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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Mediating Role of Deliberate Rumination in the Relationship Between Small "t" Traumas and Posttraumatic Growth

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to examine the mediating role of deliberate rumination in the relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth. The study was designed as a correlational survey study. The study group consisted of a convenience sample of 453 university students [388 women (85.6%) and 65 men (14.4%)] studying at Ankara University and Cappadocia University during the 2025–2026 academic year. Data were collected using a Personal Information Form, the Small "t" Trauma Effects Determination Scale, the Posttraumatic Growth Inventory, and the deliberate rumination subscale of the Event-Related Rumination Inventory. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis, and regression-based mediation analysis using Hayes' PROCESS macro Model 4 were employed in the data analysis. The findings indicated that small "t" traumas did not significantly predict posttraumatic growth at the total effect level (c path: $\beta = .019$, $p = .686$). However, small "t" traumas significantly and positively predicted deliberate rumination (a path: $\beta = .416$, $p < .001$), and deliberate rumination significantly and positively predicted posttraumatic growth (b path: $\beta = .311$, $p < .001$). When deliberate rumination was included in the model, the direct effect of small "t" traumas on posttraumatic growth was negative and statistically significant (c′ path: $\beta = -.110$, $p = .027$). The model explained 8% of the variance in posttraumatic growth ($R^2 = .08$). The bootstrap results demonstrated that the indirect effect of small "t" traumas on posttraumatic growth through deliberate rumination was statistically significant (B = .082, Bootstrap 95% CI [.047, .122]). Moreover, the negative direction of the direct effect and the positive direction of the indirect effect indicated the presence of inconsistent mediation, also referred to as a suppression effect. The findings indicate that small "t" traumas alone may not be sufficient to explain posttraumatic growth; however, through conscious, deliberate, and meaning-oriented cognitive processing, these experiences may carry the potential for positive psychological change.

Introduction

When considered within the framework of traditional psychiatric approaches and DSM-5 criteria, the concept of trauma is generally defined as a direct threat to an individual's physical integrity or life, and this definition includes sudden and severe events such as war, terrorist incidents, bereavement, natural disasters, sexual assault, or serious accidents (Benjet et al., 2016; Hensley, 2015). Similarly, in ICD-11, posttraumatic stress

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disorder is described as a condition that may develop following exposure to an extremely threatening or horrific event or series of events and is characterized by re-experiencing, avoidance, and persistent perceptions of heightened current threat (World Health Organization [WHO], 2024). In this respect, diagnostic classification systems such as DSM-5 and ICD-11 conceptualize traumatic experiences primarily in relation to events involving marked threat, horror, and severe stress. However, recent clinical observations and empirical studies have shown that events which do not directly threaten an individual's physical safety, yet profoundly disrupt psychological equilibrium, self-esteem, and ways of perceiving the world, may also produce traumatic outcomes; such effects are conceptualized as "small t" traumas (Gardenswartz, 2024). It is noteworthy that research in the posttraumatic growth literature has largely focused on Big "T" traumas, such as war, natural disasters, severe illness, sexual assault, bereavement, or life-threatening events, whereas the relationship between posttraumatic growth and more subtle, repetitive, and cumulative adverse experiences occurring within family, peer, and school contexts has been examined to a limited extent. However, although small "t" traumas may not always meet clinical criteria for traumatic events, they can be considered common and developmentally significant experiences that may affect individuals' self-perception, interpersonal relationships, and meaning-making processes. In this study, small "t" traumas were conceptualized as adverse experiences that individuals had encountered or witnessed in their past lives, which often do not involve sudden, life-threatening events or direct threats to physical integrity as in Big "T" traumas, but may have repetitive, cumulative, and subjectively distressing effects within family, peer, and school contexts. Accordingly, small "t" traumas were assessed using the Small "t" Trauma Effects Determination Scale developed by Dinç and Sapmaz (2022). The scale includes experiences such as not feeling valued by one's family, insufficient fulfillment of emotional and physiological needs, restriction of the right to make choices, being given excessive responsibility, persistent criticism, rejection, abandonment, being belittled by peers, being mocked, exposure to bullying, and social exclusion. Brickel (2019), based on clinical observations, states that small "t" trauma-related experiences, such as having a parent with medical problems, mental health difficulties, or substance use disorder, may have cumulative effects over time and may lead to significant difficulties in individuals' psychological functioning.

From the perspective of psychotraumatological theories, the effects of traumatic experiences on individuals are addressed not merely as a process limited to psychopathological symptoms, but within the framework of the short- and long-term effects of traumatic experiences on memory, consciousness, self-perception, and meaning systems. According to Öztürk et al. (2021), psychotraumatology is a field that examines the factors leading to psychological trauma, the traumatic process itself, and the outcomes of this process in relation to trauma-based clinical phenomena such as posttraumatic stress disorder and dissociation. Öztürk (2022) further emphasizes that modern psychotraumatology particularly focuses on understanding the short- and long-term psychological consequences of chronic and complex traumas that begin in early life. Within this framework, traumatic experiences can be considered not only as events that produce destructive outcomes for individuals but also as experiences that disrupt individuals' basic assumptions about the world, themselves, and life, thereby necessitating processes of meaning-making and reconstruction. Therefore, in the present study, posttraumatic growth is addressed not primarily within the general well-being perspective of positive psychology, but in the context of the reconstruction of the disruption caused by traumatic experiences in individuals' basic assumptions through cognitive processing and meaning-making processes. This transformation, conceptualized by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) as posttraumatic growth, refers to the positive psychological changes that emerge following traumatic experiences. According to Janoff-Bulman (1992), traumatic experiences may disrupt individuals' assumptive world, including their basic beliefs that the world is safe, meaningful, and predictable. In the posttraumatic growth model proposed by Tedeschi et al. (2018), this cognitive disruption is also considered to initiate a process through which individuals reconstruct their understanding of the world, themselves, and their lives. In other words, posttraumatic growth refers to the construction of a more complex and resilient meaning system that incorporates the traumatic experience in place of previously shattered beliefs (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). From this perspective, traumatic events do not necessarily have to be life-threatening or direct causes of PTSD symptoms. Exposure to a moderately or highly stressful life event is considered sufficient for posttraumatic growth to occur in individuals (Tedeschi et al., 2022).

