

Negative Emotions in Response to Daily Stress Take a Toll on Long-Term Mental Health

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Our emotional responses to the stresses of daily life may predict our long-term mental health, according to a new study published in [*Psychological Science*](#), a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#).

Psychological scientist Susan Charles of the University of California, Irvine and colleagues conducted the study in order to answer a long-standing question: Do daily emotional experiences add up to make the straw that breaks the camel's back, or do these experiences make us stronger and provide an inoculation against later distress?

Using data from two national surveys, the researchers examined the relationship between daily negative emotions and mental health outcomes ten years later.

Participants' overall levels of negative emotions predicted psychological distress (e.g., feeling worthless, hopeless, nervous, and/or restless) and diagnosis of an emotional disorder like anxiety or depression a full decade after the emotions were initially measured.

Participants' negative emotional responses to daily stressors — such as argument or a problem at work or home — predicted psychological distress and self-reported emotional disorder ten years later.

The researchers argue that a key strength of the study was their ability to tap a large, national community sample of participants who spanned a wide age range. The results were based on data from 711 participants, both men and women, who ranged in age from 25 to 74. They were all participants in two national, longitudinal survey studies: Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) and National Study of Daily Experiences (NSDE).

According to Charles and her colleagues, these findings show that mental health outcomes aren't only affected by major life events — they also bear the impact of seemingly minor emotional experiences. The study suggests that chronic nature of these negative emotions in response to daily stressors can take a toll on long-term mental health.

In addition to Charles, co-authors on the study include Jennifer Piazza of California State University, Fullerton; and Jacqueline Mogle, Martin Sliwinski, and David Almeida of Pennsylvania State University.