

## Article

# Rising Strong: The Interplay between Resilience, Social Support, and Post-Traumatic Growth among Teachers after the COVID-19 Pandemic

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**Abstract:** Background: When schools reopened for face-to-face classroom instruction following the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers faced many professional challenges. Most studies examining teachers' psychosocial condition after school reopening predominantly focused on negative aspects of their emotional well-being, leaving a gap in the understanding of the potential positive effects. This study is grounded in the theory of post-traumatic growth, which suggests that growth and development can occur alongside difficulties. Objectives: The purpose of this study was to shed light on the lesser explored associations between resilience, social support, and post-traumatic growth among teachers after the COVID-19 pandemic. It also examined the differences in post-traumatic growth between teachers in special education and those in general education. Methods: The participants in this cross-sectional study were recruited by convenience sampling. A self-report online survey was used to collect data from 208 Israeli teachers during November 2022. Results: Most of the participants (79.4%) reported experiences of post-traumatic growth during the pandemic. The findings revealed that post-traumatic growth exhibited a positive association with social support ( $r = 0.23, p < 0.001$ ) and resilience ( $r = 0.18, p < 0.001$ ). The multiple regression model was significant, explaining 14.5% of the variance in post-traumatic growth [ $F(4.202) = 8.58, p < 0.001$ ]. Finally, special education teachers exhibited higher levels of post-traumatic growth than general education teachers ( $t = -2.36, p < 0.05$ ). Conclusions: Social support for teachers must be provided during and after traumas caused by crises and pandemics similar to COVID-19. Intervention programs and ongoing training should offer effective tools to help teachers balance their professional and personal lives. Promoting positive changes in teacher well-being must be a priority in the education system.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic; teachers; special education teachers; resilience; social support; post-traumatic growth



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## 1. Introduction

The global COVID-19 pandemic is considered a mass traumatic event that has drastically altered people's working conditions and had a negative impact on workers' health [1,2]. The COVID-19 crisis forced teachers across the world and in Israel to switch to online or hybrid teaching [3,4]. Under the conditions of ongoing stress related to the pandemic, teachers were required to invest their efforts in teaching and provide emotional assistance to their students [5].

Upon the reopening of the schools, teachers faced a new reality and challenging routines characterized by social distancing in the classroom, alternative teaching approaches to reduce learning gaps, online team meetings, new hygiene measures and hybrid teaching [6,7]. Most studies that examined teachers' emotional well-being during the pandemic focused primarily on negative aspects [2,8,9]. Indeed, following the COVID-19 pandemic, the new teaching requirements and the high expectations of themselves were a source of

anxiety and stress [8]. For example, a study that examined teachers' experience found that many feared endangering their health and the health of their family. They also reported educational anxiety related to communication with students' parents and the growing gap in their academic abilities [9]. Teachers also faced challenges pertinent to social and professional isolation, and their well-being was impacted by the difficulty of balancing teaching and their personal lives [10].

Alongside teachers' feelings of emotional distress, a few studies observed positive changes among teachers as a result of dealing with the COVID-19 crisis [11–13]. Some of these changes include increased care, security, self-direction, short-time work, and increases in leisure time. This is in accordance with the assumption that stressful events can stimulate development [14]. However, none of these studies focused on teachers' post-traumatic growth in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The present study fills this gap in the literature. We examined the positive effects of the ongoing stressful situation on teachers by investigating their resilience and social support resources after the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Resilience* is a psychological resource that refers to positive adaptation and functioning in the face of a crisis [15,16]. Studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic found that teachers' resilience was positively related to their emotional state and functioning [11,17], and that resilience is a significant positive predictor of teacher well-being [18].

*Social support* is a resource that can help individuals cope emotionally during stressful events [19]. Following the COVID-19 crisis, teachers reported that the ambiguity of their role and the lack of support from the school affected their personal lives, mental well-being, and professional performance as educators [11,20]. However, very few studies have examined the positive psychological effects among teachers when schools reopened after a prolonged period [6,7].

