

# DIFFERENCES AMONG CAREGIVERS AND NONCAREGIVERS IN POSITIVE EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO EVENTS IN DAILY LIFE



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## Background

- Chronic stress is linked to detriments in emotional well-being, including the ability to respond to positive events in daily life.
- Caregiving is a well-established model of chronic stress, yet it is unclear how the caregiving experience longitudinally affects positive emotional responses compared to those not in a caregiving role.

## Study Aims

To understand the relationship between caregiving and positive emotional responses to daily events.

## Methods

- Participants described a daily positive event for 21 days.
  - They rated their overall positive emotions from the event, specific emotions (interest, happiness, compassion, pride), how much they savored emotions, and whether they capitalized on emotions by sharing the event.
- Data were aggregated and both average levels (means) and intra-individual variability (standard deviations) for each variable were compared between groups using independent samples *t*-tests.

## Results

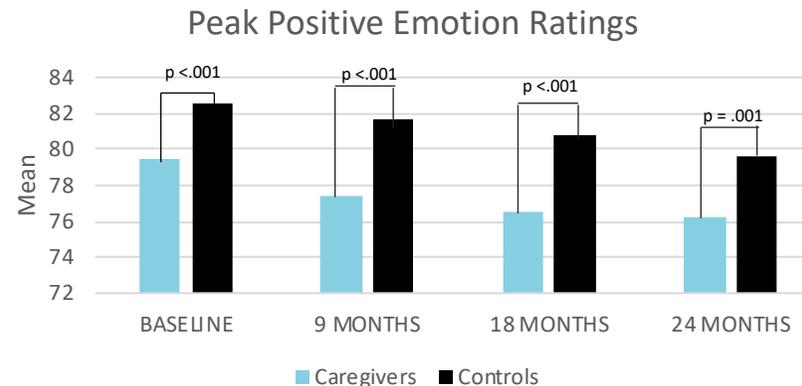
- Caregivers reported lower average overall positive emotions ( $t(181)=2.08, p<.05$ ) and lower happiness ( $t(181)=2.65, p<.01$ ) than noncaregivers.
- Caregivers have greater intra-individual variability in both indices (overall emotions:  $t(179)=-2.67, p<.01$ ; happiness:  $t(179)=-2.44, p<.05$ ).
- We found no significant differences in interest, compassion, pride, savoring, or capitalization.

## Method

### Participants:

- Participants (N=183) were mothers who were part of a longitudinal study on chronic stress and aging.
- Mothers were considered “caregivers” if they were caring for a child with autism and “noncaregivers” if they were caring for a neurotypical child.
- We examined daily positive emotional responses at 3 time points over 1.5 years in a sample of mid-life women stratified by chronic caregiving stress (N=92) or not (N=91).

Figure 1: Comparison of peak positivity of caregivers and controls at 4 time points.



## Acknowledgements

Funding for this study was provided by the National Institute on Aging (R01AG030424, R24AG048042, K01AG057859), the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (T32AT003997), the John and Marcia Goldman Foundation, the Chapman Family Foundation, and the Althea Foundation.

## Conclusions

- Being a caregiver may affect overall positive emotional responses to daily events, yet has less influence on specific emotions, savoring, and capitalization.
- Although the caregiving experience may longitudinally affect some aspects of emotional well-being, caregivers reported similar positive responses as noncaregivers across several indices, suggesting pathways for emotional resilience.