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*Layah Jacob, Anuradha Sathiyaseelan*

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ΕΜΠΕΙΡΙΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ | RESEARCH PAPER

Loving life’s impermanence: How existential gratitude sparks transformation in cancer survivors

Layah Liz JACOB<sup>1</sup>, Anuradha SATHIYASEELAN<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Psychology, CHRIST University, India

KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Existential gratitude Post-traumatic growth Spirituality Cancer survivors Mortality	Cancer survivorship is often accompanied by existential distress as individuals confront mortality and search for meaning in their experiences. This study examines existential gratitude, which is a heightened appreciation of life shaped by suffering and impermanence, as a mediator between spirituality and post-traumatic growth (PTG) among Indian cancer survivors. Grounded in Terror Management Theory (TMT), this research explores how spirituality, rather than directly fostering PTG, requires existential gratitude as a transformative mechanism. A sample of 118 Indian cancer survivors, at least six months post-active treatment, participated in the study. Spearman’s rho correlations revealed significant positive associations between existential gratitude, spirituality, and PTG. Mediation analysis demonstrated that existential gratitude fully mediated the relationship between spirituality and PTG ( $\beta = .16, p = .003$ ), with spirituality showing no direct effect on PTG ( $\beta = .08, p = .414$ ) when existential gratitude was introduced. These findings challenge traditional views of spirituality as an inherent driver of growth, highlighting instead that PTG arises when existential gratitude transforms mortality awareness into an appreciation of life’s fragility.
CORRESPONDENCE	
Layah Liz Jacob Christ University Hosur Road, Near Dairy Circle, Bangalore, Karnataka- 560029 layahlizjacob27@gmail.com	

Impermanence is central to existence, a concept deeply embedded in Buddhist philosophy, where change is both a source of suffering and a path to liberation (Laumakis, 2008). When individuals encounter impermanence, or the awareness of death, such as in the case of a cancer diagnosis, this can provoke existential anxiety. However, authentic life is not achieved through the denial of death but by confronting its inevitability. Existential philosopher, Martin Heidegger views this awareness of mortality, not as an abstract endpoint but an ever-present condition that imbues life with meaning (Molapo & Malatji, 2024). Within this context, gratitude, which is traditionally defined as a stable trait linked to psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Aghababaei & Farahani, 2011), takes on a deeper existential dimension through existential gratitude. Unlike conventional gratitude, which is often conditional and directed toward specific benefits or benefactors, existential gratitude is an unconditional stance of appreciation for existence itself. It arises not from abundance, but from the awareness of the transiency of life (Kirca et al., 2023; Lacewing, 2016). Existential gratitude can be defined as an enduring appreciation for life rooted in an awareness of our interconnectedness among humanity, the capacity to find meaning in suffering, and an acceptance of life’s impermanence (Jans-Beken & Wong, 2021). This form of gratitude is particularly relevant in contexts involving mortality, trauma, or existential threat, such as in serious illness, where individuals may shift from asking “*why me?*” to “*Even so, I am thankful for this life*” (Friedrich, Zenger & Hinz, 2019).

This offers a framework for understanding how individuals adapt to trauma and perceived life-threat. As cancer survivors face existential crisis through threatened death, they may grapple with post-traumatic stress

symptoms, while simultaneously cultivating deeper meaning and appreciation for life (Banik et al., 2022; Knox, 2020). This leads to a paradoxical outcome, known as post-traumatic growth (PTG) (Cann et al., 2010) which refers to positive psychological change in response to challenging life circumstances that results in a deeper appreciation for life, meaningful relationships to others, discovering new possibilities, identifying personal strength and causes a positive change in spirituality. Spirituality, defined as a personal or communal search for the sacred and meaning of life (Pargament, 1997), has been widely associated with resilience and psychological adaptation, especially in the face of a serious illness (Easvaradoss & Rajan, 2013).

Terror Management Theory (Greenberg & Arndt, 2012) addresses this viewpoint through the concept of mortality salience (similar to mortality awareness), which is theorized to trigger defenses that rationalize or suppress thoughts regarding death. Further, it maintains that cultural worldviews such as religiosity offer meaning and order, resulting in symbolic immortality (e.g.: afterlife) thus providing psychological security (Greenberg, Pyszczynski & Solomon, 1986). However, we contradict and add to this theory by viewing spirituality as the buffer to existential anxiety, which then promotes existential gratitude through meaning - making that shifts the focus from fear of death to an appreciation of impermanence, offering a transformative pathway to achieving PTG.