### 1.1. Theoretical Model: Post-Traumatic Growth

The current study investigated coping after the COVID-19 pandemic through the lens of the post-traumatic growth theory [21,22]. According to Tedeschi, Shakespear-Finch and Calhoun [22], the post-traumatic growth theory suggests that individuals who experience significant adversity, such as trauma or crisis situations, have the potential for positive psychological growth [22]. Although trauma is often associated with negative outcomes, post-traumatic growth proposes that individuals can undergo positive transformations as a result of their struggle with adversity [21,22].

Endowing meaning to a stressful situation generates a positive life change and a sense of growth in five domains, as reported below.

*Relationships with others*: the individuals may improve their interpersonal skills and become more empathic, compassionate, and highly sensitive to the suffering of others [14]. *Personal Strength*: the stressful event brings about a change in self-perception, thus enabling the individuals to introspect and recognize their limitations and internal resources [23]. *New Possibilities*: the individuals are able to identify new opportunities, set new goals, and discover areas of interest that provide a sense of growth and new and different interests in life. *Appreciation of Life*: the individuals renew and re-evaluate the meaning of life, shifting their priorities [24]. The individuals' perception of life becomes more flexible [23]. *Religious/Spiritual Change*: the stressful event encourages the individuals to reflect on existential questions and become more aware of life's uncertain and constantly changing nature [22]. Studies that examined post-traumatic growth among teachers and school principals during the pandemic found that social support and positive or adaptive coping strategies [25,26] are positively associated with post-traumatic growth [27,28]. Furthermore, teachers who regulated their emotions effectively reported higher post-traumatic growth [28].

Studies indicated that demographic and professional variables may be associated with post-traumatic growth [23,29]. This study examined whether there are differences between teachers who taught in a regular education setting and those who taught in a special education setting.

From the first global outbreak of COVID-19 in February 2020, educational institutions were subject to closures and irregular lockdown situations [30]. During school closures in Israel, schools continued to provide special education to students with unique developmental characteristics, different from those of their peers. Although teachers who worked in general/regular education were required to teach remotely, special education teachers taught face-to-face and were required to be present in the schools. Therefore, regular and special education teachers faced different challenges during the pandemic. The unique challenges and experiences faced by each group (i.e., regular and special education) following the COVID-19 pandemic could affect their post-traumatic growth experiences differently and result in varying degrees of post-traumatic growth. Study findings in this area have not been consistent. For example, a study in The Netherlands [10] and another in Pakistan [31] reported no differences in stress levels between regular and special education teachers during the pandemic. In contrast, a study in Germany found that teachers in secondary grammar schools were more stressed than special education teachers [32]. Very little research has examined the difficulties special education teachers have faced following the pandemic outbreak and their positive impact on their wellbeing.

### *1.2. The Present Study*

Most studies that examined the psychosocial condition in schools post-COVID-19 predominantly focused on the negative aspects of teachers' emotional well-being. However, little is known about the positive effects of ongoing stress. It may be necessary to identify factors that affect post-traumatic growth to protect teachers' mental health and promote their growth after trauma. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the associations between personal resources (resilience, social support) and post-traumatic growth following the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, this study, to our knowledge, is the first to examine differences in the levels of post-traumatic growth between special education teachers and general education teachers in Israel after the traumatic experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even on days when COVID-19 is not spreading, we can learn from this emergency about the post-traumatic growth of teachers who have functioned as essential helpers over time. Teachers' mental health has a significant impact on children's development and their relationship with other students. The study of teachers' post-traumatic growth can help in identifying factors that affect such growth. This knowledge could assist government officials and mental health professionals in promoting targeted practical measures to improve teachers' well-being and minimize mental health risks in the post-COVID-19 era.

The study tested the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** *The levels of resilience and social support among teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic are positively associated with their post-traumatic growth.*

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** *Resilience and social support will predict post-traumatic growth among teachers.*

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** *Post-traumatic growth differs between special education teachers and those teaching general education, so that special education teachers (SET) will experience higher post-traumatic growth than general education teachers.*

## **2. Methods**

### *2.1. Study Participants*

The study was a cross-sectional online survey. Two hundred and eight teachers ( $n = 208$ ) from Israel participated in the study, including 173 women (83.6%) and 34 men (16.4%) (Table 1). The mentioned ratio signifies the prevalence of women in the teaching profession in Israel. Specifically, based on the report from the Israel Ministry of Education

during the study’s timeframe, it was reported that 85% of the teachers in Israel were women [33]. All study teachers taught during the period 2019–2021 (COVID-19 pandemic). Exclusion criteria: teachers who worked less than a third of a full-time job during the COVID-19 period, substitute teachers, and teachers who were in an internship year.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the participants (*n* = 208).