A review of the literature shows that posttraumatic growth has been examined in the context of various traumatic experiences, such as cancer, intimate partner violence, bereavement, chronic illness, and war/combat-related experiences (Andrykowski et al., 2000; Cordova et al., 2001; Tedeschi et al., 2018; Bakaitytė et al., 2022). Posttraumatic growth is considered both a process and an outcome. Positive reappraisals and meaning-making efforts reflect posttraumatic growth as a process, whereas growth is considered an outcome when trauma exposure leads to lasting and positive change in the individual (Tedeschi et al., 2018). However, studies directly examining the relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth appear to be quite limited. Within this limited literature, Acar et al. (2024) found a weak and negative significant relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth and showed that small "t" traumas explained only a small proportion of the variance in posttraumatic growth. This finding suggests that small "t" traumas alone may not be sufficient to explain posttraumatic growth. Recent studies have also drawn attention to the important role of rumination in the transformation of past traumatic experiences (Ahmadi et al., 2025), negative affect (Ravelo et al., 2024), or intrusive thoughts (Shigemoto & Bhattarai, 2025) into posttraumatic growth. Accordingly, the present study aims to contribute to this gap in the literature by examining the relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth not merely as a direct association, but through the mediating role of deliberate rumination.

Considering that posttraumatic growth is related not merely to the traumatic experience itself, but also to how this experience is processed and made meaningful, rumination emerges as an important cognitive variable in this process. Rumination is defined as a repetitive thinking process about a traumatic or emotionally distressing event (Bakaitytė et al., 2022). In the theory of posttraumatic growth, rumination is addressed in two different forms: intrusive rumination and deliberate rumination. Intrusive rumination refers to thoughts related to the traumatic experience that come to mind involuntarily, are difficult to control, and are distressing, whereas deliberate rumination refers to a more conscious and intentional cognitive processing process aimed at making sense of the experience, reappraising it, and integrating it into one's life narrative (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2004; Taku et al., 2008). While intrusive rumination is often regarded as a distressing and uncontrolled cognitive process that emerges in the early stages following a traumatic experience, deliberate rumination may contribute to individuals' questioning the meaning of the experience, re-evaluating their core beliefs, and recognizing possibilities for positive psychological change (Wu et al., 2015). Accordingly, the literature emphasizes that deliberate rumination, in particular, is more closely associated with posttraumatic growth (Taku et al., 2008). Big "T" traumas often directly threaten individuals' core beliefs as clear, sudden, and intensely disruptive experiences, whereas small "t" traumas may emerge as more subtle, repetitive, and normalized experiences embedded in everyday life. In major traumas, because the disruption caused by the experience is more pronounced, cognitive processing may be activated more explicitly and become more visible in the individual's attempts to make sense of the experience. In contrast, in small "t" traumas, the process may operate more implicitly, and the effects of these experiences on the individual may not always be clearly recognized. At this point, deliberate rumination may help individuals consciously address and make meaning of implicit effects embedded in daily life, such as the sense of inadequacy created by persistent criticism (Allen et al., 2022). Therefore, deliberate rumination can be considered an important cognitive mechanism in transforming the diffuse emotional effects associated with small "t" traumatic experiences into a more structured process of meaning-making and development (Shahabi et al., 2025; Taku et al., 2008). Accordingly, in the present study, deliberate rumination was hypothesized to function as a mediating mechanism in the relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth.

A substantial proportion of existing studies have focused on experiences that are explicitly recognized as traumatic, often referred to as large "T" traumas. By contrast, research examining the extent to which deliberate rumination accounts for growth in the context of small "t" experiences—which may not always meet formal trauma criteria but are subjectively distressing for the individual—remains highly limited. Nevertheless, small "t" traumas may also challenge individuals' core beliefs; when appropriate cognitive processing mechanisms, particularly deliberate rumination, are activated, these experiences may be repositioned within one's life narrative and thereby contribute to growth.

Based on this rationale, the present study examines the mediating role of deliberate rumination in the relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth. The study aims to contribute to the understanding of small "t" traumas not only in relation to negative psychological outcomes, such as stress and

anxiety, but also in terms of how they may be associated with positive psychological change through deliberate cognitive processing. In this respect, the study is expected to provide a more specific contribution to the posttraumatic growth and rumination literature by examining whether small "t" traumas are related to posttraumatic growth through deliberate rumination. The findings are also expected to provide a basis for addressing experiences that may appear "minor" yet leave profound psychological traces within meaning-making and cognitive restructuring-oriented psychological counseling processes. Accordingly, the following hypotheses were tested in the present study.

