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## Coming Back Into Existence Following Burn Injury: An Evolutionary Concept Analysis

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Coming back into existence is a concept coined relatively recently in a grounded theory study in nursing. However, the nature of this concept has not been thoroughly clarified. In order to improve nurses' and others' understanding of and communication about coming back to existence, this study aimed to clarify the concept.

**Methods:** This study was performed qualitatively using Rodgers' evolutionary concept analysis to clarify the concept of coming back to existence. Multiple computerized databases (PubMed, Scopus, ProQuest, Google Scholar, Iran Mede, and SID) were searched for their titles and abstracts to select full-text English papers published without time limit. A total of 20 articles were selected to be reviewed.

**Results:** The key attributes of coming back into existence identified in this study were providing opportunities for thinking and self-reflection on living affairs, releasing the mind to focus on the inner life, and making conscious efforts to explore and discover the original dimensions of one's being. Antecedents included the bitter and unforgettable experience of physical pain, psychological suffering, failure and hopelessness in interactions, and doubts about one's self-identity and philosophy of being. Consequences included self-acceptance, a sense of liberation and freedom, and positive and creative development in life to achieve more transcendent goals.

**Conclusion:** The results of this study can be helpful in identifying the needs and problems of clients and developing appropriate care plans and nursing interventions.

**Keywords:** Burns, Life, Nursing care, Qualitative research

## Introduction

Due to recent scientific and technological advances leading to an increasing number of people surviving serious burn-related injuries and considering the profound impact of burn injuries on survivors' quality of life, it is a top priority to understand individuals' longer-term psychosocial outcomes (1, 2). Coming back into existence is a concept introduced relatively recently in a grounded theory study in nursing. According to this theory, coming back into existence is a capability uniquely experienced by each individual and shaped by a sense of self-sufficiency and inner satisfaction in life. The concept is based on the quality of self-awareness that ranges from self-loss to rewriting the self-concept (3).

In order to respond to trauma and return to a meaningful life, burn victims need to address all their dimensions of being (4). They pass through different stages during their coming back to existence (5, 6). If, at any stage, a balance between threats and disturbances is achieved, then the individual stays in a state of equilibrium that will facilitate their progression to a higher stage. In this theory, the concept of coming back into existence represents the highest level of balance obtainable by an individual. This is preceded by stages involving physical, mental, social and conceptual disruption in the light of contemplation and meditation on the inner, interpersonal, and external world and the selection of self-protection strategies (3). Progression through various levels of balance helps these individuals to return to the community and finally to come back to their existence. This coming back is not a return to the pre-burn phase; rather, it is a return to the highest balance which provides the background for a meaningful life following the evolution resulted from physical, mental, and spiritual changes in the post-burn life process (4).

While the goal of most rehabilitation programs is to bring individuals back to their normal life (5, 6), some studies suggest that, despite returning to apparently normal living conditions, some victims continue to suffer from a sense of internal dissatisfaction and inadequacy and have feelings such as self-alienation, a tendency to look backwards, and a sense of crushed ambition related to their burn. In other words, despite an ostensible return to society and ordinary life, the person has not been able to return to himself/herself. These findings suggest that burn victims may still not achieve this

level of balance for years despite a normal life and a return to their former roles (4, 7).

In a sense, the concept of coming back to existence seems to be closely related to but not synonymous with that of health (8). Identifying new concepts or novel extensions of existing concepts used in the nursing literature continues to encourage nursing researchers to better articulate those concepts (9). Thus far, the concept of coming back to existence has not been well identified in the nursing literature and a more thorough understanding could help to identify clients' needs and problems, anticipate possible responses, and assist planning for dealing with problems. Nursing comprises a set of practices intended to improve the level of balance in physical, mental, social, and spiritual dimensions of individuals. Evaluation of patients' behavior and identification of its determining and influencing factors can inform subsequent appropriate actions in each of the four dimensions mentioned above. Through an improved understanding of the concept, the nurses can significantly help victims to achieve balance and come back into existence. Therefore, the current study aimed to clarify the concept of coming back into existence.