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentages
Gender	Male	34	16.4%
	Female	173	83.6%
Marital Status	Single	13	6.3%
	Married	161	77.8%
	Divorced	33	15.9%
Number of Children	Ages 0–6 years	108	52.2%
	Ages 7–12 years	58	28%
	Ages 13–18 years	32	15.4%
	Ages 18 years and above	10	4.4%
Religion	Jewish	203	98%
	Non-Jewish	5	2%
Education	Bachelor’s degree	125	60.4%
	Master’s degree	82	39.6%
Economic status	Below average	11	5.3%
	Average	134	64.7%
	Above average	62	30%
Full- vs. part-time employment	One-third to two-thirds	30	15%
	More than two-thirds	176	85%
Teaching seniority	Less than 5 years	31	15%
	Five to ten years	64	30.9%
	Ten to fifteen years	60	29%
	Over fifteen years	52	25.1%
Health status	Good	160	51.2%
	Reasonable	99	47.8%
	Bad	2	1%
Disease history	Yes	58	28%
	None	149	72%

The average age of the participating teachers was 40.62 years (range: 24–62, *SD* = 8.62), and approximately a third had five to ten years of teaching experience (64 teachers, 30.9%). More than half of the participants taught in the general education system (108 teachers, 52.2%), while 99 taught in special education (47.8%). Most of the teachers had no underlying illnesses (72%) and were vaccinated against coronavirus (88.9%). More than half of the teachers had a child aged 0–6 years (108 teachers, 52.2%). Most teachers were Jewish (203 teachers, 98%)

In terms of demographics, the teachers who taught in general education and those in special education did not show significant differences in gender, marital status, education, financial status, and health status. Furthermore, no differences between the two groups emerged regarding the percentage of job employment (full versus part-time), the years of teaching experience, or the subjects taught. Finally, more teachers in general education became infected with the coronavirus than in special education [ $\chi^2(1) = 9.82^{**}$ ].

**2.2. Research Procedure**

The Ethics Committee approved the study at the University of the authors (authorization no. 1062021), confirming its compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki. The researchers converted the questionnaire to an online format, including an informed consent form that the research participants completed to access the questionnaire. The research questionnaire was anonymous, and the researchers distributed it through a link sent to dedicated groups of teachers through social media networks (via Facebook). The study

was carried out during November 2022, one year after schools were reopened in Israel and when face-to-face learning was carried out.

### 2.3. Research Tools

The following research tools were used in the present study.

#### 2.3.1. Independent Variables

*Resilience Questionnaire* (Brief Resilience Scale, BRS) [34]: the questionnaire includes six items that test an individual's ability to recover or "return to functioning" after experiencing a difficult event or dealing with stress. The participants responded on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "completely disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree" (e.g., "I tend to bounce back quickly after difficult times"), with high scores reflecting high levels of resilience. The Cronbach's internal consistency coefficient was  $\alpha = 0.88$ .

*Social Support Questionnaire* (Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, MSPSS) [35]: the questionnaire includes 12 items that examine an individual's perceived social support from three sources: family, friends, and significant others. The respondents answered on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 7 (very strongly agree) (e.g., "Help is always close when I need it"). Higher scores indicate higher levels of social support. The Cronbach's internal consistency coefficient was  $\alpha = 0.96$ .

*Personal Information Questionnaire*: the questionnaire examines the following variables: age, gender, marital status, number of children, religion, number of years of education, subjective economic status, employment status during the last year, subjective health status, pre-existing medical conditions, past or present COVID-19 infection, and vaccination against COVID-19.