H1. The level of small "t" trauma significantly predicts posttraumatic growth.

H2. The level of small "t" trauma positively and significantly predicts deliberate rumination.

H3. The level of deliberate rumination positively and significantly predicts posttraumatic growth.

H4. Deliberate rumination has a statistically significant mediating role in the relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth.

Method

Research Model

This study was conducted as a descriptive study based on a correlational survey model to examine the mediating role of deliberate rumination in the relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth. The correlational survey model is defined as a research model that aims to determine the existence and degree of covariation between two or more variables (Karasar, 2024). Within the scope of the study, small "t" traumas were considered as the independent variable (X), posttraumatic growth as the dependent variable (Y), and deliberate rumination as the mediator variable (M). Accordingly, a simple mediation model structured as X→M→Y was adopted in the present study (Figure 1).

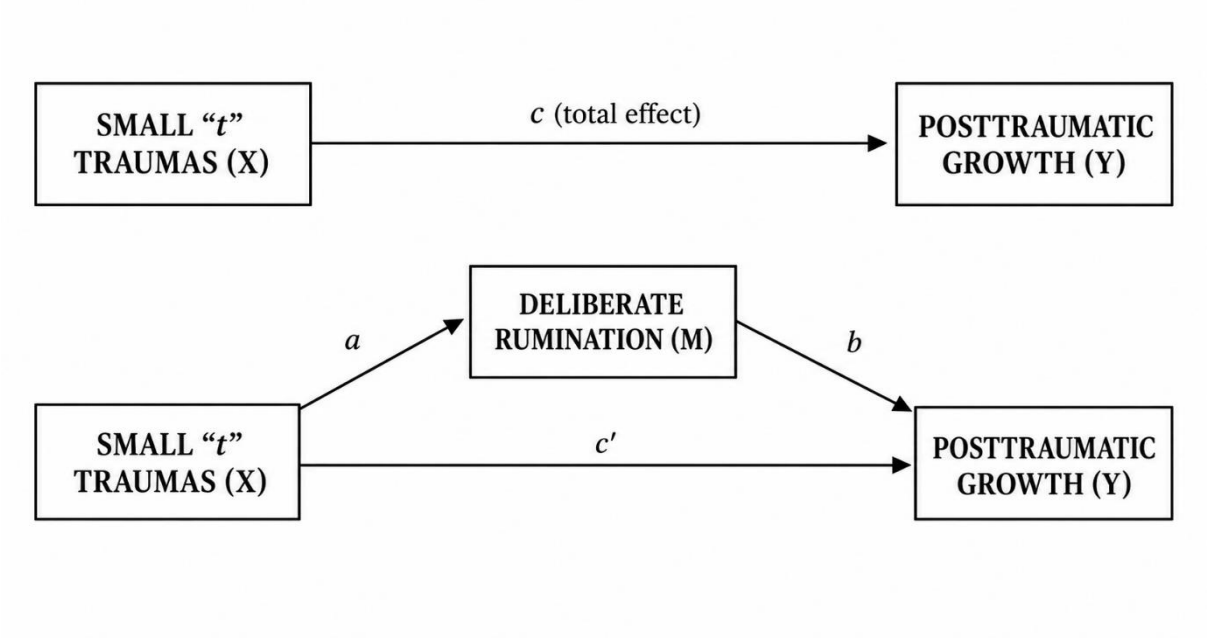


Figure 1. *Conceptual Mediation Model*

Study Group

The study group consisted of university students enrolled at Ankara University and Cappadocia University during the 2025–2026 academic year. A convenience sampling method was used in the study. Of the

participants, 231 students were from Ankara University and 222 students were from Cappadocia University. Prior to data collection, the minimum required sample size was calculated using the finite population sample size formula, $n = N / [1 + N(e^2)]$, based on the accessible population size. Considering the population size and a 5% sampling error, the recommended minimum sample size for the study was determined to be 399. During the data collection process, a total of 453 students were reached. All participants who met the inclusion criteria and completed the online form in full were included in the analysis. Therefore, no participants were excluded from the study due to missing data, inappropriate responses, or exclusion criteria. Since the data were collected through an online form, there were no missing responses in the dataset. To evaluate the statistical adequacy of the final sample size, a power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1. For a linear multiple regression model with two predictors, based on a significance level of .05, N = 453, and the effect size obtained in the present study (R^2 = .08; f^2 = .087), the statistical power of the model was found to be above .99. This finding indicates that the study had an adequate sample size for the tested model.