## Methods

To comply with ethical considerations, the authors undertook the work according to the research plan approved by the Research Deputy of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences. This study was performed qualitatively using Rodgers' evolutionary concept analysis. It is an approach aimed at clarifying a specific concept (9, 10). Rodgers' methods describe an inductive approach and are underpinned by a belief that every concept has a dynamic and evolving nature which always requires clarification. The purpose of analysis is to reveal its essential features. The stages of concept analysis include i) defining the intended concept, ii) identifying its key attributes, associated expressions, and surrogate terms, iii) defining and selecting an appropriate scope for collecting information, iv) collecting data pertaining to features of the concept in professional usage, v) analyzing data with regard to features of the concept, and if possible, vi) specifying an appropriate sample as well as hypotheses and implications of the analysis for further development of the concept (10, 11).

As mentioned above, coming back into existence is a new concept in nursing care which is also applicable across the health care sector. Therefore, the concept

analysis was performed considering the concept in a wider scope across the health sector rather than just nursing. The most important step after defining the concept is to specify the scope and range of the literature reviewed. In this study, the literature was reviewed in two stages. The initial search was aimed at determining the meaning of words in English and Persian dictionaries. The secondary search was performed with the aim of examining texts with specific keywords in databases.

First, an initial search was conducted in English dictionaries including Oxford and Webster (12, 13) using keywords such as ‘come back’, ‘return’, ‘self’, ‘oneself’, ‘existence’, ‘one’s self’, and ‘individuation’. Then, another search was carried out in Persian dictionaries including Dehkhoda and Mo’in (14) using the Persian translations of ‘self’ and ‘return to self’ as keywords separately and in combination. The results obtained from the initial search are presented in Table 1.

At this point, a general understanding of the synonyms and similar meanings of the above words was obtained. Coming back to existence was not mentioned in accredited Persian dictionaries as a combination. For a deeper understanding of this term, some philosophical Persian and Islamic texts associated with the concept were also reviewed. According to the literature, this concept has been used in two different domains: “reactionary return to the past” and “returning to the past with rationality”. In the second domain, coming back to existence does not imply a return; rather, it means to discover oneself i.e. a move forward along with vigilance and rational awareness to seek and retrieve oneself. The return aims at recreating identity (15). Furthermore, “coming back and return to existence” have been defined in English dictionaries as “restore, renew, and repair”. The review of English texts indicated that this

concept is defined as come back to existence and come back to self.

The second element of the search used the above keywords in PubMed, Scopus, ProQuest, Iran Mede, and SID databases. Since the concept of coming back to existence was first introduced in a grounded theory study in nursing practice on burn patients as a health outcome, “burns”, “burn patients”, “life after burn”, and “chronic disease” were also added. The key inclusion criteria were English and Persian papers with no limit on publication date. A regular review of literature obtained from the search revealed some overlaps. In addition, exclusion of non-Persian and non-English articles resulted in the elimination of some studies. In the initial review, 425 abstracts and full-text papers were obtained. A total of 312 studies were excluded at the title level because they lacked a focus on coming back to existence. After reviewing abstracts, 91 studies were excluded due to irrelevant content. Five studies were written in a language other than Persian and English. Finally, 20 full-text papers were selected for analysis (Fig. 1).

The selected papers were carefully read and reviewed. In the next phase, the defined features/ attributes, antecedents, outcomes, relevant related concepts, and surrogate terms were extracted. Data were then reviewed several times to extract the key points in order to provide clear explanations of every aspect of the concept. Finally, an inductive information analysis of coming back into existence was performed. Meaning units included terms related to the attributes, antecedents, and outcomes of coming back into existence. To improve the robustness of the methodology and to avoid potential biases, the analysis was carried out by two experts as well as the lead author. Table 2 summarizes the literature review along with attributes, antecedents, and outcomes.

**Table 1. Results of initial search of meaning of words**

Meaning of words in accredited Persian dictionaries	Meaning of words in accredited English dictionaries
‘Coming back’ is defined as recurrence, return, and return reaction (Dehkhoda Dictionary), returning from somewhere (Mo’in Dictionary).	‘Come back’ in the Oxford Dictionary is defined as reappear, recur, reenter, and return and in the Webster Dictionary as return after a period of misfortune.
‘Self’ is defined as person, self, soul, personality, and essence.	The word ‘ego’ is equivalent to the word ‘self’ in English.
‘Existence’ is defined as the state of being alive, present, body or person, mental existence (having an object in mind), life, or living.	In English dictionaries, the word ‘existence’ is defined as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the fact of having actual being; the state of being real</li> <li>- the state of continuing to be or to live a particular way of living- usually singular</li> <li>- reality as opposed to appearance</li> <li>- reality as presented in experience</li> <li>- a particular being sentient or living being</li> </ul>

