



Increasing internal resources over time is linked to better emotional health and life satisfaction in informal caregivers

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Background

- Informal caregiving has both positive and negative consequences. Many caregivers report benefits (e.g., sense of purpose); many also feel stressed, burdened, or overwhelmed, and may even develop depression or burnout.
- The experiences, skills, and resources that caregivers bring into their role may play a critical part in how caregiving influences emotional health,
- We wanted to know:

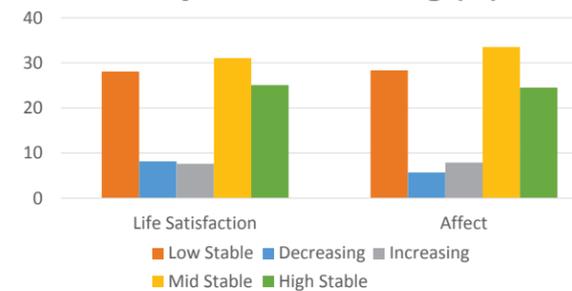
When caregiving begins, how do caregivers' psychological resources change, and how is that associated with their subjective well-being over time?

Sample Characteristics and Results Summary

Caregivers were:

- 56 years old, on average
- Mostly female (65%) and white (92%)
- Highly educated (42% college grads)
- Almost half were caring for a parent/in-law (46%) and lived with the care recipient (44%).
- Provided >20 hours of care/week and had been providing care for nearly half a year, on average

Trajectories of Caregiver Subjective Well-being (%)



- Most caregivers reported stable subjective well-being (see left) and psychological well-being and resources
- Caregivers with increasing or high stable levels of most resources saw improvements in emotional health and life satisfaction (see below; grey/green bars); decreasing or low levels were associated with declines in emotional health and life satisfaction (blue/orange bars).

Methods

Dataset: We used data from the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) study; surveys of US adults ages 25-74 were collected in 1995-1996 ("Time 1") and 2004-2005("Time 2").

Sample: Adults who reported providing informal care in the past 12 months at Time 2, and began providing that care *after* Time 1 (n=367; mean age=56; 65% female). I.e., people who began caregiving during the MIDUS study and were still caregivers at Time 2.

Key Measures:

Dependent Variables

- Affect: Frequency of positive and negative emotional states in the last 30 days (higher score = better emotional health).
- Life Satisfaction: Quality of life in five domains: work, health, relationship with spouse/partner, relationship with their children, and life overall (higher score = more life satisfaction).

Independent Variables

- Psychological wellbeing (Ryff) – Positive Relations with others, self-acceptance, autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, and purpose in life (higher scores = better psychological well-being).
- Internal resources – Self-sufficiency, personal mastery, persistence in goal setting, positive reappraisal, lowering expectations.

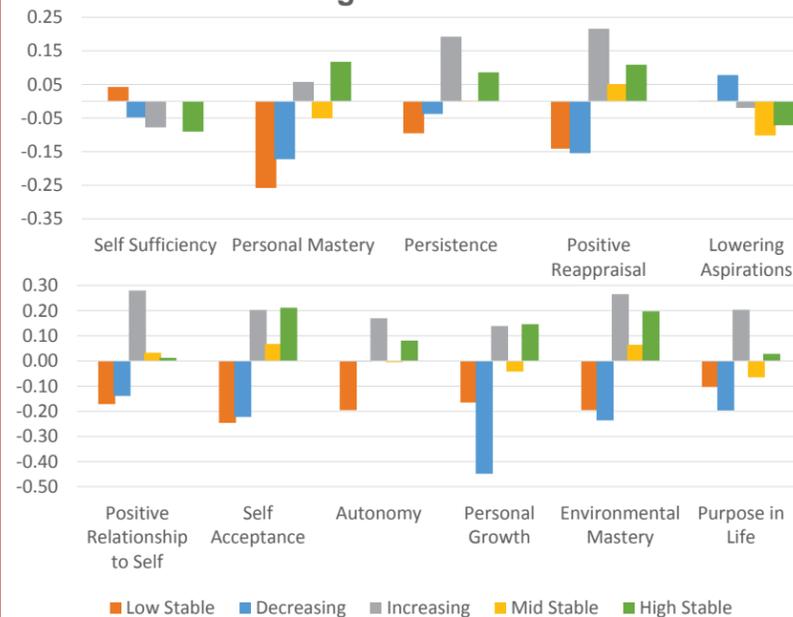
Data Analysis:

- Evaluated how psychological well-being and internal resources changes over the 9-10 years between surveys based on quartiles (chart at right).
- Evaluated how these trajectories were associated with change in emotional health and life satisfaction using multivariable linear regression (controlling for age, race, gender, education, and caregiving factors).

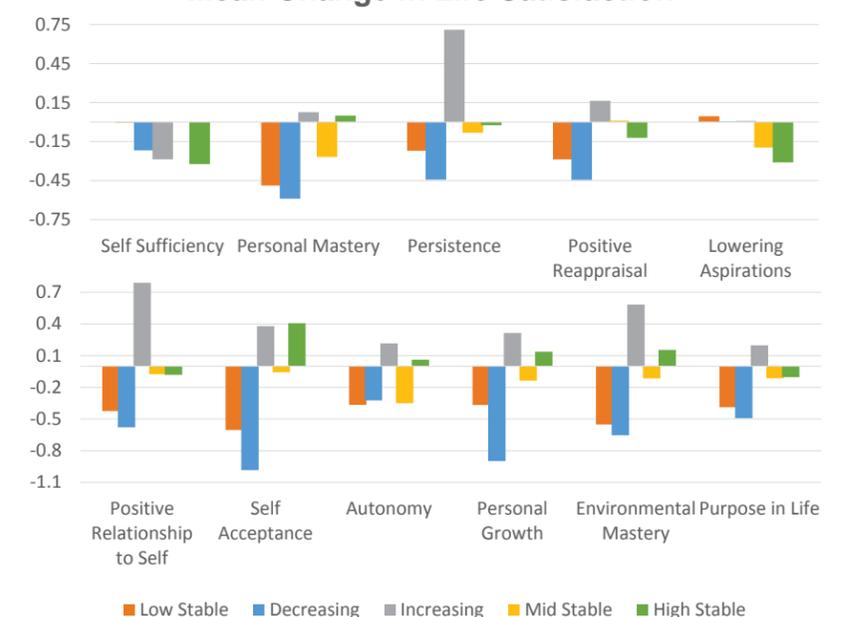


Key Results

Mean Change in Emotional Health



Mean Change in Life Satisfaction



Conclusions

- **The findings suggest that greater (and increasing) psychological resources are associated with better psychological outcomes.**
- Key exception is self-sufficiency - those who reported high levels of self-sufficiency had worse emotional health and life satisfaction suggesting that willingness/ability to rely on others may be an important internal resource for caregivers.

Limitations: Caregiving was self-reported, and included the past 12 months; data were only available 9-10 years apart, so we couldn't evaluate more nuanced changes.

Future Directions: Could interventions or practices that enhance psychological well-being and resources (e.g., mindfulness) prevent burnout and improve outcomes?

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