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## ***Post-traumatic growth amongst UK armed forces personnel who were deployed to Afghanistan and the role of combat injury, mental health and pain: the ADVANCE cohort study***

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### ***What is the ADVANCE Study?***

The ADVANCE Study investigates the physical and psycho-social outcomes of battlefield casualties in the long-term. The study has 1,145 participants who served in the Afghanistan War of 2002-2014. Half of the cohort have sustained serious battlefield injuries, and the other half are the control group of non-injured servicemen. The participants attend 6 study visits over a 20-year period.

### ***What does this piece of ADVANCE research look at?***

The long-term mental health outcomes of UK Armed Forces personnel who sustained serious combat injuries during deployment to Afghanistan are largely unknown. ADVANCE is the first study to look at these outcomes on a relatively large scale and over a long period of time.

The aim of this piece of ADVANCE research was to look at the experience of post-traumatic growth amongst the ADVANCE cohort and assess whether combat injury, mental illness and pain were associated with post-traumatic growth in this group.



### ***What is post-traumatic growth?***

Post-traumatic growth is a collection of psychological changes that occur after exposure to trauma. These can include but are not limited to: appreciating your life more, relating to others better, a greater understanding of your own personal strength, seeing new possibilities in your life and a greater spiritual understanding.

### ***What were the findings***

Our findings showed that those who experienced a combat injury whilst deployed to Afghanistan were more likely to report a large degree of post-traumatic growth compared to the uninjured group. However, the type of injury is important to consider. Those who experienced amputation-related injuries were more likely to report post-traumatic growth compared to the uninjured group, but those who experienced non-amputation injuries were not. In addition, those who reported depression were less likely to report a large degree of post-traumatic growth. On the other hand, pain/discomfort was associated with a greater likelihood of reporting a large degree of post-traumatic growth. We also found that PTSD has a mixed association with PTG.

### ***What do the findings mean***

Post-traumatic growth has a number of beneficial aspects, not limited to psychological health. Those who experience post-traumatic growth generally engage in healthier lifestyle behaviours (e.g. lower alcohol use or smoking) and have better overall health compared to those who don't experience post-traumatic growth. The more we understand about why some people experience this growth whilst others experience mental illness, the more likely it is we can develop targeted interventions that might help elicit growth amongst the most vulnerable.

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