

# Trajectories of psychological functioning in international students during the COVID-19 pandemic

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## BACKGROUND

- International students in the United States experience unique stressors during the pandemic, including deportation, discrimination, and limited opportunities to build social support networks.
- Understanding factors predicting trajectories of psychological functioning could inform policy changes and clinical interventions, particularly for a population experiencing unique stressors due to the pandemic.

## METHOD

- We conducted a longitudinal study examining trajectories of distress and psychological growth in international students and their partners and identified factors predicting distress within specific trajectories.
- 54 participants were surveyed approx. weekly for 14 weeks.
- We employed latent growth mixture modeling to examine trajectories of psychological distress (i.e., a latent factor of depression, anxiety, stress, and posttraumatic stress) and posttraumatic growth and identify predictors of distress trajectories.

## RESULTS

- 62.2% of participants reported a resilience trajectory, while the remaining 37.8% reported symptomatic trajectories (one with decreasing symptoms over time and another with increasing symptoms). See *Figure 1*.
- For posttraumatic growth trajectories, two groups reported increasing or decreasing posttraumatic growth, with the other group reporting low posttraumatic growth. See *Figure 2*.
- Women, those not receiving financial aid, and those reporting higher COVID symptoms experienced higher psychological distress within specific trajectories.

## DISCUSSION

- Environmental and individual factors predicted trajectories of distress in international students and their partners; clarifying factors predicting distress allows mental health professionals and policymakers to improve policies for underrepresented students.
- Results also elucidate factors that cognitive-behavioral practitioners may consider in the provision of evidence-based services.

Among international students and their partners, **peri-pandemic resilience** is common, but **posttraumatic growth** is less so.

*Women and participants reporting lower SES and more COVID symptoms reported increased distress within trajectories*