#### 2.3.2. Dependent Variable

*Post-traumatic Growth Inventory* (PTGI) [36]: this questionnaire includes 21 items that test the degree of change an individual has experienced since a trauma. The measured change is based on the assumption that the individual's basic beliefs are damaged because of trauma. The participants were asked to rate the extent to which they experienced the described change as a result of their trauma by answering on a Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 5 (to a very great extent). The statements included questions focused on the five dimensions of change: relationships with others ( $\alpha = 0.90$ ) (e.g., "I put more effort into my relationships"); new possibilities ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ) (e.g., "I established a new path for my life"); personal strength (for example, "I am more confident that I can handle difficulties"); religious/spiritual change ( $\alpha = 0.95$ ) (e.g., "my religious faith has become stronger"); and appreciation of life ( $\alpha = 0.97$ ) (e.g., "I appreciate the value of my own life to a greater extent"). The Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient was  $\alpha = 0.96$ .

### 2.4. Research Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using SPSS software, version 27. A Pearson test was conducted to examine the associations between the research variables. The researchers used a linear regression test of the independent variables (resilience and social support) to predict post-traumatic growth among teachers. An independent sample *t*-test was used to test the differences between special education teachers and general education teachers.

The sample size was calculated using G\*Power 3.1 for variance analysis to compare the two groups (general education/special education) with three control variables. The analysis showed that a sample of 200 teachers was required to achieve a power of 0.80,  $\alpha = 0.05$ , and a medium effect size of  $f = 0.20$ . This sample allowed for a linear regression analysis involving up to 20 independent variables, a power of 0.90,  $\alpha = 0.05$ , and a medium effect size  $f_2 = 0.15$ .



### 3. Results

The average levels of resilience ( $M = 3.32$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ , range = 1–5), social support ( $M = 5.72$ ,  $SD = 1.18$ , range = 1–10), and post-traumatic growth ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ , range = 1–5) were relatively high on the scale, indicating a high average level in these five domains (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Correlates, means, *SDs*, and ranges of the study variables ( $n = 208$ ).

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	-								
2. Resilience	0.11	-							
3. Social support	-0.23	0.24 *	-						
4. Post-traumatic growth	0.08	0.18 *	0.23 **	-					
5. Relationships with others	0.10	0.12 *	0.26 **	0.97 **	-				
6. New possibilities	0.08	0.19 *	0.24 **	0.96 **	0.97 **	-			
7. Personal strength	0.34	1.03 *	0.20 **	0.94 **	0.88 **	0.89 **	-		
8. Religious/spiritual change	0.05	0.09 *	0.17 *	0.89 **	0.83 **	0.83 **	0.84 **	-	
9. Appreciation of life	0.07	0.06 *	0.24 **	0.92 **	0.87 **	0.86 **	0.86 **	0.80	-
Mean	40.62	3.32	5.72	3.97	4.03	4.06	3.89	3.81	4.05
<i>SD</i>	8.62	0.74	1.18	1.09	1.1	1.1	1.14	1.34	1.2
Possible range	-	1–5	1–10	1–5	1–5	1–5	1–5	1–5	1–5

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; *SD* = Standard Deviation.

Pearson correlations were calculated to test whether the teachers’ levels of resilience and social support following the COVID-19 pandemic were positively associated with their post-traumatic growth (H1). Social support ( $r = 0.23$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and resilience ( $r = 0.18$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) exhibited a positive association with post-traumatic growth. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was confirmed (Table 2).

Multiple regressions were calculated to test Hypothesis 2, which posited that resilience and social support would predict post-traumatic growth among teachers. Table 3 indicates that the four models generated by the stepwise analysis were significant. The background variables age and gender were entered in the first step and did not explain the variance for post-traumatic growth. However, the fourth model, which included the variables of number of children, type of framework, social support, and resilience, produced the best predictive model [ $F(4.202) = 8.58$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ], explaining 14.5% of the variance in post-traumatic growth. A closer examination of Model 4 revealed that the social support variable was the main contributor to predicting post-traumatic growth ( $t = 4.07$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), thus confirming H2.

