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**Posttraumatic Stress and Posttraumatic Growth in  
New Zealand Surf Lifesavers: An Analysis of Age, Gender,  
Social Support, & Self-Efficacy**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the  
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## Abstract

*Introduction.* New Zealand surf lifeguards are exposed to a range of potentially traumatic events including search and rescue, trauma and medical care, and body retrievals. Although extensive training is required and peer support programmes are in place, little is known about the impact this work may have as there is a lack of published literature focusing on surf lifeguards. *Method:* A cross-sectional online survey was available to all current, paid and volunteer lifeguards, 17 years and older. Information was gathered on personal and surf lifesaving trauma exposure, posttraumatic stress symptoms, posttraumatic growth (PTG), perceived social support and perceived self-efficacy. Statistical analyses were performed to explore hypothesized relationships between these constructs and demographic variables. *Results:* A total of 181 lifeguards 17 years and older ( $M = 26.96$ ,  $SD = 12.45$ ), were included in the final analysis. Males reported significantly higher trauma exposure, yet females presented with higher posttraumatic stress symptoms. 7.8% of adolescents and 1.8% of adults scored above 40 on the PTSD measure suggesting probable PTSD. Adolescent participants reported both higher posttraumatic stress and PTG. Total trauma exposure, including surf lifesaving events, failed to show a significant relationship with trauma outcomes. However, personal traumatic events alone did show a small but significant relationship with both posttraumatic stress and PTG. The expected relationships between social support and self-efficacy with posttraumatic stress were not verified. Social support and self-efficacy did show a small but significant positive relationship with PTG. No moderation effect was found for either social support or self-efficacy. Exploratory analysis did show that age moderated the relationship between trauma exposure and both posttraumatic stress and PTG. *Discussion.* Results suggest that being younger may facilitate PTG but it may also make some vulnerable to posttraumatic stress symptoms under high trauma conditions. Traumatic events within Surf lifesaving were not related to trauma outcomes suggesting that personal trauma may have a stronger impact than lifeguard related trauma. The lack of evidence supporting the impact of social support and self-efficacy may be due to limitations in the measures used. Results and limitations are discussed with a focus on how this unique population could benefit from future research.

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