

Routine Assistance to Parents: Effects on Daily Mood and Other Stressors

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Objectives. The present study examined the association of providing assistance to older parents amid everyday circumstances and short-term psychological consequences for adult children providing assistance.

Methods. We explored this association using 824 daily diary interviews of 119 adult children providing assistance in the National Study of Daily Experiences by using a left-censored random effects tobit regression model that accounted for the clustered data and floor effects in reported psychological distress.

Results. Psychological distress was higher on days adult children provided assistance to their parent ($b = 0.88, p < .05$) even after we controlled for situational variables such as time spent on daily paid work, time spent on leisure activities, and assistance provided to individuals other than parents. Demographic and psychosocial variables such as having resident children ($b = 2.14, p < .01$), less education ($b = -0.54, p < .05$), and neuroticism ($b = 2.08, p < .05$), also predicted daily psychological distress.

Discussion. Even after we controlled for within-person (daily situational variables) and between-person factors (background characteristics), the act of providing assistance itself had immediate associations with daily mood for helpers, particularly for those with fewer resources and greater demands on time. Feasibility and success of programs that provide respite and relief services to older adults and their children should be assessed in light of daily living.

Key Words: Routine assistance—Daily diary—Stress proliferation—Caregiving.

VARIATION in assistance between adult children and their older parents has emerged as an important topic in social gerontology (e.g., Davey, Janke, & Savla, 2005; Pillemer & Suito, 2006). Whereas studies of continuous care to chronically ill family members can contribute to researchers' general understanding of care-related stress and its psychological consequences on the younger generations providing assistance, most of these studies are specific to certain types of care experiences (e.g., for Alzheimer's patients, stroke patients) and focus on intense caregiving. This focus has provided an important, but limited, perspective on the range of possible outcomes (Ory, Hoffman, Yee, Tennstedt, & Schulz, 1999). There is growing recognition that family members are involved in a range of activities: from infrequent to daily provision and from casual routine assistance to very intensive care for family members that could still affect the daily lives of people providing assistance (e.g., Szinovacz & Davey, 2007). Furthermore, a preponderance of the literature has relied on retrospective accounts of assistance that are often collected over a relatively long period of time, covering weeks, months, and years. As a result, these accounts are likely to be confounded by other events that happened during the time period. This study examined the more immediate impact of routine assistance against the context of daily living and its cumulative effects over time for adult children providing assistance.

Understanding of daily stressors and their immediate and cumulative influence over time has benefited from developments in daily diary designs in which repeated measures are collected from individuals during their daily lives (Almeida,

2005; Bolger, Davis, & Rafaeli, 2003). In this design, individuals reported regarding a number of everyday events, behaviors, symptoms, and emotional states to capture the ongoing experiences in the natural context of daily living (Larson & Almeida, 1999). Unlike traditional designs that require respondents to recall experiences over long time frames, this design alleviates memory distortions, especially those related to current emotional state, and improves accuracy of recall. But the most valuable feature of diary methods is that they allow assessment of within-person processes and permit researchers to shift their focus from considering mean levels of stressors and well-being in a group of individuals to charting the day-to-day fluctuations in stress and well-being within an individual himself or herself (Reis & Gable, 2000). Because individuals serve as their own controls, investigators can now examine how daily provision of assistance to a parent is associated with changes in individuals' own well-being from one day to the next. For example, research has suggested that competing roles may increase psychological distress among caregivers (e.g., Murphy et al., 1997). Most of these studies have used a between-person design, comparing one caregiver to another. These studies could be confounded by within-person differences, such as amount of time spent on competing roles or experience of poor health or physical ailment on a day when assistance is provided. In contrast, in the present study, we were able to test whether psychological distress is higher on days when adult children provide assistance than on days they do not. Similarly, between-person designs have found that higher education may buffer helpers from psychological distress. Our

within-person design, however, allowed us to determine the buffering effect of education on a day when assistance is provided versus one when it is not, as well as to compare helpers on other potentially important background characteristics.