**Table 3.** Multiple regression for the prediction of post-traumatic growth ( $n = 208$ ).

	F	R <sup>2</sup>	t	Beta	βSE	B
Model 1						
Age				0.03	0.16	0
Gender	0.05	0.02	0.07	-0.07	0.08	-0.22
Model 2						
Number of children			2.70 **	0.18	0.06	0.17
Type of education	6.55 **	6	2.70 **	0.18	0.15	0.4
Model 3						
Number of children			2.66 **	0.17	0.06	0.16
Type of education	8.55 ***	11	2.69 **	0.18	0.14	0.39
Social support			3.44 **	0.22	0.06	0.21

**Table 3.** *Cont.*

	F	R <sup>2</sup>	t	Beta	βSE	B
Model 4						
Number of children	8.58 ***	14.5	3.05 **	0.2	0.06	0.19
Type of education			2.99 **	0.19	0.14	0.43
Social support			4.07 ***	0.27	0.06	0.25
Resilience			2.79 **	−0.18	0.1	−0.28

\*\*  $p < 0.005$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Hypothesis 3 predicted differences in post-traumatic growth between teachers who taught in special education and those who taught in general education. The findings showed that special education teachers ( $M = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ) experienced higher levels of post-traumatic growth than teachers who taught in general education ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ) ( $t = -2.36$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The same difference emerged upon examination of all five indicators of post-traumatic growth: relationships with others, personal strength, new possibilities, appreciation of life, and religious/spiritual development. All five indicators were found significant for special education teachers (Table 4), which confirmed H3. The results also indicated that while there were no differences in resilience and social support between special education teachers and general education teachers, differences were found in post-traumatic growth and its components.

**Table 4.** *t*-test comparing general education teachers and special education teachers ( $n = 208$ ).

Variable	Teachers in General Education ( $n = 108$ )		Teachers in Special Education ( $n = 108$ )		<i>t</i>
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Resilience	3.27	0.73	3.39	0.75	−1.18
Social support	5.50	1.25	5.55	1.11	−0.27
Post-traumatic growth	3.81	1.04	4.17	1.13	−2.36 *
Appreciation of life	3.83	1.18	4.28	1.18	−2.68 *
Religious/spiritual change	3.63	1.31	3.99	1.37	−1.93 *
Personal strength	3.72	1.12	4.1	1.15	−2.17 *
Relationships with others	3.93	1.09	4.22	1.17	−1.87 *
New possibilities	3.85	1.03	4.22	1.13	−1.87 *

\*  $p < 0.05$ .

#### 4. Discussion

The purpose of this cross-sectional study was to investigate the associations between resilience, social support, and traumatic growth among teachers post the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the study sought to determine whether there are differences in the level of post-traumatic growth between teachers in special education and teachers in regular education.

In this study, we found that social support exhibited a positive association with post-traumatic growth (Hypothesis 1). For teachers, the return to school routine offered more than just a familiar environment. It fostered a sense of belonging and a strengthened social support resource. As educators collaborated with their peers, they found new opportunities for personal growth that contributed to their personal development and resilience [37]. This finding aligns with early research showing that social support helped people cope with stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic and contributed to their sense of post-traumatic growth [19,38,39]. A study conducted in China after the COVID-19 pandemic found that those who recovered from COVID-19 and received social support during their illness reported a sense of growth that manifested itself as a significant positive change in their lives [40]. The work of Tedeschi and Calhoun [14] also resonates with our

findings. According to their proposal, individuals can achieve post-traumatic growth when supportive others offer alternative interpretations for negative events, which might then be integrated into their cognitive schema about the world. This integration of support and new perspectives nurtures personal growth and resilience, as exemplified by the participants in the current study. Additionally, Antonovsky's salutogenic model [41] further reinforces our results, emphasizing the factors and resources that enable individuals to remain resilient in the face of life's stressors and difficulties. The strong support systems the teachers in the current study experienced appeared to help them confront challenges head-on and emerge with newfound strength.

The current study found that the levels of resilience among teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic were positively associated with their post-traumatic growth, thus confirming our first hypothesis (Hypothesis 1). Teachers' resilience in the current study appeared to be a critical factor in managing work-related stress, much like what observed for healthcare workers and professionals during the pandemic [42]. Resilience seemed to enable teachers in the current study to adapt flexibly rather than succumb to the highly stressful challenge of the pandemic and, therefore, was positively associated with their personal growth. It (i.e., the ability to bounce back from negative emotional experiences) appeared to enable teachers to overcome the challenges caused by the pandemic and protect themselves from overwhelmingly excessive feelings of stress. This confirms studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which found that teachers' resilience was positively related to their emotional state and resilience [11,17]. A recent review of scientific evidence on the positive aspects of the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic found that resilience was associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and burnout among health professionals. Resilience was essential to improve well-being and prevent the deleterious psychological effects of the pandemic at the individual and organizational levels [1].

