
About.com: Stress Management

Stress Management Blog

By [Elizabeth Scott, M.S.](#), About.com Guide

About.com Health's Disease and Condition content is reviewed by the [Medical Review Board](#)

Study: What Doesn't Kill You MAY Make You Stronger

Wednesday October 20, 2010

In my own experience, dealing with difficult life experiences can bring positives with the negatives, leaving strength and wisdom as a by-product after the difficulties have passed. I've seen this with many others as well: if we look for the gifts that can come with stressful experiences, crises and even losses, we can eventually come out stronger for the experience.

There's a lot of research, however, that shows that adverse experiences can leave us more vulnerable to stress and can lead to lower levels of mental health and wellbeing. Fortunately, a new study from the University of Buffalo reconciles these two realities.

This new study, which follows 2,398 subjects for a span of three years, found that there is a balance of adverse life experiences: some adversity does seem to make us stronger than those with a life of either no adverse life experiences or many serious struggles.

Lead researcher Mark Seery, PhD, explains, "Consistent with prior research on the impact of adversity ... more lifetime adversity was associated with higher global distress, functional impairment and PTS symptoms, as well as lower life satisfaction.

"Our findings revealed," he says, "that a history of some lifetime adversity -- relative to both no adversity or high adversity -- predicted lower global distress, lower functional impairment, lower PTS symptoms and higher life satisfaction."

The researchers also found that people with a history of some lifetime adversity (not none, and not copious amounts) appeared less negatively affected by recent adverse events than other individuals. In effect, what didn't kill them, so to speak, did appear to make them stronger and more resilient!

Combined with the rest of what we know about resilience, this research helps give a clearer picture of how to respond to adverse life experiences. Just like a broken bone becomes stronger than before once it's healed, we can be stronger once we reach the other side of a difficult life event.

What's made you stronger?

Resilience Resources:

- [What Goes Into Resilience?](#)¹
- [Quiz: How Resilient Are You?](#)²
- [READERS: How Do You Stay Resilient?](#)³
- [Positive Emotions and Resilience](#)⁴
- [Resilience, Elizabeth Edwards Style](#)⁵

Get Stress Management on [Facebook](#)⁶ and [Twitter](#).⁷

Source: Seery, Mark D.; Holman, E. Alison; Silver, Roxane Cohen [Whatever Does Not Kill Us: Cumulative Lifetime Adversity, Vulnerability and Resilience](#)⁸. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, October 11 2010.

[Prev](#)¹¹ [Next](#) ¹²

Comments

No comments yet. [Leave a Comment](#)

This About.com page has been optimized for print. To view this page in its original form, please visit:
<http://stress.about.com/b/2010/10/20/study-what-doesnt-kill-you-may-make-you-stronger.htm>
©2010 About.com, Inc., a part of [The New York Times Company](#). All rights reserved.