When the demographic characteristics of the participants were examined, it was determined that 85.6% of the sample consisted of female students (*n* = 388), while 14.4% consisted of male students (*n* = 65). In terms of age distribution, 15.1% of the participants (*n* = 68) were 19 years old, 19.2% (*n* = 87) were 20 years old, 22.4% (*n* = 102) were 21 years old, 30.1% (*n* = 136) were 22 years old, 7.1% (*n* = 32) were 23 years old, 3.0% (*n* = 14) were 24 years old, and 3.2% (*n* = 14) were 25 years of age or older. Regarding year of study, 11.7% of the participants (*n* = 53) were first-year students, 27.2% (*n* = 123) were second-year students, 26.3% (*n* = 119) were third-year students, and 34.7% (*n* = 158) were fourth-year students. With respect to maternal education level, 2.4% of the participants' mothers (*n* = 11) had not graduated from any school, 24.3% (*n* = 110) were primary school graduates, 17.5% (*n* = 79) were middle school graduates, 30.8% (*n* = 140) were high school graduates, and 25.0% (*n* = 113) were university graduates. In terms of paternal education level, 0.4% of the participants' fathers (*n* = 2) had not graduated from any school, 16.6% (*n* = 75) were primary school graduates, 14.3% (*n* = 65) were middle school graduates, 33.3% (*n* = 151) were high school graduates, and 35.3% (*n* = 160) were university graduates. Regarding perceived income level, 1.1% of the participants (*n* = 5) reported a very low income level, 3.8% (*n* = 17) reported a low income level, 74.0% (*n* = 335) reported a moderate income level, 20.5% (*n* = 93) reported a high income level, and 0.7% (*n* = 3) reported a very high income level.

Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Cappadocia University Ethics Committee (Decision No: 26.01, Date: 14/01/2026).

Data Collection Instruments

The data were collected using a Personal Information Form and standardized measurement instruments designed to assess the variables included in the study. Information regarding the data collection instruments used in the study is presented below.

Small "t" Trauma Effects Determination Scale

The Small "t" Trauma Effects Determination Scale was developed by Dinç and Sapmaz (2022). The total score obtained from the scale reflects the extent to which individuals are affected by small "t" traumas. The scale consists of 45 items and includes three subdimensions: small "t" traumas arising from family relationships, small "t" traumas arising from social relationships, and small "t" traumas resulting from unmet physiological needs. The scale is structured as a five-point Likert-type instrument and is rated from "1" (does not reflect at all) to "5" (completely reflects). In the scale development study, the internal consistency coefficients were reported as .96 for the first subdimension, .92 for the second subdimension, and .76 for the third subdimension. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the overall scale was calculated as .96. The scale does not include any reverse-coded items. Sample items include "I did not feel valued by my family in my past" and "I was exposed to bullying during my school life." In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the scale was calculated as .97.

Posttraumatic Growth Inventory

The Posttraumatic Growth Inventory was developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) to assess positive psychological changes that may occur following a highly stressful or traumatic life event. The original form

of the inventory consists of 25 items and includes subdimensions such as personal strength, relating to others, new possibilities, spiritual change, and appreciation of life. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) reported the internal consistency coefficient of the inventory as .90. The Turkish adaptation study of the revised form of the inventory was conducted by Aydın and Kabukçuoğlu (2020). Following the adaptation process, the inventory consisted of 23 items and five subdimensions. The inventory is a six-point Likert-type instrument rated from "0" (I did not experience this change) to "5" (I experienced this change to a very great degree). The total score obtained from the inventory indicates the individual's level of posttraumatic growth. The inventory does not include any reverse-coded items. Sample items include "I developed new interests" and "I have greater self-confidence." In the Turkish adaptation study conducted by Aydın and Kabukçuoğlu (2020), the overall internal consistency coefficient of the inventory was calculated as .93. In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the inventory was found to be .92.

Event-Related Rumination Inventory

The Event-Related Rumination Inventory was developed by Cann et al. (2011) to assess intrusive and deliberate rumination processes that may emerge following traumatic or stressful life events. The inventory consists of 20 items in total, including 10 items measuring intrusive rumination and 10 items measuring deliberate rumination. The Turkish adaptation of the inventory was conducted by Çalışır and Öktem (2025), and its factor structure was found to be consistent with the original form. In the Turkish adaptation study, the internal consistency coefficient was reported as .94 for the overall inventory, .94 for the intrusive rumination subscale, and .88 for the deliberate rumination subscale. In the present study, only the deliberate rumination subscale of the inventory was used in accordance with the research model. The deliberate rumination subscale consists of 10 items and has a unidimensional structure. It is a four-point Likert-type scale rated from "1" (never) to "4" (often). The scale does not include any reverse-coded items. Sample items include "I thought about whether I could find meaning from my experience" and "I thought about whether the changes in my life were related to dealing with my experience." In the present study, the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient of the deliberate rumination subscale was calculated as .90.

Procedure

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Cappadocia University with the decision dated 14.01.2026 and numbered 26.01. The research data were collected through an online form after the necessary ethical approval had been obtained. The online Google Forms link was distributed to students through class WhatsApp groups at Ankara University and Cappadocia University. During the data collection process, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the confidentiality of the information obtained, and the fact that the data would be used solely for scientific purposes. To reduce potential response bias and common method variance, participants were also assured that there were no right or wrong answers and that their responses would be evaluated anonymously. Informed consent was obtained from the students who agreed to participate in the study, after which they were asked to complete the data collection instruments.

Data Analysis

In line with the aim of the study, regression-based mediation analysis was conducted to examine the mediating role of deliberate rumination in the relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth. Accordingly, Hayes' PROCESS macro Model 4, which is widely used for testing mediation effects, was employed. Prior to the analyses, the assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, and multivariate outliers were evaluated. Multivariate outliers and influential cases were examined using Mahalanobis distance and Cook's distance analyses. The normality of the variables was examined using skewness and kurtosis values, while the multicollinearity assumption was assessed based on correlation coefficients, tolerance values, and VIF values. The significance of the indirect effect was tested using 5000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals. A confidence interval that does not include zero was interpreted as indicating a statistically significant indirect effect.