Although post traumatic growth is viewed as a positive outcome arising from stress of cancer experience, fear of cancer recurrence remains a prevalent concern that co-exist with feelings of personal growth (Gu et.al, 2024), which hints at a connection between PTG and mortality awareness. Moreover, among Turkish breast cancer survivors, the experience of illness often deepened their contemplation of life and death, frequently framed through a spiritual or religious lens (İnan & Üstün, 2020). Spirituality does provide a framework for meaning - making and fostering adaptive coping which leads to PTG (Vis & Boynton, 2008). And within Indian communities, cultural worldviews often link mortality awareness to spirituality, viewing a higher power or God as the ultimate authority over life and death (Chittem, Elliott & Olver, 2022).

### ***Bridging the Existential- Spiritual Pathway to Growth: A Review***

Mortality awareness, or the recognition of life's finitude, is central to existential thought, which urges individuals to take responsibility for their choices and embrace life fully (Nguyen, 2004; Vail et al., 2020). According to TMT, heightened mortality awareness can provoke existential anxiety, compelling individuals to seek meaning or risk feeling adrift in an indifferent universe (Greenberg et al., 1986; Landau et al., 2025). For cancer survivors, the grueling experience of treatment and the uncertainty of remission amplify this awareness, shaping their psychological trajectory. To manage this existential anxiety, individuals construct cultural worldviews around belief systems that provide order and significance and hence mortality reminders can intensify religious and spiritual convictions, thus influencing the individuals meaning- making in the face of death (Landau et al., 2025; Pyszczynski et al., 1999).

In cultural contexts like India, spirituality is deeply interwoven with belief systems that shape perceptions of suffering. Concepts originating in Indian religious traditions such as karma and reincarnation frame adversity as a means of atonement and detachment from material desires (Mir et al., 2023). However, studies reveal that Indian cancer survivors often ruminate over the reasons for their illness (e.g.: Cancer is from God), indicating unmet existential and spiritual needs that correlate with poorer health outcomes (Joad et al., 2022; Saraf, Singh & Khurana, 2013).). Theistic beliefs, such as karma and fate can evoke ambivalence toward a higher power, leading to existential confusion and negatively impacting PTG (Illueca et al., 2023; Zeligman & Fakhro, 2023). Conversely, Indigenous cancer survivor narratives highlight a connection between nature and spirituality, where natural elements symbolize renewal and healing (Thomas et al., 2023). Recognizing these existential dimensions, spiritual and existential changes have been incorporated into the revised PTG scale (Tedeschi et al., 2017).

Existential gratitude emerges from an awareness of life's fragility, fostering a deep sense of interconnectedness with nature and spirituality (Southern, 2011). Unlike general gratitude, existential gratitude emerges in response to adversity, making it a particularly relevant construct for cancer survivors. While spiritual gratitude depends on belief in a divine presence, existential gratitude arises from embracing the impermanence of life and finding meaning in coexistence (York, 2024). By redirecting focus from fear of death to appreciation for life, existential gratitude may uniquely mediate the relationship between spirituality and PTG.

While empirical research directly linking existential gratitude, PTG, and cancer survivorship remains limited, existing studies provide a strong foundation for the present study. For instance, breast cancer survivors exhibit greater PTG than healthy controls, with growth linked to perceived life threat, illness disclosure and time since diagnosis (Cordova et al., 2021). Additionally, perceived threat, optimism, and meaning in life have been shown to influence PTG in cancer patients (Jeon & Choi, 2016). Importantly, some findings indicate that mortality reminders can reduce reported PTG and benefit finding, suggesting that PTG may, in some cases, serve as a defensive function against existential distress (Luszczynska et.al, 2012). Rather than avoiding perceived life threat, individuals cultivate a life-affirming outlook, redirecting attention from fear of dying toward appreciation of being alive (Marimuthu, 2024). Concurrently, gratitude practices have been linked to heightened spiritual awareness. Body-centered spiritual practices facilitate meaning-making and trauma navigation, while nature-based rituals cultivate existential gratitude, transforming suffering into spiritual growth (Doehring, 2019). Faith communities that emphasize embodied spirituality often integrate existential gratitude to restore a sense of the sacred (Captari et al., 2019).

