

## Psychological study proves ‘what doesn’t kill you’ adage

By Mark Brown | 18 October 2010 | Categories: [Wired Science](#)



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A recently published personality and [social psychology](#) study at the University of Buffalo, [offers](#) scientific evidence to prove the old adage: "What doesn't kill makes us stronger."

The multi-year, [longitudinal study](#) looked at the effects that difficult life events have on our mental health. The study included a national sample of 2,398 people, examining both their lifetime history of adverse experiences, and their current mental health and wellbeing.

The study concluded that people who have experienced some [adversity and hardship](#) in life appear to foster resilience and adapt better to new situations, which subsequently improves their mental health.

But Mark Seery, assistant professor of psychology at the University, warns that there's a fine balance between leading a cushy tension-free life and an arduous, [stressful](#) life full of adversity. Seery says the results "yielded quadratic, U-shaped patterns", with those who underwent some troubling events faring much better than those who had a very high history of adversity, or none at all.

“Our findings revealed that a history of some lifetime adversity -- relative to both no adversity or high adversity - predicted lower global distress, lower functional impairment, lower [post traumatic stress](#) symptoms and higher life satisfaction,” says Seery.

The implications of the study, other than backing up Friedrich Nietzsche’s famous quotation, suggest that there may be some mileage in designing psychotherapeutic interventions to build up human resilience artificially. “Although there is much work that still needs to be done to fully understand resilience and where it comes from,” Seery clarifies.

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