Results

In this section, the relationships among small "t" traumas, posttraumatic growth, and deliberate rumination were tested within the framework of the proposed mediation model, and the findings are presented. In the model, small "t" traumas were considered as the independent variable, posttraumatic growth as the dependent variable, and deliberate rumination as the mediator variable. Descriptive statistics for the variables included in the model are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics for the Variables Included in the Model*

Variables	M	SD	Skewness	SE	Kurtosis	SE
Small "t" Traumas	85.20	32.86	1.03	.12	.73	.23
Posttraumatic Growth	84.95	20.83	-.06	.12	.02	.23
Deliberate Rumination	30.24	6.65	-.93	.12	.91	.23

Note. M = Mean; SD = standard deviation; SE= standard error.

An examination of the calculated skewness and kurtosis values showed that skewness ranged from −.93 to 1.03, while kurtosis ranged from .02 to .91. The standard error for skewness was calculated as .12, and the standard error for kurtosis was .23. According to George and Mallery (2013), skewness and kurtosis values within the range of ±2.00 are considered acceptable indicators of normality. Since the values obtained in the present study fall within these limits, the data can be considered to satisfy the assumption of normal distribution at an acceptable level.

To assess the assumption of multicollinearity, Tolerance and VIF values were examined for the variables deliberate rumination and small "t" traumas. The analysis revealed that the Tolerance value was .827 and the VIF value was 1.209 for both predictor variables. Tolerance values above .10 and VIF values below 10 indicate that there is no multicollinearity problem in the model (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Table 2. *Pearson Correlation Analysis Results for the Relationships Among the Variables Included in the Model*

Variables	1	2	3
Small "t" Traumas	-	.019	.416*
Posttraumatic Growth	.019	-	.265*
Deliberate Rumination	.416*	.265*	-

Note. * $p < .001$, N = 453

Table 2 presents the results of the Pearson correlation analysis conducted to examine the relationships among the variables included in the model. The findings indicated that there was no significant relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth ($r = .019$, $p = .686$). However, small "t" traumas were positively and significantly associated with deliberate rumination ($r = .416$, $p < .001$). In addition, deliberate rumination was positively and significantly associated with posttraumatic growth ($r = .265$, $p < .001$). Since the correlation coefficients among the variables were below .70, it can be concluded that there was no serious multicollinearity problem (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013, p. 88).

Given the unequal gender distribution in the sample, the mediation model was additionally tested by including gender as a covariate. In this covariate-adjusted model, gender did not significantly predict either deliberate rumination ($B = −1.289$, $p = .114$) or posttraumatic growth ($B = 1.627$, $p = .548$). No other demographic variables, such as age, were entered into the model as covariates. These findings suggest that the observed mediation pattern was not substantially attributable to gender differences. It should be noted that the zero-order correlation between deliberate rumination and posttraumatic growth ($r = .265$) differs from the b path coefficient obtained in the mediation model ($\beta = .311$). This difference can be explained by the fact that the b path coefficient reflects the partial predictive effect of deliberate rumination on posttraumatic growth after accounting for small "t" traumas in the mediation model, rather than a simple bivariate association.

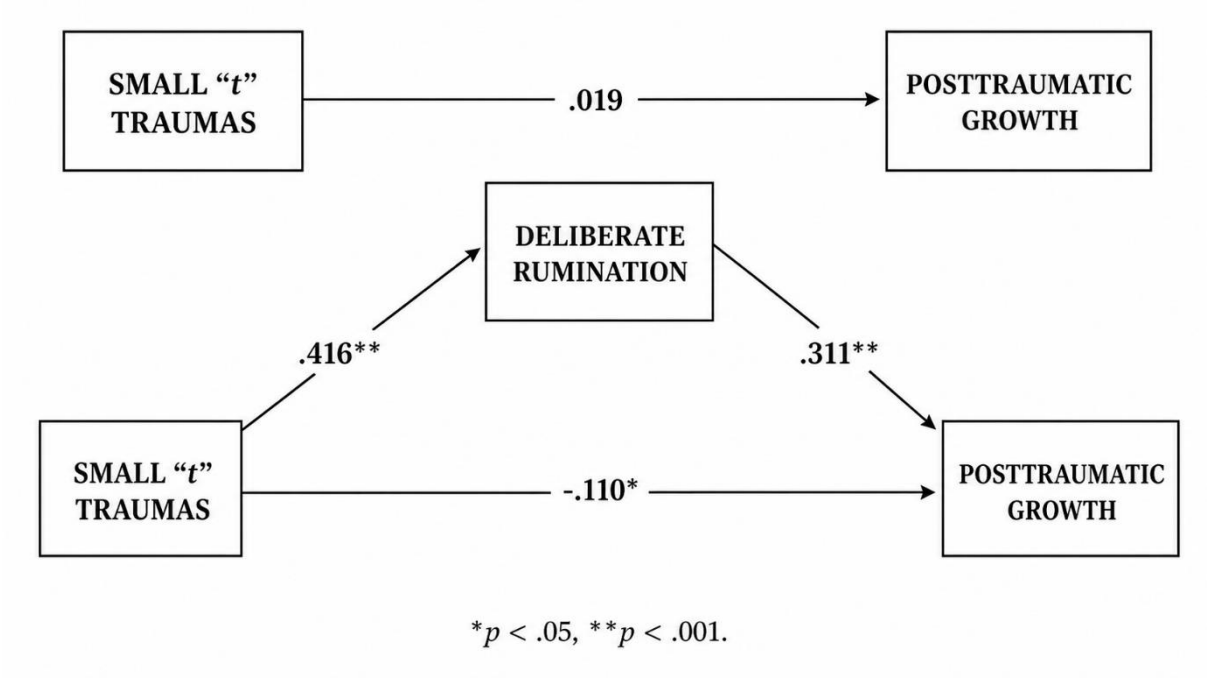


Figure 2. *Standardized Path Coefficients for the Mediation Model*

Note. Values shown in the figure are standardized coefficients (β).