Although spirituality, gratitude, and post-traumatic growth (PTG) have been explored independently, the mediating role of existential or trait gratitude in the relationship between spirituality and PTG remains underexamined. Prior studies have found that forgiveness and gratitude partially mediated the link between religiosity and PTG in Korean Christian young adults (Lee & Kim, 2021), and that spirituality and trait gratitude, via ego resilience, influenced PTG in veterans with PTSD (Eyni et al., 2023). Additionally, Christian gratitude and anxious attachment to God were positively associated with PTG (Vazquez et al., 2022), while meaning in life partially mediated the relationship between spiritual well-being and PTG (Ermiş, 2023). However, none of these investigations were conducted among cancer survivors, leaving a critical gap in literature.

In conclusion, spirituality has long been associated with positive psychological adaptation (Easvaradoss & Rajan, 2013). Additionally, existential gratitude can foster psychological resilience by cultivating awe, acceptance, and meaning in the face of impermanence (Southern, 2011; York, 2024). Given the link between mortality awareness and spiritual meaning-making within Indian settings, we would like to explore existential gratitude as a mediator between spirituality and post traumatic growth that transforms mortality awareness to an acceptance of impermanence that aligns with promoting personal growth in life-threatening illness. Thus, the purpose of this study is to determine if existential gratitude is the mediator between spirituality and PTG among Indian cancer survivors. This theoretical integration offers a novel perspective, linking spirituality, gratitude, and PTG in a way that progresses our understanding of psychological resilience in the face of life's impermanence. Building upon Terror Management Theory (Greenberg, Pyszczynski & Solomon, 1986), spiritual belief systems around symbolic immortality (Landau et al., 2025) and perceived life threat (Cordova et al., 2021), in relation to survivors, we propose that existential gratitude serves as a bridge, converting spiritual reflection into a life-affirming response that enables growth after trauma. Thus, the study aims to investigate the mediating role of existential gratitude between spirituality and PTG in cancer survivors across India. By appreciating existence despite adversity, cancer survivors may transform trauma into a renewed appreciation for life.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 118 Indian cancer survivors (98 females, 20 males) participated in the study. Participants were recruited through cancer support groups and online forums. Eligibility criteria included being 24 years or older, having completed active cancer treatment at least six months prior to participation, and not being in palliative care. Childhood cancer survivors and individuals with traumatic experiences unrelated to cancer were excluded to ensure the specificity of post-traumatic growth related to adult cancer survivorship. This was determined through a structured pre-screening questionnaire that included items on age at cancer diagnosis, demographic details, spiritual orientation, nature of traumatic experience and details of medical diagnosis. Only participants who reported a cancer diagnosis in adulthood and no other major trauma as their most distressing experience were included in the study.

This study's participants were predominantly middle-aged to older (73% between 45 and 74 years old) and married (70%). A significant majority (80%) were from an Upper Middle Socioeconomic background and 50% held a bachelor's degree or higher. In terms of cancer type, roughly 62% had breast cancer, while other types represented minimal percentages. And for the stage of cancer, Stage 1 (40%) and Stage 2C (35%) were the most prevalent.

Mental health was screened with the 28-item GHQ-28 (range 0–84), wherein participants scoring 23 or higher, indicating significant psychological distress were excluded.

### Measures

The standardized psychological measures used in this study were administered in English, as participants were proficient in the language and primarily recruited from urban, educated populations.

**Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory– Short Form (PTG-SF).** The PTG-SF (Cann et al., 2010) is a 10-item scale measuring positive psychological changes following trauma on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = *I did not expect this change* to 5 = *I experienced this change to a very great degree*. Total scores range from 0 to 50, with higher scores indicating greater post-traumatic growth. The PTG-SF has demonstrated strong internal consistency in prior studies, with Cronbach's alpha values between .86 and .89. The English versions of the PTG-SF have previously been used in Indian samples without requiring cultural or linguistic adaptation (Nik Jaafar et al., 2022; Sachdeva & Shukla, 2024).