The current study demonstrated that both resilience and social support predicted post-traumatic growth (Hypothesis 2), shedding light on their intertwined impact on individuals' responses to stress and trauma. The Hobfoll's resource theory [43] provides a compelling possible explanation for this finding, emphasizing the role of individual resources in mitigating the negative consequences of the stressors to which an individual is exposed. In the current study, the teachers with higher resilience and social support were better equipped to cope with personal and professional challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to reduced emotional distress and facilitated their post-traumatic growth.

A recent study reinforces our finding, highlighting the significance of psychological resilience as a predictor of post-traumatic growth when individuals are engaged in disaster preparedness and hence perceive themselves as being more able to cope and experience growth after stressful traumas [44]. Additionally, our study confirms findings from a recent study that emphasized the critical role of social support in shaping teachers' well-being and post-traumatic growth [18]. Resilience and social support in the current study may have helped teachers face the challenges in their work and personal lives and consequently may have reduced their emotional distress. This notion confirms earlier findings that social support can influence teacher 'psychache' or emotional experience directly, as well as indirectly through their psychological resilience [45]. Supportive relationships enhanced teachers' resilience, enabling them to navigate challenges with greater adaptability and ultimately fostering their post-traumatic growth. A study conducted prior to the COVID-19 pandemic found that support from fellow teachers influenced teachers' stress and anxiety [46]. Contextualizing our study within the COVID-19 pandemic further reinforced these insights. Specifically, during the COVID-19 pandemic, support from fellow teachers [47] and administrators played a key role in teacher well-being and in reducing burnout [20,48].

Furthermore, in this study, a striking revelation emerged, indicating that post-traumatic growth was higher among special education teachers than among their general education counterparts (Hypothesis 3). A plausible explanation for this finding lies in the differential experiences during the school closure in Israel. Special education teachers were required to teach in person at schools, while their general education peers switched to remote instruc-



tion [49]. This unique situation contradicts the predominant research on special education teachers during the pandemic, highlighting their struggles with remote instruction and the need for in-person interactions during the pandemic. For example, two studies reported special education teachers' need for in-person interaction with students and the lack of efficacy in online instruction [50,51]. However, in Israel, special education teachers were required to teach in their schools, when most teachers had to be socially isolated and work remotely. This could provide a plausible explanation for the high levels of post-traumatic growth found among special education teachers in the current study. It is possible that their sense of resilience and efficacy increased because they had to navigate multiple personal and professional challenges under unprecedented conditions. Just like health professionals during the pandemic [37], special education teachers took on the role of essential front-line workers [37]. The demands placed on them might have contributed to their higher levels of post-traumatic growth. Having the opportunity to maintain face-to-face contact with students and colleagues could have contributed to special education teachers' sense of control and positively impacted their mental well-being [52]. This aligns with Hobfoll's resource conservation model [43], which emphasizes the value of preserving one's sense of control as a valuable resource during traumatic events. Special education teachers experienced the traumatic COVID-19 pandemic as a trigger that enhanced their resilience and increased their post-traumatic growth. In contrast, general education teachers in Israel, though continuing their duties remotely in a safe environment, encountered higher levels of anxiety, stress, and distress due to limited resources [4,53,54]. Their experiences were distinct from those of their special education counterparts, potentially contributing to a difference in post-traumatic growth outcomes.

In conclusion, our study highlights the unique challenges and contexts faced by special education teachers during the pandemic, leading to increased post-traumatic growth compared to general education teachers. The role of essential front-line workers, the need to navigate uncharted territory, and the preservation of a sense of control played crucial roles in shaping their responses to the traumatic events [38,43,52,54]. Understanding these distinctions enriches our comprehension of post-traumatic growth and the various factors that influence educators' well-being during times of crisis.