As shown in Figure 2, the total effect of small "t" traumas on posttraumatic growth was not statistically significant (c path: B = .012, SE = .030, p = .686; β = .019). However, when deliberate rumination was included in the model, the direct effect of small "t" traumas on posttraumatic growth was negative and statistically significant (c′ path: B = −.070, SE = .032, p = .027; β = −.110). In addition, small "t" traumas positively and significantly predicted deliberate rumination (a path: B = .084, p < .001; β = .416), and deliberate rumination positively and significantly predicted posttraumatic growth (b path: B = .972, p < .001; β = .311). The bootstrap analysis further indicated that the indirect effect of small "t" traumas on posttraumatic growth through deliberate rumination was statistically significant (B = .082, Bootstrap 95% CI [.047, .122]). Taken together, these findings indicate a pattern of inconsistent mediation, also referred to as a suppression effect, as the direct and indirect effects operate in opposite directions.

Accordingly, the simple mediation model structured as X → M → Y was analyzed, and the findings are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Bootstrap Coefficients and Confidence Intervals for the Proposed Mediation Model*

Effect	B	SE	β	T	p	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Total Effect	.012	.030	.019	.405	.686	-.047	.071
Direct Effect	-.070	.032	-.110	-2.214	.027	-.132	-.008
Total Indirect Effect	.082	—	.129	—	—	.047	.122

Note. B = unstandardized coefficient; β = standardized coefficient. Confidence intervals for the indirect effect were obtained using 5000 bootstrap samples. The β value for the indirect effect represents the standardized indirect effect.

Table 3 presents the total, direct, and indirect effect coefficients for the proposed mediation model. The findings indicate that the indirect effect of small "t" traumas on posttraumatic growth through deliberate rumination was statistically significant (*B* = .082, 95% CI [.047, .122]). Because the confidence interval did not include zero, the indirect effect was considered statistically significant.

Discussion

In this study, the mediating role of deliberate rumination in the relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth was examined. The findings indicated that there was no significant direct relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth. However, when deliberate rumination was included in the model, the direct effect of small "t" traumas on posttraumatic growth became negative and statistically significant.

The first finding of the study showed that small "t" traumas did not significantly predict posttraumatic growth. This finding does not fully align with previous studies indicating that posttraumatic growth is mostly associated with large "T" traumatic experiences (Andrykowski et al., 2000; Bakaitytė et al., 2022; Cordova et al., 2001). In contrast, Acar et al. (2024), who examined the relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth, reported a significant negative relationship between these two variables. Although this result may initially appear to differ from the first finding of the present study, the emergence of a negative and significant direct effect of small "t" traumas on posttraumatic growth after deliberate rumination was included in the model indicates a partially similar pattern to the findings of Acar et al. (2024).

A review of the literature shows that studies directly examining the relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth are quite limited. Therefore, when evaluating the present findings, studies examining the relationship between childhood trauma and posttraumatic growth were also taken into consideration. In this context, studies investigating the relationship between childhood trauma and posttraumatic growth appear to have produced inconsistent findings. In a study conducted with university students, a negative relationship was found between childhood trauma experiences and levels of posttraumatic growth (Işık, 2024). In contrast, another study conducted with 311 female participants reported no significant relationship between childhood trauma and posttraumatic growth (Hacımüezzin, 2026). One possible explanation for these inconsistent findings is the proposition that stressors may have an inverted U-shaped relationship with posttraumatic growth (Özcan, 2019). Accordingly, low-intensity stressors may be insufficient to trigger growth, whereas highly intense traumatic experiences may hinder the process of posttraumatic growth. Nevertheless, childhood trauma and small "t" traumas, although related, are considered conceptually distinct constructs. Childhood trauma often refers to more severe, developmentally profound, and clinically more salient adverse experiences, whereas small "t" traumas may involve more subtle, cumulative, normalized experiences that are closely related to the individual's subjective meaning-making process. Therefore, findings from childhood trauma studies are evaluated not as direct evidence for the small "t" trauma findings of the present study, but rather as contextual explanations.

Another explanation for these differences may be related to how individuals perceive, interpret, and make sense of their experiences. The fact that traumatic experiences in childhood occur during a developmental period in which self-related cognitions are being formed increases the likelihood that these experiences may lead to negative cognitive evaluations (Briere, 1992). In this context, small "t" traumatic experiences in early life, such as being ignored, lack of affection, exclusion, rejection, and persistent criticism, may pave the way for individuals to develop negative cognitive representations of the self. Young et al. (2003) suggested that early adverse experiences may play an important role in the development of early maladaptive schemas. Similarly, Gibb et al. (2001) empirically demonstrated that childhood emotional maltreatment is associated with negative cognitive styles. Over time, these negative self-representations may become internalized as internal working models and may shape how individuals interpret subsequent life experiences (Morsünbül & Çok, 2011). From this perspective, small "t" traumas may often be interpreted by individuals within the framework of their existing self-perceptions. Therefore, these experiences may not be experienced by every individual as explicit traumatic events that suddenly disrupt core beliefs; rather, they may be internalized as experiences that reinforce existing negative self-perceptions. Accordingly, the possibility that small "t" traumas may not sufficiently activate deeper cognitive questioning and cognitive restructuring processes in some individuals can be considered one possible factor explaining the absence of a direct significant relationship between these experiences and posttraumatic growth.