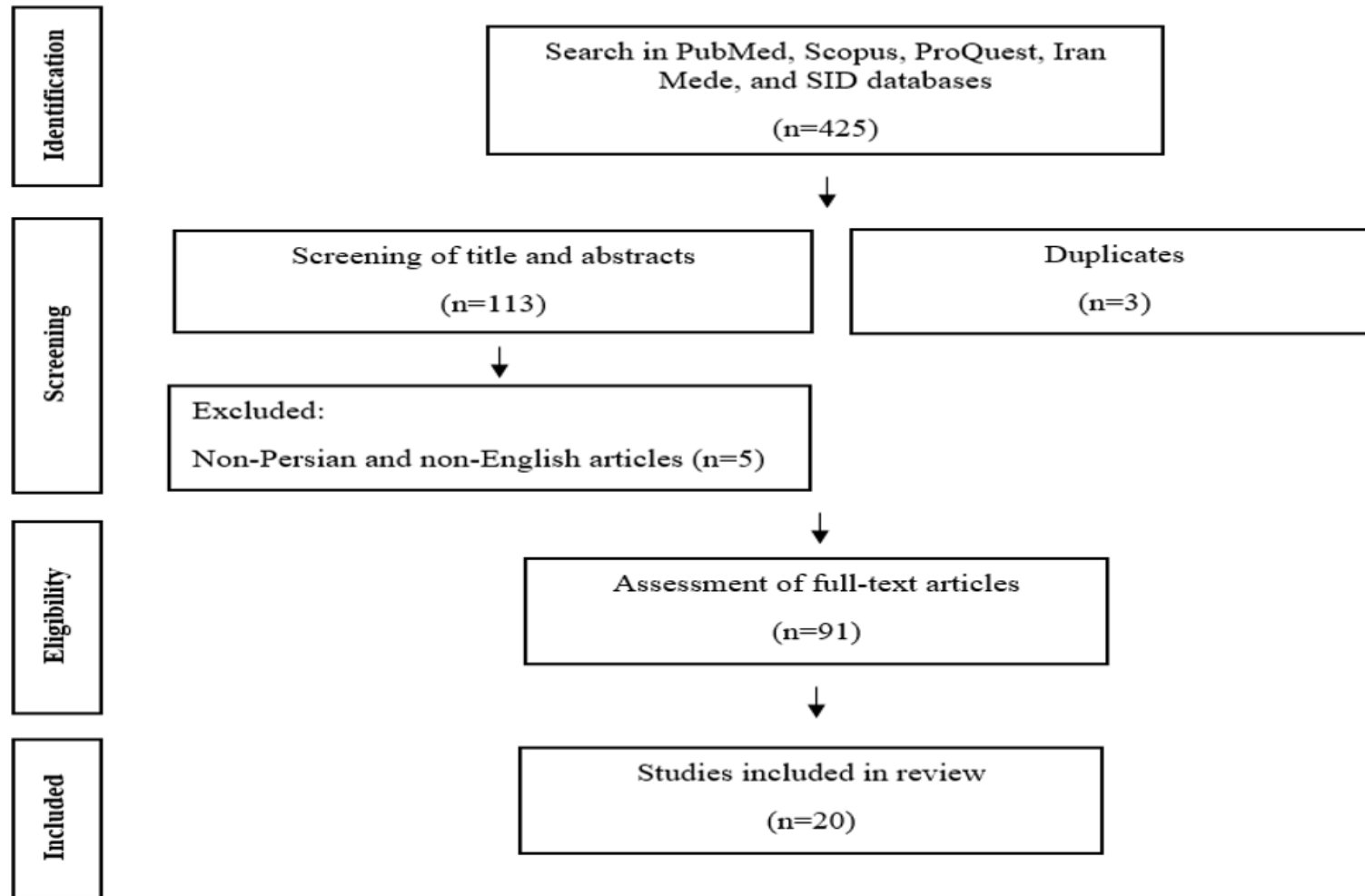


Figure 1. Flow diagram of study selection

**Table 2. Articles related to the concept of coming back into existence in the literature**

Outcome	Attribute	Antecedent	Methodology	Source
- Solving identity crisis - Adapting to changes in body appearance, changing others' reactions to the individual, enhancing their ability to work	- Redefining self-identity based on non-physical factors - Increasing family relationships - Putting more emphasis on inner values	- Frustration in communicating with others - Mental and physical pain and suffering - Religiosity	Qualitative-descriptive	Andreasen et al. (16)
- Change in work - Inability to keep in touch with peers at school - Severe psychological problems	-	- Devastating effects of burn	Retrospective- qualitative	Chang and Herzog (17)
- Success in rehabilitation program	- Return to work - Absence of psychological problems	- Outcomes of thermal injury	Qualitative-descriptive	Bernstein et al. (18)
- Ability to accept the changed reality - Understanding new insights - Gratitude and appreciation of life	- Trying to survive and to live - Suffering to change now or predicting the changed future	- Experience of disease - Experience of having a bad life	Qualitative-descriptive	Morse & Carter (19)
- Accepting dependency - Becoming stronger - Returning to responsibility - Awareness of and confidence in changed body	- Re-finding self - Reclaiming self - Learning to live with the transformed self	- Pain and suffering - Bitter experience	Grounded theory	Morse (20)
- Adapting to one's physical changes - Setting new life goals	- Changing one's perspective on life and oneself - Changing life goals - Focusing on the inner self and the values	- Burn-induced pain and suffering	Qualitative-descriptive	Williams et al. (21)
- Functional independence - Good quality of life	- Returning to driving - Returning to work - Ability to reset priorities - Need to collaborate - Evaluating the suffering experience - Evolution in self	- Suffering - Involvement with cause of burn	Qualitative-descriptive	Druery et al. (22)
- Becoming a new person - Changing views	- Looking for a new way of life - Self-excellence - Restoration - Moving on - Transformation - Finding positive meaning - Finding meaning in suffering	- Surviving a serious fatal accident - Near-death experience	Qualitative- Concept development	Mayan et al. (23)
- Returning to the previous job - Returning to a different job - Being self-employed	- Problem solving skills	- Injuries and damages	Quasi-experimental	Lu & Xu (24)
- Adaptation to changed face and body	- Trying to accept self - Communication with individuals and self	- Post-burn life experience - Physical change that results in the transformation of one's life	Qualitative-descriptive	Moi et al. (25)
- Achieving personal goals and independence - Communicating with others - Meaningful life - Accepting what cannot be changed - Changing what can be changed	- Going into solitude - Complaining about what happened to the burn victim	- Need to be supported	Qualitative-descriptive	Moi & Gjengedal (26)