Stress Proliferation on Everyday Living

Providing routine assistance to an older parent has salient psychological consequences such as increased distress and burden for the adult child providing help (e.g., Aneshensel, Pearlin, Mullan, Zarit, & Whitlatch, 1995; Antonucci, Akiyama, & Lansford, 1998; Marks, 1998; Walen & Lachman, 2000). Many researchers believe that this distress and burden is partly due to the impingement of the helping role on other everyday roles and experiences, which makes up the structural underpinning of stress spillover or proliferation (Pearlin, 1989; Pearlin, Aneshensel, & LeBlanc, 1997). According to the stress process model (Aneshensel et al., 1995), individuals bear multiple social roles; for instance, they may simultaneously be breadwinners, parents, employees or employers, members of voluntary organization, and so forth. Each of these roles imposes time commitments, responsibilities, and obligations. Many of these roles have been a part of the daily plan of an individual for a long time and have been accommodated into the flow of daily living. The helping role emerges after these primary roles have already been acclimatized (Pearlin, Mullan, Semple, & Skaff, 1990). Initially, the demands of providing routine assistance to a parent may be minimal and sporadic; however, they can continue to grow over time, making reordering of priorities and reallocating energies increasingly difficult. It is this feature of the helping role that contributes to stress proliferation, wherein the new role imposes demands on one's time and energy and requires restructuring and juggling of the primary roles in daily life, making it particularly challenging and eventually undermining the health and well-being of the individual providing routine assistance to parents (Pearlin, 1989).

Extant research supporting this theory has found that whether providing help is situation specific and occasional or repetitive and chronic, it is still powerful enough to disrupt an array of roles, activities, and relationships that are only proximally related to the helping role. Using longitudinal data, McKinlay, Crawford, and Tennstedt (1995) found that providing assistance exerted the greatest toll on an individual's personal life, followed by family life and employment. They found that providing assistance was particularly stressful for those who had multiple responsibilities and for those who spent less time on themselves. Murphy and her colleagues (1997) found that role overload was highest for women helpers with multiple roles of parent or worker. At the same time, resentment in the helping role was highest for those women who had fewer roles apart from providing help, those who had to quit work to fulfill their role, and those without a partner. More recently, Stephens, Townsend, Martire, and Drule (2001) examined role conflict experienced by 278 helping women who simultaneously played the role of mother, wife, and employee. Their results suggested that part of the stress that these women experienced was due to conflicts between the helping role and the other roles they were playing.

Situational and Background Characteristics

Although we expect to find evidence of stress proliferation in the everyday lives of all helpers, we believe that the nature and

extent of exposure and reactivity to stress will vary with the background and situational characteristics of the person involved. For instance, the social and economic characteristics of helpers as well as the possession of resources from which they can draw are important covariates to consider. We consider several important ones in this article.

Adult children's age is an important predictor of the provision of routine assistance. Older adult children give more support than younger adult children (Ikkink, van Tilburg, & Knipscheer, 1999; Wong, Capoferro, & Soldo, 1999) and might have fewer conflicting demands. Although the effect of adult children's gender on routine exchanges is not as well understood (Pinquart & Sörensen, 2006), it is quite clear that women, in particular daughters, spend more time providing assistance to their older parents than do adult sons (Campbell & Martin-Matthews, 2003).

Household structure also plays an important role in the determination of exchanges between the generations and vulnerability to stressors. An adult child's marital status is an important aspect of intergenerational exchanges, wherein unmarried daughters are more likely to engage in an exchange of household assistance than married siblings for whom the opportunity cost of providing assistance is higher (Couch, Daly, & Wolf, 1999). Moreover, the presence of minor children in married-couple households leads to increased time spent in domestic work, reduced time in the labor market, decreased monetary transfers to parents, and increased role overload (Ikkink et al., 1999). Economic theories also suggest that the educational or financial status of adult children facilitates the provision of assistance to older parents. For instance, empirical studies (Couch et al., 1999; Johnson, 2008) have found that siblings with little education or earning lower wages provide hands-on assistance to older parents, whereas their higher earning counterparts provide financial resources or use paid services. We therefore expect that adult children with lower education may be more distressed on days when assistance is provided.