**Existential Gratitude Scale (EGS).** The EGS (Jans-Beken & Wong, 2021) consists of 13-items assessing gratitude for existence. It used a 7-point Likert scale, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Total scores range from 13 to 91, with higher scores reflecting a deeper sense of existential gratitude. EGS was validated for the Indian population, demonstrating reliability ( $\alpha = .82-.89$ ) (Garg et al., 2023).

**Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES).** The DSES (Underwood, 2011) is a 16-item scale designed to assess the frequency of transcendent experiences, such as feeling God's presence or a deep inner peace. Items are rated on a scale from 1 (never or almost never) to 6 (many times a day). A higher average score indicates more frequent spiritual experiences. The DSES has shown strong psychometric properties across cultures, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.89, including 0.94–0.95 in U.S. General Social Survey samples. Test-retest reliability ( $r = 0.85$ ) and construct validity have also been established (Underwood, 2006; Underwood & Teresi, 2002). No translation was required for the present study.

### Design and Procedure

This study employed a cross-sectional correlational design to investigate the mediating role of existential gratitude in the relationship between spirituality and post-traumatic growth among Indian cancer survivors.

Participants were contacted through online forums and cancer support networks. Data collection was conducted through telephone interviews, face-to-face meetings, and Google Forms. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee Board at CHRIST (Deemed to be University) (Registration code: CU: RCEC/00225/08/21) and all procedures were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Committee and the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

### Statistical Analysis

Preliminary statistical tests were conducted to ensure assumptions were met for further analyses. Spearman's rank-order correlations were computed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 20). Mediation analysis was conducted using JASP software to examine the indirect effect of existential gratitude on the relationship between spirituality and post-traumatic growth. Multicollinearity tests were performed to assess potential biases and mitigate risks of Type II error.

### Results

The Shapiro-Wilk test indicated a significant deviation from normality for existential gratitude ( $W = .85, p < .01$ ), spirituality ( $W = .83, p < .01$ ), and post-traumatic growth (PTG) ( $W = .94, p < .01$ ). Given the non-normal distribution of these variables, Spearman's rho correlation was employed to examine relationships among existential gratitude, spirituality and PTG which revealed significant positive associations between existential gratitude and spirituality ( $r_s = .45, p < .001$ ); existential gratitude and PTG ( $r_s = .37, p < .001$ ) and spirituality and PTG ( $r_s = .18, p = .047$ ).

These findings provided the basis for mediation analysis which was tested using JASP with 5000 bootstrap replications for bias-corrected confidence intervals. The results (Table 1) indicate a statistically significant positive indirect effect of spirituality on PTG through existential gratitude ( $\beta = .16, p < .003$ ) and total effect of spirituality and PTG ( $\beta = .24, p < .009$ ). We can thus conclude that existential gratitude fully mediates the relationship between spirituality and post traumatic growth as the effect of spirituality on post traumatic growth weakens with the introduction of existential gratitude as mediator.

**Table 1.** Mediation analysis results

Parameter	Estimate*	P value
Spirituality → PTG		
Direct effect	.08	.414
Spirituality → Existential gratitude → PTG		
Indirect effect	.16	.003
Spirituality → PTG		
Total effect	.24	.009

\*Note. Delta method standard errors, bias-corrected percentile bootstrap confidence intervals, ML estimator. Significant at  $p < 0.01^{**}$

