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## A little adversity goes a long way

Posted By [Patricia Donovan-Buffalo](#) On October 15, 2010 @ 4:32 pm In [Society & Culture](#) | [1 Comment](#)

**U. BUFFALO (US)** — New research adds credence to the adage ‘whatever doesn’t kill us makes us stronger,’ a well-known saying, that until now has had little scientific evidence to support it.

A national multi-year longitudinal study of the effects of adverse life events on mental health has found that adverse experiences really do in fact appear to foster subsequent adaptability and resilience, with resulting advantages for mental health and well being.

Details will be published in a forthcoming issue of the [Journal of Personality and Social Psychology](#).<sup>[1]</sup> and is currently available online.

The 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, and found those who were 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,” says Mark Seery, assistant professor of psychology at the [University at Buffalo](#).<sup>[2]</sup>

“Consistent with prior research on the impact of adversity, linear effects emerged in our results, such that 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 team also found that, across these same longitudinal outcome measures, people with a history of some lifetime adversity appeared less negatively affected by recent adverse events than other individuals.

Although these data cannot establish causation, Seery says the evidence is consistent with the proposition that in moderation, experiencing lifetime adversity can contribute to the development of resilience.

“Although we studied major lifetime adversity,” he says, “there is reason to believe that other relatively mundane experiences should also contribute to 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.”

More news from University at Buffalo: <http://www.buffalo.edu/news/><sup>[3]</sup>

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[1] Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, : <http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/2010-21218-001/>

[2] University at Buffalo.: <http://www.buffalo.edu/news/11868>

[3] <http://www.buffalo.edu/news/>: <http://www.buffalo.edu/news/>

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