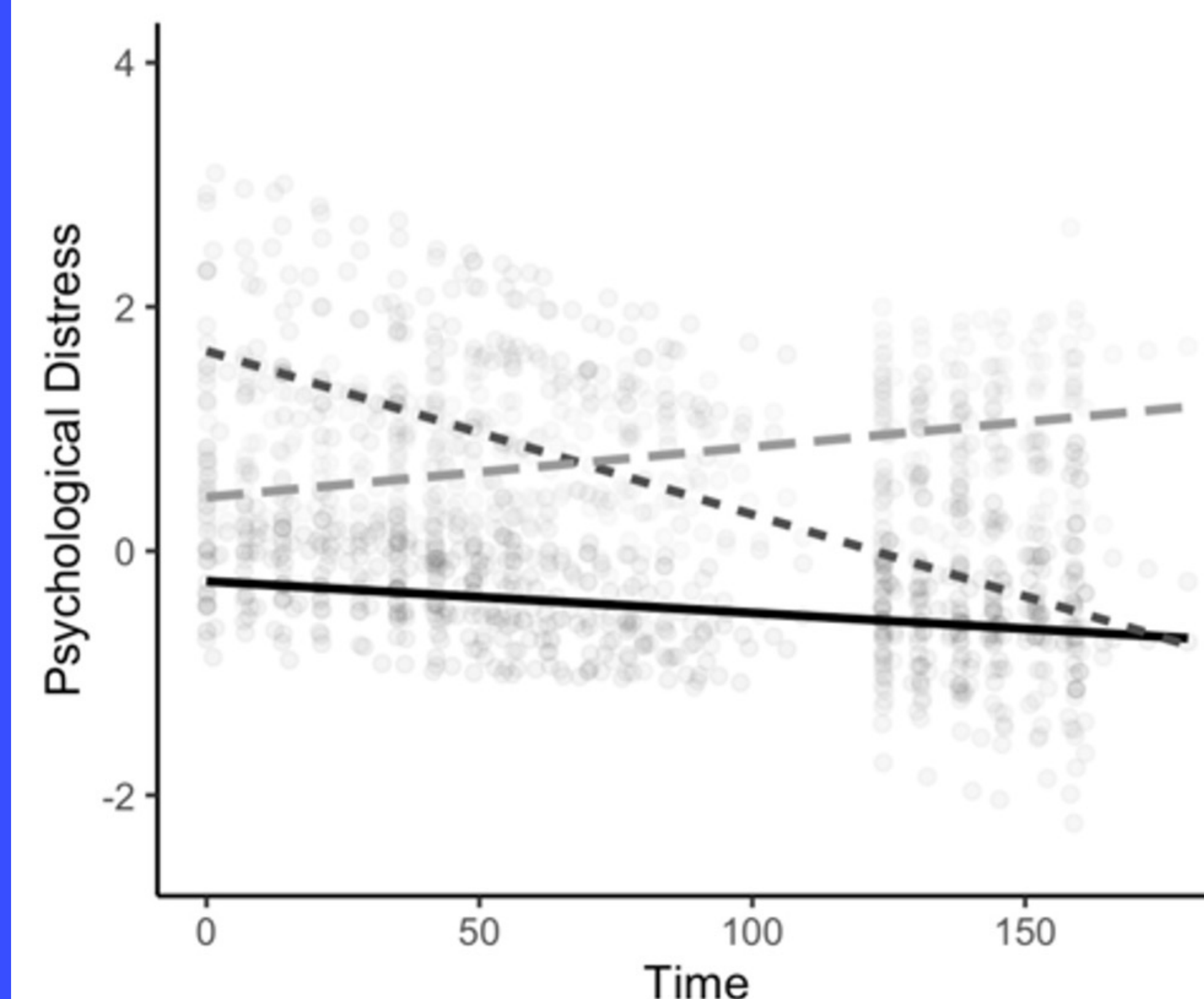


Figure 1. Trajectories of psychological distress. Solid line indicates resilience, with the black dashed line indicative of decreasing distress. Gray dashed line denotes increasing distress.

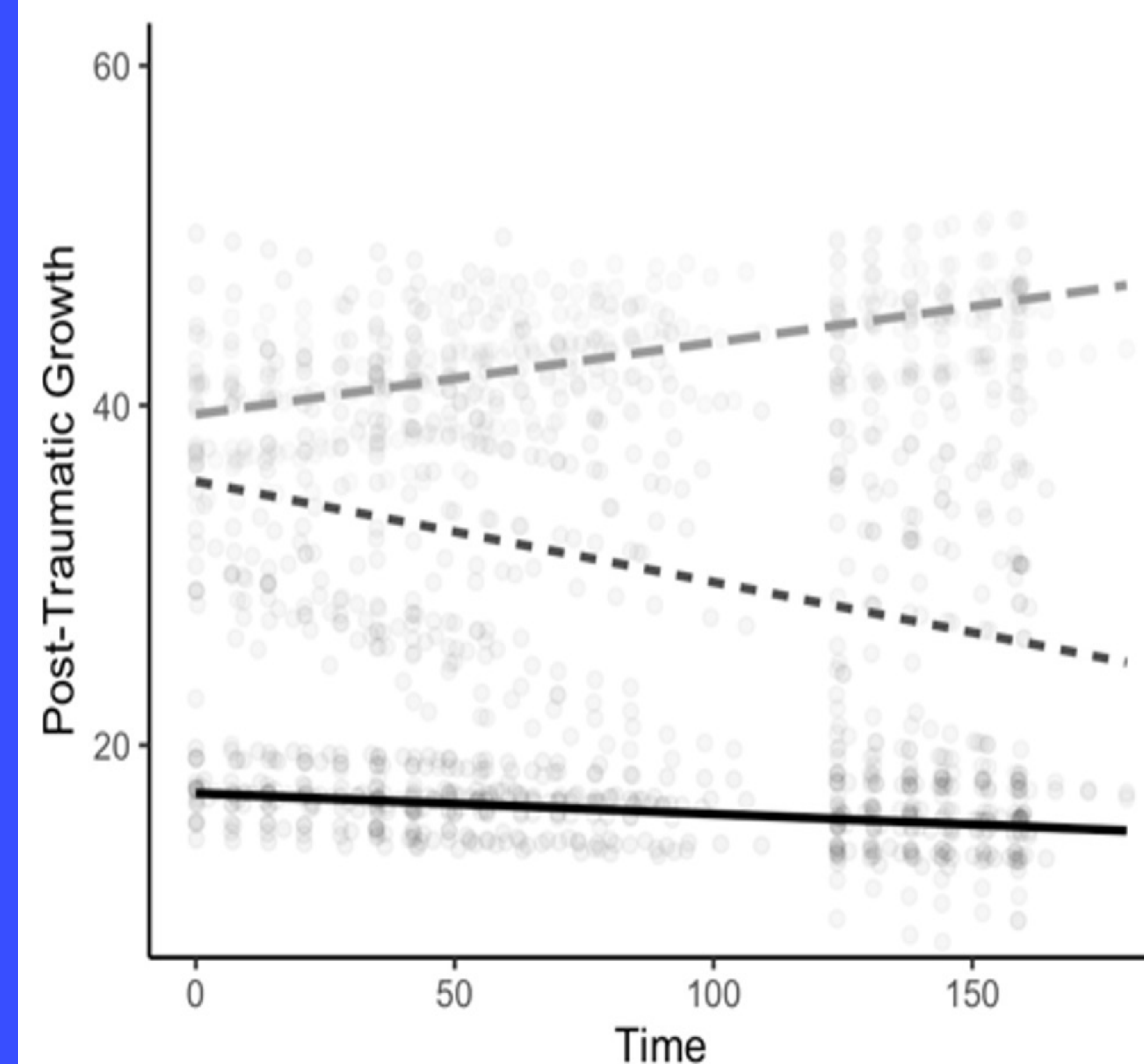


Figure 2. Trajectories of posttraumatic growth. Solid line indicates low growth, with the black dashed line indicative of decreasing growth. Gray dashed line denotes increasing growth.



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