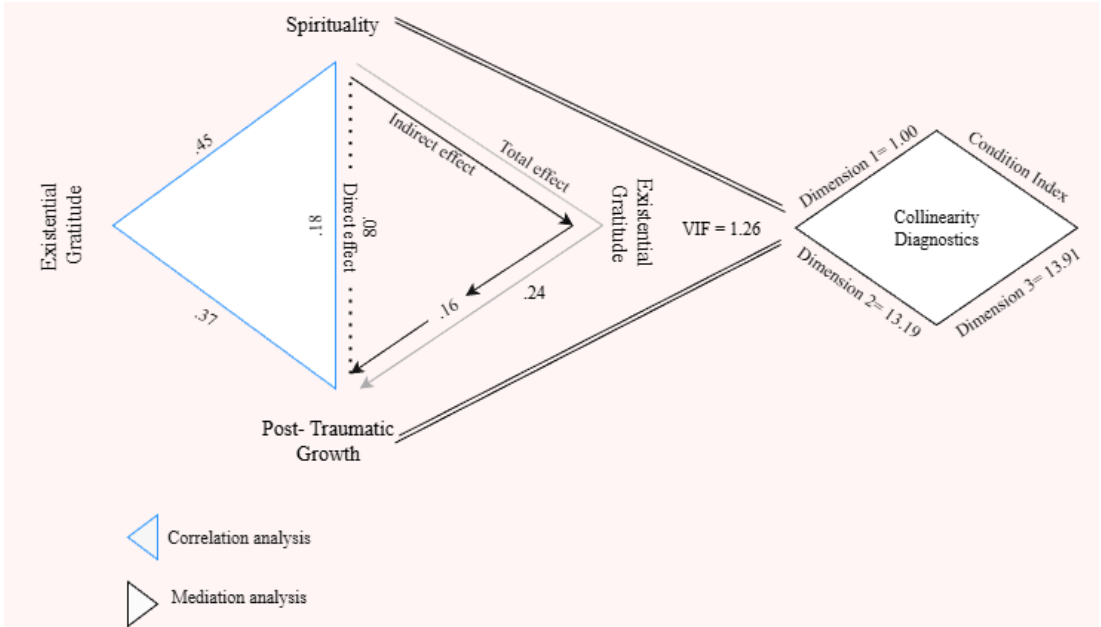
PTG refers to Post Traumatic Growth.

The inclusion of existential gratitude made the direct effect of spirituality on post-traumatic growth (PTG) non-significant ( $\beta = .08, p = .414$ ), indicating full mediation. This emphasizes the key role of existential gratitude in promoting PTG among cancer survivors.

We further assessed the model fit and multicollinearity diagnosis to ensure the robustness and validity of the above results. The  $R^2$  values for PTG ( $R^2 = .14$ ) and existential gratitude ( $R^2 = .21$ ) suggest that while the

model fit is modest, there may be additional factors that contribute to PTG. To assess potential multicollinearity, we computed variance inflation factor (VIF) analysis on SPSS which yielded a value of 1.26. A VIF value higher than 5 or 10 indicates a potential problem with multicollinearity and with the value we obtained (closer to 1), it indicates no significant multicollinearity.

**Figure 1.** Summary of Correlation, Mediation, and Multicollinearity Analysis Results



Combined and represented in *figure 1*, these diagnostics indicate that while the model’s fit was modest, multicollinearity was not an issue, supporting the robustness of the mediation model. These findings further support the idea that existential gratitude significantly mediates the relationship between spirituality and post-traumatic growth ( $p < .05$ ), with higher levels of spirituality predicting greater existential gratitude, which in turn enhances PTG.

**Discussion**

Our results highlight a psychological mechanism through which existential gratitude transforms spirituality into post-traumatic growth (PTG) among cancer survivors, indicating that spirituality alone does not directly predict PTG, but rather, its effects are fully mediated by existential gratitude. Specifically, the direct effect of spirituality on PTG was found to be weak ( $\beta = .08$ ,  $p = .414$ ), with the introduction of existential gratitude as a mediator, further supporting our conclusion of full mediation. This study introduces existential gratitude as a distinct, transformative construct rather than traditional notions of gratitude in post-trauma recovery (Aghababaei & Farahani, 2011). The indirect effect ( $\beta = .16$ ) demonstrates the significance of existential gratitude in facilitating PTG, independent of spirituality’s direct predictive role. Furthermore, our model accounted for a certain proportion of variance in PTG, as indicated by the  $R^2$  value.

Gratitude is often conceptualized as a positive psychological trait associated with emotional regulation, well-being, and post-traumatic growth (Dalal & Singh, 2025). However, our study challenges this conventional perspective by presenting existential gratitude not merely as an emotional response but as an ontological stance that embraces suffering, mortality, and impermanence as intrinsic to existence. Danely (2023) highlights that gratitude, frequently overlooked in anthropology, extends beyond mere reciprocity to create a space for vulnerability, fostering existential awareness and deeper relational connections. This perspective aligns with our findings, which suggest that gratitude is not just about passive appreciation but an active, meaning-making process that reconfigures trauma into growth.

