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)
- Provided >20 hours of care/week and had been providing care for nearly half a year, on average

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

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?

Acknowledgements: MIDUS data were collected with funding from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation and the National Institute on Aging (P01-AG020166). The views expressed represent those of the authors and not those of the National Cancer Institute, National Institutes of Health. Thanks to Amy Taub for her help creating this poster. Contact: Litzelman@wisc.edu; 608-262-3314