#### *4.1. Limitations*

The current study has some limitations. First, this cross-sectional study used a small convenience sample, and hence the findings and implications are not generalizable. Future studies could employ larger samples and more longitudinal designs that examine changes in teacher post-traumatic growth as time progresses in the aftermath of COVID-19. Second, the research design entailed the online collection of self-report questionnaires. This design increased the likelihood that the participants would be digitally literate, have access to digital resources, and have virtual social connections. Future research should examine more diverse samples in order to enhance the generalizability of the current findings and implications. In addition, the majority of the study's participants were female. Subsequent studies should examine more comprehensively the issue of gender disparities, examining the experiences of male teachers as well. Additionally, there is a need for caution in generalizing the results to other cultural contexts, especially considering that teachers in Israel, compared to other countries, adopted different patterns of action during the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, this study examined a restricted selection of resources pertaining to post-traumatic growth. We recommend that future studies incorporate additional resources to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between resilience, social support, and post-traumatic growth among teachers post the COVID-19 crisis. Finally, in interpreting the data showing more COVID-19 infections among general education teachers compared to special education teachers, it is essential to consider the common method bias (CMB). Considering the impact of CMB on the results, it is possible that the reported difference in infection rates between general and special education teachers might reflect not solely actual differences in their susceptibility to the

virus. CMB may have influenced the results due to differences in the reporting accuracy between the two groups, impacting the reported infection rates and subsequent conclusions about the stress levels and resilience. Researchers should acknowledge and address CMB in future studies to ensure more accurate and reliable findings [55].

#### *4.2. Practical Implications*

The study findings attest to the importance of collegial support among teachers; therefore, social support should be stressed after crises and emergencies similar to the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, interventions that provide information on social support and collaborative sharing can help reduce teacher stress and promote resilience and post-traumatic growth, especially for teachers in the general education system. Educational policy-makers and school leaders can implement the following concrete guidelines to bolster teachers' coping skills, nurture their sense of belonging, and foster collegial support during future crisis situations. First, establish teacher support groups as structured spaces for sharing experiences and coping strategies during and after crises. Encourage collegial support and maintain open communication channels to facilitate an ongoing interaction among teachers. Second, conduct resilience workshops that address stress management, work-life balance, and coping skills tailored to the specific needs of teachers in both general and special education. These workshops, led by professional trainers, will equip teachers with effective tools to navigate challenges during future emergencies. Finally, foster an inclusive school culture by valuing open communication, involving teachers in decision-making processes related to crisis responses, and creating a sense of belonging within the school community. Following these guidelines will enhance teachers' collective resilience and social support, ensuring a positive and productive learning environment during challenging times. Such intervention initiatives are vital to promote effective functioning and general resilience among teachers in both general and special education. School administrators can ensure that training is provided to help teachers acquire effective tools to maintain balance in their professional and personal lives.

### **5. Conclusions**

Based on the findings of this cross-sectional study investigating resilience, social support, and post-traumatic growth among teachers post the COVID-19 pandemic, several key conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, social support exhibited a positive association with post-traumatic growth, indicating that teachers benefited from a sense of belonging and collaboration with the educational staff during the crisis. Secondly, teachers' resilience during the pandemic positively influenced their post-traumatic growth, enabling them to adapt flexibly and overcome challenges. Resilience acted as a protective factor against overwhelming stress, similar to what was observed for healthcare professionals. Thirdly, both resilience and social support predicted teachers' post-traumatic growth, emphasizing the importance of individual resources in mitigating the negative effects of stressors. Teachers' ability to cope and experience growth after stressful traumas was linked to their psychological resilience and support systems. Additionally, this study found that post-traumatic growth was higher among special education teachers compared to general education teachers. This difference might be attributed to the unique challenges special education teachers faced during in-person teaching amidst school closure. They were deemed essential front-line workers, compelled to cope with numerous personal and professional challenges, which may have contributed to their resilience and post-traumatic growth. In contrast, general education teachers who engaged in remote teaching experienced higher levels of anxiety and distress attributable to limited resources. These findings suggest that different contexts and experiences during the pandemic influenced teachers' post-traumatic growth. Understanding these associations can help educational policy-makers and school leaders develop targeted support strategies to enhance teachers' resilience and well-being during future crises.

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