Similarly, Heidegger's concept of 'Being-towards-death' posits that confronting mortality is essential for an authentic and meaningful existence (Nguyen, 2004; Vail et al., 2020). Our study provides empirical support for this philosophical claim, demonstrating that cancer survivors who engage with existential gratitude are more likely to experience PTG. This suggests that mere awareness of mortality, as posited by Terror Management Theory (TMT), is insufficient for growth. Instead, it is the interpretative shift from existential anxiety to existential appreciation that shapes psychological outcomes.

These findings build upon existing literature that underscores the role of spirituality in meaning-making and psychological adaptation following trauma (Vis & Boynton, 2008). However, our study advances this understanding by demonstrating that spirituality alone does not directly lead to PTG. Rather, an active engagement with existential gratitude characterized by an acceptance of mortality and impermanence, appears to be the crucial mechanism that transforms the trauma of cancer into a deeper appreciation for life, beyond traditional spiritual coping strategies. This is particularly significant in cultural contexts such as India, where spirituality is deeply embedded in cognitive frameworks but can also evoke existential ambivalence when suffering is interpreted through the lens of karma or divine will (Mir et al., 2023; Joad et al., 2022; Saraf, Singh & Khurana, 2013). Similar themes of existential reflections related to spiritual meaning-making for cause of cancer and its connection to mortality awareness were seen among cancer survivors from Sweden (Westman, Bergenmar & Andersson, 2006); United Kingdom and United States (Namisango et.al, 2022); and South African women survivors (Moodley, 2011). Additionally, Islamic societies, where culture and religion interlaps, death is viewed as inevitable, and this framework emphasizes co-existence that arises from this acceptance of finitude (Silbermann & Hassan, 2011). A similar concept can be traced back to Sufism, termed 'Vahdat-e-Vojod' that focuses on transcendental spirituality and its connection to nature and co-existence, linked to existential meaning-making and coping among Iranian cancer survivors (Ahmadi et.al, 2022).

The mediating role of existential gratitude highlights that while cultural and spiritual frameworks provide existential grounding, true transformation requires a personal reconfiguration of suffering into meaning. This aligns with Eastern philosophical traditions, such as Buddhism, which emphasize gratitude for suffering as a catalyst for enlightenment (Strelkova, 2022). However, this phenomenon is not necessarily unique to Indian cancer survivors; similar patterns may emerge in global narratives of resilience, where existential reflection fosters post-traumatic transformation (Vail et al., 2020). By shifting the focus from fear of mortality to an appreciation of life's impermanence, existential gratitude serves as a powerful psychological mechanism that enables survivors to integrate their trauma into a renewed sense of purpose and growth.

Our model provides valuable insights into the mechanism linking spirituality to PTG via existential gratitude. However, we acknowledge that while the model fit is modest, there may be additional factors that contribute to PTG. Future research should explore a broader range of psychological, interpersonal, and contextual factors that may further contribute to PTG in cancer survivors. Psychologically, factors such as self-compassion, cognitive reappraisal, and meaning-making coping strategies could play a significant role (Aliche, 2023; Almeida et.al, 2022). Interpersonally, social support, quality of relationships, and the availability of supportive communities might be crucial (Mah et.al, 2024; Thakur & Mishra, 2025). Contextual factors such as socioeconomic status, and cultural beliefs surrounding illness and death could also influence the trajectory of PTG (Shaygan et.al, 2024). Investigating these additional variables would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of post-traumatic growth within this vulnerable population.

To Conclude, cancer survivors stand at a crossroad between mortality awareness and transformation. Our study highlights the role of existential gratitude as the latent force that propels spirituality into PTG. By shifting the narrative from fear of death to appreciation of existence, existential gratitude offers a paradigm shift in how we understand post-traumatic recovery. However, this study has several limitations. The cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences, making it unclear whether existential gratitude facilitates PTG or whether individuals



with higher PTG naturally exhibit greater gratitude. Longitudinal research is needed to clarify this relationship. Additionally, the questionnaire used for spirituality has not been validated within the Indian cultural context and moreover, the sample was predominantly female and from a specific cultural background, limiting generalizability. Future research should explore existential gratitude in more diverse populations. The model explained only a modest proportion of variance in PTG ( $R^2 = .14$ ), suggesting that important factors such as social support, resilience, personality traits (e.g., optimism), coping styles, and illness-related variables were not included in the analysis. Their absence limits the comprehensiveness of the model. As participants responded to sensitive questions about spirituality and gratitude through telephonic interviews and face to face meetings, responses may have been influenced by social desirability bias, particularly in collectivist and spiritually oriented cultural contexts like India. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the mediating role of existential gratitude in PTG and provides a solid foundation for future inquiries into the transformative potential of existential thought and meaning making in the context of life- threatening illnesses.