Finally, several researchers have asserted that personal dispositions interact with stressful situations in determining individuals' own appraisals of a stressor (Ben-Porath & Tellegen, 1990; Costa, Somerfield, & McCrae, 1996). Studies of personality traits have shown that neuroticism predicts increased exposure and lowered adjustment to interpersonal daily stressors (Bolger & Zuckerman, 1995; Mroczek & Almeida, 2004). Perceived mastery and control, in contrast, are known to buffer the emotional effects of chronic daily stressors (Lachman & Weaver, 1998; Pearlin & Schooler, 1978; Yates, Tennstedt, & Chang, 1999). We therefore expect that adult children with higher mastery and lower scores on the neuroticism trait will experience less significant psychological distress on days when assistance is provided to parents. Whereas some of the factors listed above increase one's vulnerability to stressors, others may serve as protective factors.

Study Purpose, Hypotheses, and Research Questions

Daily diary designs provide a unique opportunity to simultaneously study within-person and between-person differences by examining psychological distress in helpers on days when assistance is provided versus days when it is not (within-person), as well as by comparing helpers as a function of their background and contextual factors (between-person). Given

that the proliferation of stressors on primary role-related activities is a key determinant of stress and well-being among individuals providing assistance, in the present study we hypothesized that psychological distress would be higher on days helpers encountered more daily situational factors (spent more time on activities, encountered stressors, provided help to other family members) in addition to providing assistance to a parent. We also hypothesized that women; younger individuals; African Americans; unmarried individuals; persons with young children; as well as individuals with lower education, higher neuroticism, and lower mastery would be more susceptible to psychological distress.

Using a representative sample of the population, we identified adult children that engage in a full range of assistance in order to address two main questions. First, how are the daily role-related experiences affected by the type of day (i.e., helping vs non-helping day)? Second, after we control for daily role-related experiences and responsibilities and person-level variables, is psychological distress higher on days when assistance is provided than on days when it is not?

METHODS

Data and Sample

We used data from participants in the National Study of Daily Experiences (NSDE). The NSDE is a randomly selected subsample of the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS) carried out under the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Network for Successful Midlife Development (for detailed descriptions of the MIDUS project, see Brim, Ryff, & Kessler, 2004). Out of the 1,242 MIDUS participants contacted, 1,031 (562 women, 469 men) participated in the NSDE daily diary study, yielding a response rate of 83%. Over the course of eight consecutive evenings, participants completed short telephone interviews about their daily experiences. The initiation of interviews was staggered across days of the week to control for the possible confounding between day of study and day of week. Participants completed an average of seven of the eight interviews, resulting in a total of 7,221 daily interviews. Participants received \$20 for their participation (for more details on the study, see Almeida, Wethington, & Kessler, 2002). Out of the 1,031 NSDE participants, we identified 119 individuals who reported providing either instrumental or emotional assistance to their parent on at least 1 of the 8 days of the diary interview. The 119 individuals completed an average of 6.9 days of interviews out of the 8 days, resulting in 824 daily interviews.

Measures

Outcome variable.—Daily psychological distress was operationalized using an inventory of 10 emotions from the Non-Specific Psychological Distress Scale (Kessler et al., 2002; Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998), which was conducted on each of the 8 days of telephone interviews. Participants rated these mood-related questions on a 5-point scale (0 = none of the time; 4 = all of the time). The inventory included emotions such as sadness, hopelessness, anxiety, and restlessness. The scale was developed using item response models and factor analysis, yielding a single-factor structure representing current psycho-

logical distress (for complete information on psychometric properties of the scale and validation, refer to Kessler et al., 2002; Mroczek & Kolarz, 1998). Cronbach's alphas ranged from .70 to .89 across the 8 days of administration.

Psychological distress in this sample had a positively skewed distribution ($M = 1.97$, $SD = 3.51$, skewness = 3.55) because the scores clustered toward the lower end of the scale. Other studies of more serious caregivers have seen this low rating of psychological distress as well (Schulz et al., 1997). To adjust for the skewness, we attempted to transform this variable to a more symmetric distribution by adding a constant of unity to the score before taking the natural logarithm of psychological distress ($M_{\text{logged psychological distress}} = 0.67$, $SD = 0.83$). We used the logged psychological distress score for descriptive and univariate analyses and relied on random effects tobit regression with left-side censoring for the multivariate model.

