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It's True: Whatever Doesn't Kill Us Really can Make Us Stronger

The age-old saying 'whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger' has some truth to it, according to a new study.

The University at Buffalo study examined a national sample of people who reported their lifetime history of adverse experiences and several measures of current mental health and well being.

Mark Seery and co-researchers found those exposed to some adverse events reported better mental health and well-being outcomes than people with a high history of adversity or those with no history of adversity.

"We tested for quadratic relationships between lifetime adversity and a variety of longitudinal measures of mental health and well-being, including global distress, functional impairment, post-traumatic stress symptoms and life satisfaction," Seery said.

"More lifetime adversity was associated with higher global distress, functional impairment and PTS symptoms, as well as lower life satisfaction," Seery added.

"However, our results also yielded quadratic, U-shaped patterns, demonstrating a critical qualification to the seemingly simple relationship between lifetime adversity and outcomes," he said.

Seery said the evidence is consistent with the proposition that in moderation, experiencing lifetime adversity can contribute to the development of resilience.

"This suggests that carefully designed psychotherapeutic interventions may be able to do so, as well, although there is much work that still needs to be done to fully understand resilience and where it comes from."

The study will be published in the forthcoming issue of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology.

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