These findings contribute towards a conceptual refinement of traditional resilience-based models that place importance on coping strategies to minimize distress and instead, imply a redirection towards an approach that embraces existential confrontation as a path to healing. Therapeutic interventions that cultivate existential gratitude, such as meaning-centered therapy, existential psychotherapy, and gratitude interventions tailored to mortality awareness could enhance PTG outcomes in cancer survivors. By integrating existential gratitude into survivorship care, clinicians can help patients move beyond mere survival toward a renewed engagement with life.

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ΕΜΠΕΙΡΙΚΗ ΕΡΓΑΣΙΑ | RESEARCH PAPER

Αγαπώντας την παροδικότητα της ζωής: Πώς η υπαρξιακή ευγνωμοσύνη  
ωθεί τη μετατραυματική ανάπτυξη σε επιζήσαντες καρκίνου

Layah Liz JACOB<sup>1</sup>, Anuradha SATHIYASEELAN<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Τμήμα Ψυχολογίας, Πανεπιστήμιο CHRIST, Ινδία

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ	ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ
Υπαρξιακή ευγνωμοσύνη Μετατραυματική ανάπτυξη Πνευματικότητα Επιζήσαντες καρκίνου Θνητότητα	Η επιβίωση από τον καρκίνο συνοδεύεται συχνά από υπαρξιακή οδύνη, καθώς τα άτομα έρχονται αντιμέτωπα με τη θνητότητα και αναζητούν το νόημα σε αυτό που βιώνουν. Η παρούσα μελέτη διερευνά την υπαρξιακή ευγνωμοσύνη, μια ενισχυμένη αίσθηση εκτίμησης της ζωής που αναδύεται μέσα από τον πόνο και την επίγνωση της παροδικότητας, ως διαμεσολαβητική μεταβλητή μεταξύ πνευματικότητας και μετατραυματικής ανάπτυξης (ΜΑ) σε Ινδούς επιζήσαντες καρκίνου. Βασισμένη στη Θεωρία Διαχείρισης του Τρόμου ( <i>Terror Management Theory</i> , TMT), η έρευνα εξετάζει κατά πόσο η πνευματικότητα, διαμεσολαβείται από την υπαρξιακή ευγνωμοσύνη, αντί να προάγει άμεσα τη μετατραυματική ανάπτυξη. Το δείγμα αποτέλεσαν 118 Ινδοί και Ινδές που επέζησαν από τον καρκίνο, τουλάχιστον έξι μήνες μετά την ολοκλήρωση της ενεργού θεραπείας. Οι συσχετίσεις Spearman's rho έδειξαν σημαντικές θετικές σχέσεις μεταξύ υπαρξιακής ευγνωμοσύνης, πνευματικότητας και ΜΑ. Η ανάλυση διαμεσολάβησης έδειξε ότι η υπαρξιακή ευγνωμοσύνη διαμεσολαβεί πλήρως τη σχέση ανάμεσα στην πνευματικότητα και τη μετατραυματική ανάπτυξη ( $\beta = 0.161, p = 0.003$ ), ενώ η πνευματικότητα δεν φάνηκε να είχε άμεση επίδραση στη ΜΑ ( $\beta = 0.081, p = 0.414$ ) όταν λαμβάνεται υπόψη η υπαρξιακή ευγνωμοσύνη. Τα ευρήματα αμφισβητούν την παραδοσιακή θεώρηση της πνευματικότητας ως εγγενούς κινητήριου παράγοντα ανάπτυξης, υποδεικνύοντας ότι η μετατραυματική ανάπτυξη αναδύεται όταν η υπαρξιακή ευγνωμοσύνη συμβάλει στην μετατροπή της επίγνωσης της θνητότητας σε εκτίμηση της ευθραυστότητας της ζωής.
ΣΤΟΙΧΕΙΑ ΕΠΙΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΑΣ	
Layah Liz Jacob Christ University Hosur Road, Near Dairy Circle, Bangalore, Karnataka- 560029 layahlizjacob27@gmail.com	