**Continues Table 2. Articles related to the concept of coming back into existence in the literature**

Outcome	Attribute	Antecedent	Methodology	Source
- Returning to school	- Trying to accept reality	- Mental suffering - Hopelessness	Grounded theory	Horridge et al. (27)
- Self-renewal - Thinking about self and the world	- Self-awareness - Acceptance - Recognition - Positive transformation - Living with goals - Psycho-emotional development	- Processes of mental production of meaning in burn survivors	Qualitative-descriptive	Lau & Van Niekerk (28)
- Adaptation to the new mental and physical image	- Seeking support - Thinking and meditating with self	- Burn as an unforeseen and traumatic physical and psychological event	Qualitative-descriptive	Dahl et al. (29)
- Rebuilding relationships - Successful return to society	- Accepting mental image	- Post-burn life - Impaired physical function Self-esteem	Quantitative survey	Lee & Yom (30)
Internal transformation and evolution: - Feeling inner satisfaction - Life satisfaction - Sufficiency in life - Focusing on life achievements - Gratitude - Self-confidence - Prioritizing others - Trying to reduce suffering in others - Positive use of suffering and discomfort experience - Being closer to God and seeking more transcendent goals - Focusing on what you have rather than what you don't - Understanding patients more	- Gaining vigilance - Self-awareness - Sensory perceptions - Focusing on the inner self - Daydreaming - Meditating	- Desire to survive and hope - Self-disruption - Physical suffering - Tolerance and struggle - Journey into self and seeking self - Self-confidence	Grounded theory	Lotfi (3)
- Feeling better health and well-being than before - Evolved and developed worldview - Improved mental health	- Change in the philosophy of life: Renewing beliefs, appreciating life - Change in self-perception (feeling stronger) - Increasing communication (adding more value to friends or family) - Feeling compassion and generosity towards others	- Suffering and pain experiences - Communicating with the people around	Qualitative-descriptive	Baillie et al. (31)
- Improving psychological status - Adaptation and compatibility	- Self-acceptance - Change of view - Understanding social mutual value	- Burn-induced suffering and misery - Importance of peer support in survivors	Qualitative-descriptive	Davis et al. (32)
- Encountering burn injury and altered mental image	- Reasoning - Sense of humor - Challenge of acceptance - Self-awareness - Gratitude and acceptance	- Experiences of burn survivors in rehabilitation process - Doubt on the philosophy of existence	Phenomenology	Kornhaber et al. (33)
- Return to community, pre-burn activities, and meaningful life	- Supportive relationships with family, friends, and health professionals	- Life experience and relationships after major burn injury	Phenomenology	Moi & Gjengedal (34)