The second finding of the study indicated that small "t" traumas positively and significantly predicted deliberate rumination. It is well established that traumatic experiences may disrupt individuals' core beliefs about themselves, others, and the world, and that this process is often accompanied by intense emotional

distress. In order to cope with this distress, individuals may initially engage in more automatic, involuntary, and repetitive thinking processes (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995). Over time, however, these intrusive thoughts may transform into a more conscious, deliberate, and meaning-oriented form of thinking. During this transformation process, individuals question their existing schemas, analyze their experiences, and reorganize their cognitive structures (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2014; Haselden, 2014). Previous studies in the literature have also shown that trauma history significantly predicts deliberate rumination (Ahmadi et al., 2025). In this regard, the present finding suggests that small "t" traumas do not merely generate automatic and intrusive thoughts, but may also activate conscious cognitive processes aimed at questioning the causes, consequences, and personal meaning of the experience. Therefore, deliberate rumination can be considered an important component of the cognitive restructuring process that emerges following traumatic experiences.

The third finding of the study showed that deliberate rumination significantly predicted posttraumatic growth. This finding is consistent with previous studies reporting a positive relationship between deliberate rumination and posttraumatic growth (Xu et al., 2019; Allen et al., 2022; Shahabi et al., 2025). In individuals exposed to challenging or traumatic experiences, the transformation of initially intrusive rumination into deliberate rumination—a more controlled, reflective, and meaning-oriented form of cognitive processing—is considered a critical process for posttraumatic growth (Wu et al., 2015). In this process, individuals intentionally and consciously question the traumatic experience and re-evaluate its meaning, consequences, and place within their lives. This search for meaning and effort to draw lessons from the experience constitute one of the core components of the cognitive restructuring process underlying posttraumatic growth (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2012). While traumatic experiences may disrupt individuals' belief systems, deliberate rumination enables conscious "cognitive work" on this disrupted structure and facilitates the construction of new meanings (Szcześniak et al., 2022). Therefore, the finding that deliberate rumination significantly predicts posttraumatic growth suggests that individuals may develop personal strength, new possibilities, and a deeper awareness of life by reflectively reinterpreting painful experiences rather than avoiding them.

Finally, one of the important contributions of this study is that although the direct relationship between small "t" traumas and posttraumatic growth was nonsignificant, this relationship became negative and significant when deliberate rumination was included in the model. In contrast, the positive and significant indirect effect through deliberate rumination indicates the presence of inconsistent mediation, or in other words, a suppression effect, in the model. MacKinnon et al. (2000) stated that mediation, confounding, and suppression effects may have statistically similar structures; however, these effects should be interpreted in theoretically distinct ways. According to Tzelgov and Henik (1991), suppression situations in psychological research can be explained by the separation of criterion-irrelevant or oppositely functioning variance in one predictor variable by another variable. From this perspective, the inclusion of deliberate rumination in the model may have separated two opposing components of small "t" traumas in relation to posttraumatic growth. On the one hand, small "t" traumas may weaken individuals' self-perception, self-efficacy, and perceived sense of control through repeated experiences such as exclusion, persistent criticism, rejection, emotional neglect, or lack of affection. In this respect, the unprocessed negative burden of small "t" traumas may be expected to have a negative direct effect on posttraumatic growth. On the other hand, when these experiences are deliberately reflected upon, re-evaluated, and made meaningful within one's life narrative, they may also activate a cognitive processing pathway that supports posttraumatic growth. In the present model, this process is represented by deliberate rumination. Therefore, before deliberate rumination was included in the model, the negative direct effect of small "t" traumas and the positive indirect effect through deliberate rumination may have been mixed within the same total effect. When deliberate rumination is included in the model, the meaning-making and cognitive restructuring component that supports growth is separated, leaving behind the negative direct effect that reflects the unprocessed adverse burden of small "t" traumas. At this point, although the study by Wu et al. (2015) did not examine the same variables as the present study, it provides a partial theoretical parallel regarding the cognitive processing role of deliberate rumination in the process of posttraumatic growth. Whereas Wu et al. (2015) conceptualized posttraumatic stress as a psychological response emerging after a traumatic experience, the present study examined small "t" traumas as more subtle, cumulative, and often internalized adverse experiences. Despite this conceptual difference, both studies converge in suggesting that posttraumatic growth is related not merely to adverse experiences or stress levels, but to the deliberate

cognitive processing of these experiences. In addition, the finding of Acar et al. (2024) that small traumas were weakly, significantly, and negatively associated with posttraumatic growth can be more directly linked to the negative direct effect observed in the present study. In this context, the negative direct effect of small "t" traumas on posttraumatic growth, together with the positive indirect effect through deliberate rumination, suggests that these experiences may have a paradoxical structure. In other words, when small "t" traumas remain unprocessed, they may weaken individuals' positive self-narratives, sense of control, and capacity for growth; however, when they are consciously addressed and made meaningful through deliberate rumination, they may indirectly contribute to posttraumatic growth.

