventions, and positive social interactions, which support the second research objective of identifying reconstruction processes and mechanisms. Lastly, the critical role of support systems was highlighted, with family, therapy, and community playing pivotal roles in either facilitating or obstructing the identity reconstruction process. This finding responds to the third research objective by assessing the impact of support systems.

4.1 Contribution of the Study

This study makes several notable contributions to the field of trauma recovery and identity studies. The development of the Identity Reconstruction and Support Systems Framework (IRSSF) is a significant theoretical advancement, providing a structured pathway for understanding and supporting the identity reconstruction process. This framework integrates psychological and social perspectives, emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to trauma recovery. Additionally, the study enhances the existing body of literature by providing detailed, qualitative insights into the subjective experiences of trauma survivors, thus enriching our understanding of the nuanced ways in which complex trauma impacts identity.

4.2 Study Limitations

Despite its contributions, the study has several limitations. The small sample size of 12 participants, while providing depth, may limit the generalizability of the findings. The use of purposive sampling, although ensuring relevance, may introduce selection bias. Furthermore, the reliance on self-reported data could lead to recall bias or social desirability bias, potentially affecting the authenticity of the responses. Finally, the study's focus on a specific population may not capture the diverse experiences of all trauma survivors, particularly those from different cultural or socio-economic backgrounds.

4.3 Recommendations for Future Studies

Future research should consider addressing these limitations by employing larger, more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the dynamic process of identity reconstruction over time. Additionally, incorporating mixed methods approaches could offer a more comprehensive understanding by combining qualitative depth with quantitative breadth. Further exploration into the specific roles of different

types of support systems, including digital and peer support, could provide valuable insights into innovative ways to support trauma survivors. Lastly, cross-cultural studies are recommended to understand the cultural nuances in identity reconstruction and to develop culturally sensitive support frameworks.

In conclusion, this research underscores the profound impact of complex trauma on identity and highlights the critical role of support systems in the reconstruction process. By developing the Identity Reconstruction and Support Systems Framework (IRSSF), this study provides a valuable tool for practitioners and researchers alike, offering a structured approach to understanding and facilitating identity reconstruction in trauma survivors. Despite its limitations, the study contributes significantly to the field, paving the way for future research to build on these findings and further enhance our understanding and support of trauma recovery.

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Conflict of Interest

The author confirms there are no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research studies.

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