## Results

In this section, the attributes, antecedents, and outcomes of the concept of coming back into existence are discussed followed by an example.

### *Attributes of coming back into existence*

Identifying key attributes of the concept of coming back into existence is the first step in performing an analysis that leads to a true definition of this concept (10). Coming back into existence is a process-driven phenomenon that occurs dynamically over time. The most prominent features of coming back into existence identified in this study include giving oneself the opportunity to think and reflect on life affairs, empowering the mind to focus on the inner self, striving to search and discover one's original existential dimensions by relying on spiritual values, finding new physical awareness, gaining vigilance for living in the present, redefining oneself, and changing life priorities.

### *Antecedents of coming back into existence*

Antecedents are prerequisites for the concept under study that precede the occurrence of the concept (35). The antecedents in this study were divided into two groups based on text analysis including (1) occurrence factors and (2) factors affecting coming back into existence. The identified causes of the occurrence include a bitter and unforgettable experience of physical pain, emotional distress, failure and frustration in interactions, and doubts regarding one's identity and philosophy of existence. According to the literature, factors such as hope, effective interaction with others, spiritual values, and personality traits were identified as the most important factors affecting coming back into existence.

### *Consequences of coming back into existence*

Consequences are the phenomena whose occurrence

follow that of the concept (35). The results of the analysis in this study revealed that the most important implications of coming back into existence include self-acceptance and accepting what is immutable followed by a sense of liberation and freedom, a positive and creative development in life to achieve more transcendent and humanitarian goals, maturity and spiritual growth such as feeling close to God and feeling inner satisfaction, self-confidence, positive use of suffering experience for own's own transcendence, focusing on what you have rather than what you don't, and, ultimately, achieving a balance of physical, psychological, interactive, and cognitive dimensions. In fact, a person's ability to positively perceive his/her current situation, acquired experientially through difficulties and suffering endured in post-burn life, enables one to connect the disrupted link of the concept of self in physical, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions.

## Related and Surrogate Terms

Surrogate terms are those used to describe the concept rather than the intended meaning (10) and related concepts are part of the relationships and dependencies of the main concept but are not synonymous and, therefore, they do not include all the features and properties of the concept under study (35). Surrogate and related terms relevant to this study are shown in Table 3. Each of the related concepts listed in the table is closely related to the concept of coming back into existence. However, each of these concepts deals with some part or parts of the aforementioned areas related to health. The selection criterion was the words that somehow evoke the impact of the disease on individual's integrity decided based on the consensus of the research team.

**Table 3. Related and surrogate terms for the concept of coming back into existence**

Related term	Surrogate term
Good patterns of coping	Reformulation of self
A new bodily awareness	Transformation of self
Post-burn positive changes	Self-transcendence
Achieving a positive meaningful life	Finding meaning in suffering
	Integrity
	Restoration
	Renewal
	Gaining a new understanding of life
	psychological growth from adversity
Better outcomes in terms of mental health	Positive transformation and growth
	Rebirth of the self
	Rediscovery of self and meaningful connection with others
	Striving for regained freedom
	Reframing
	Awareness of the meaning of mutual interdependence



### An Example Proportional to the Concept

Examples are useful to illustrate a concept in context and can help to identify important features of the concept while leading to transparency, clarity, and more effective application of the concept. Here, the narrative statements of a burn victim are provided as an example:

*When I think about the day it happened, I come to a clearer conclusion by examining the cause. If it were not for God's grace, I would have died. Living again was just the divine grace. Even after the accident when I was crippled, it was only the divine grace that rescued me from difficult circumstances of experiencing death at the scene of the accident and in life. By trusting in God, I achieved relative mental and physical balance. Due to many conscious and unconscious events, I irritated and annoyed myself in the past. My unpleasant thoughts and behaviors caused me to be unkind to myself and experience discomfort in my life. However, as I noticed the real issues of life, my beliefs about life and people changed. I no longer need the grace of others to achieve true peace. Even people's disgrace does not make me anxious. Having a kind Creator and myself who are with me every moment, I do not need others' affection. In addition, I know that nobody can be closer and kinder to me than myself. Now I've found new beliefs in life and the peace I've been looking for, for many years, the one I did not even find in my health and fitness for which I paid a heavy price and I thought was the peace I needed. It is more valuable than the comfort and health I've ever had because the source of this tranquility is linked to me and my Creator and such a bond is not broken and this relationship remains eternal.*

### Discussion

Analyzing the concept of coming back into existence revealed its dimensions and showed that the concept had a range of features/attributes, antecedents, and outcomes. According to the results, the most prominent attributes of coming back into existence include giving oneself an opportunity to think and reflect on life affairs, releasing the mind to focus on the inner self, striving to search and discover its original existential dimensions relying on spiritual values, new physical awareness and gaining vigilance to live in the present, redefining oneself, and changing life priorities. Following physical, mental, and interactive disruption, the affected individuals try to analyze the situation by talking to themselves so that they can be patient with the new situation and move on.

The findings of this study also showed that factors such as hope, effective interactions with others, strong spiritual values, and personality traits influence individuals' coming back into existence. In this regard, various studies have reported hope as a predictor of psychosocial outcomes of adult burn victims (36). With the decline of hope, disruptive behavioral disorders become more and self-worth diminishes (36, 37). Thus, as self-worth diminishes and feelings of inability to control personal and social life increase, internal dissatisfaction increases and one's beliefs change. Therefore, individuals experience conceptual disruption (16, 37). On the other hand, the findings of the present study indicated that failure in interactions results in behavioral disturbances. In this regard, many studies have demonstrated that maladjustment with others is a social challenge in these survivors that can lead

to decreased social skills making it difficult for them to return to the community (38). Studies have shown that injuries resulting from many complex diseases influence all aspects of one's life, especially self-concept (39). Consistent with some studies, the findings of this study showed that individuals undergoing severe post-burn reactions respond to one of the most fundamental factors in behavioral motivation, i.e. self-concept and redefining their overall identity, require to work hard through a complex mental process (40). In addition, personality traits such as self-esteem, strong self-concept, and introversion have a greater impact on individuals' coming back into existence. The results of other studies are consistent with these findings and have shown that individuals have been able to overcome hopelessness in this way. Spiritual beliefs are among other antecedents of coming back into existence found in this study. The results of a qualitative study showed that religious faith or God are effective in adjustment (7), hence, reinforcing spiritual beliefs in survivors can have a significant impact on their coming back into existence.

Among the most important implications of coming back into existence are self-acceptance, sense of liberation and freedom, positive growth and development in pursuit of transcendent goals, maturity and growth, closeness to God, and balance in physical, psychological and mental dimensions. Survivors focus on the original dimensions of being, a kind of maturity that results from self-consciousness and redefinition of self that occurs over time, leading to acceptance of self as it is. Along the way, the person learns to be alone, enjoy solitude, and live meaningfully (25, 28, 31). Lotfi found that returning to the community for a burn

survivor is a process in which he/she goes through physical pain and suffering. The burn survivor has a mental journey of pain and suffering, struggles to break free from social isolation, and eventually experiences an evolution to change his/her beliefs about living an active and transcendent life (3). Coming back into existence seems to be associated with an ability to process the physical, psychological, social and internal transformations in order to maintain integrity after being rescued from a traumatic event, have an acceptable life and, even more, lead a purposeful life. This concept demonstrates how a person is able to balance the relationship with others in a new meaningful self-understanding and ultimately experience a new insight of self and the universe. It is noteworthy that one of the limitations of this study was lack of access to the full text of some papers related to the subject of the research that was out of the authors' control. Moreover, inability to use full-text papers available in non-English languages may give rise to an incomplete picture of the concept under consideration.

### Conclusion

Overall, according to the findings of this study, it can be concluded that attention to the attributes, antecedents, and outcomes of coming back into existence will help better identify the phenomenon, where it occurs, or where it has the potential

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