The intensity of the disruption caused by large "T" traumas often facilitates individuals' engagement in cognitive restructuring processes and activates deliberate rumination aimed at making sense of the experience (Dürü, 2014). In contrast, the absence of a direct emergence of posttraumatic growth in the context of small "t" traumas may be associated with the normalization or minimization of the stressor, as well as the internalization of negative self-perceptions that develop as a result of these experiences (Dhawan & Sinha, 2022). Nevertheless, although these experiences may not appear sufficiently disruptive on their own, they may gradually weaken individuals' sense of self-efficacy and perceived control over time. When deliberate rumination is activated, these diffuse and implicit traces of experience may be reinterpreted within a more coherent life narrative. This suggests that the negative direct effect of small "t" traumas on posttraumatic growth may be counterbalanced or suppressed by a positive indirect effect through deliberate rumination. In other words, although the unprocessed burden of small "t" traumas may be negatively associated with posttraumatic growth, deliberate rumination appears to function as a cognitive pathway through which these experiences are indirectly associated with higher levels of growth. Previous studies also indicate that ruminative processes play a decisive role in the relationship between traumatic experiences and growth (Ahmadi et al., 2025; Shigemoto & Bhattarai, 2025). In conclusion, small "t" traumas do not appear to lead to posttraumatic growth on their own; however, when deliberate rumination is activated, these experiences may be reinterpreted and may contribute to the process of growth.

Implications for Practice and Research

The findings of this study offer critical theoretical and practical implications for professionals working in the field of psychological counseling and guidance. First, experiences referred to as "small t" traumas, which are generally less visible than "Big T" traumas, should be considered as experiences that may have implicit effects on individuals' worldview, self-perception, and psychological adjustment through patterns such as bullying, rejection, persistent criticism, exclusion, or emotional neglect. Therefore, in practice, such experiences in clients' pasts should be addressed not merely as "stressors," but also as potential sources of trauma.

One of the most original contributions of the study, namely the role of deliberate rumination as a "suppressor mediator" (inconsistent mediator), points to the importance of cognitive processing in intervention processes. The findings indicate that small "t" traumas do not directly produce growth; indeed, they may have an implicit negative effect on growth. However, when these experiences are included in a process of meaning-making and cognitive restructuring through deliberate rumination, they may indirectly contribute to posttraumatic growth. In this context, it is important for psychological counselors to develop supportive interventions that help clients transform their traumatic experiences into a conscious process of meaning-making and cognitive restructuring, rather than focusing only on the repeated or uncontrolled recounting of these experiences.

Psychological counselors are therefore encouraged to adopt trauma-sensitive interventions that support deliberate rumination, meaning-making, cognitive restructuring, and value-oriented life directions, rather than repetitive and uncontrolled narratives that may increase intrusive rumination. In this process, expressive writing exercises may support clients in cognitively and emotionally processing emotionally challenging experiences by putting them into structured written form (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986). Similarly, Cognitive Processing Therapy may provide a useful framework for identifying and restructuring rigid and maladaptive beliefs related to traumatic experiences (Resick et al., 2017). Narrative Exposure Therapy may support the integration of fragmented, disorganized, or cumulative adverse experiences into a coherent life narrative (Schauer et al., 2011). Acceptance and Commitment Therapy may also help clients develop a more flexible relationship with painful experiences and make meaning of these experiences in line with their values rather

than avoiding them (Hayes et al., 2011).

Limitations and Future Research

There are several methodological and sample-related limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings of the present study. First, the study sample consisted of university students studying at Ankara University and Cappadocia University. Although gender was controlled for in the mediation analysis, the fact that the majority of the sample consisted of female participants (85.6%) limits the generalizability of the findings to the general population and especially to the male population. Second, the data were collected using self-report measures. This raises the possibility that participants may have been influenced by social desirability concerns in their responses or may have shown recall bias when reporting past traumatic experiences. In addition, because all variables were collected at the same time and using the same measurement method, common method variance may be considered a limitation of the study. Although procedural precautions were taken to reduce potential response bias and common method variance, such as informing participants about confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the scientific purpose of the study, no additional statistical test for common method variance, such as Harman's single-factor test, was conducted. Therefore, caution is required when interpreting the relationships between variables, particularly the findings regarding the mediating/suppressor role of deliberate rumination. Third, because the study was conducted using a cross-sectional design based on a correlational survey model, it is not possible to establish definitive cause-and-effect relationships between the variables. Therefore, the finding that small "t" traumas are associated with posttraumatic growth through deliberate rumination should be interpreted not as a causal process, but as a relational pattern based on cross-sectional data.

Future studies may reduce these limitations by using multi-source and multi-method data collection approaches, such as clinician evaluations, narrative interviews, structured clinical interviews, or the coding of written narratives, in addition to self-report data. Moreover, longitudinal or multi-wave research designs may allow for a stronger examination of the temporal direction of the relationships among small "t" traumas, deliberate rumination, and posttraumatic growth. In addition, comparing individuals with high levels of small "t" trauma who differ in their levels of deliberate rumination may contribute to understanding the conditions under which these experiences become growth-inhibiting or growth-supporting processes. Furthermore, the current model may be expanded by including different protective factors such as social support, self-compassion, cognitive flexibility, or psychological resilience.

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