Predictor variables.—Using a broad definition of helping, we assessed providing routine assistance to a parent as help provided with emotional or instrumental tasks on each of the 8 days of the study. Two questions were asked regarding assistance to people living outside the house, in particular a parent. The first question was “Did you provide any unpaid assistance or instrumental assistance to someone outside the house?” (e.g., help with shopping, etc.). If participants agreed, then they were asked to name each of those to whom they provided assistance on that day. The list included parents. Likewise, the second question was about providing emotional support (e.g., giving advice, comforting them). Providing either emotional or instrumental support or both on a given day to a parent was coded as 1 if yes and 0 if no. Providing emotional or instrumental support to someone else other than a parent was also used as a control variable and was coded similar to the previous variable, namely 1 if provided support and 0 if provided no support on a given day. In this way, we could distinguish assistance provided to parents from assistance provided to others.

Three time-use variables measured competing everyday situational demands. These variables were related to time spent each day on tasks and activities other than providing assistance to a parent. The first variable, routine chores, assessed the amount of time the participant spent on routine chores in the house, such as yard work. The second variable reflected the amount of time spent on activities related to business, paid work, or school, which included time traveling and thinking about the work. The third variable considered the use of time on activities related to leisure, such as relaxing, taking a nap, or engaging in physical exercise or leisure activities. Time spent on these activities was coded in hours and minutes.

Background variables.—From the MIDUS survey, which was collected approximately a year before the NSDE diary interviews, variables that acted as reasonably stable background characteristics were included as between-person covariates in these analyses. This study included demographic variables such as gender (0 = male, 1 = female), African American race (0 = no, 1 = yes), and education (1 = less than high school, 2 = high school, 3 = college, 4 = college and higher). Apart from these individual characteristics, we utilized family-related variables such as marital status (1 = married, 0 = not married) and whether the participant had any children younger than 18 years (0 implying

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Analytic Sample ($N = 119$)

Variable	M	SD
Day assistance provided to parent (proportion)	0.28	0.45
Everyday situational factors		
Time spent on routine chores (hr)	2.19	2.25
Time spent on work (hr)	4.26	4.60
Time spent on leisure and sleep (hr)	10.68	3.92
Engagement in additional helping tasks (proportion)	0.04	0.20
Background characteristics		
Age of adult child (years)	44.51	11.41
Daughter (proportion)	0.67	0.47
Married (proportion)	0.65	0.48
Black (proportion)	0.06	0.23
Any children (proportion)	0.38	0.48
Education category	2.90	0.93
Neuroticism	2.24	0.74
Mastery	5.91	0.92

no children). We coded age reported during the NSDE diary interview into categories: 1 = 25 to 35 years (24.37%), 2 = 36 to 45 years (30.25%), 3 = 46 to 55 years (26.89%), 4 = 56 to 64 years (15.97%), 5 = 65 to 74 years (2.52%). Finally, we included trait neuroticism and personal mastery as two personal characteristics variables. The neuroticism items included the following four adjectives: moody, worrying, nervous, and calm (Lachman & Weaver, 1997). Participants indicated how well each of the four items described them on a 4-point scale from 1 (a lot) to 4 (not at all). All but the last item were reverse-coded, and the mean across the items was taken such that a higher value indicated higher levels of neuroticism. Scores ranged from 1 to 4. Cronbach's alpha for this sample was .76.

The personal mastery scale consisted of two items from Pearlin and Schooler (1978) and two items from Lachman and Weaver (1998). See Lachman and Weaver (1998) for more information on this scale. Respondents rated on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly agree; 7 = strongly disagree) how strongly they agreed with the following questions: (a) I can do just about anything I really set my mind to; (b) When I really want to do something, I usually find a way to succeed at it; (c) Whether or not I am able to get what I want is in my own hands; and (d) What happens to me in the future depends mostly on me. We recoded responses so that higher scores indicated greater personal mastery. The scale was constructed by calculating the mean across each set of items. Scores ranged from 1 to 7. Cronbach's alpha for this sample was .63. Table 1 provides descriptive statistics for the total sample.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the participants in the study. The average age of participants was 45 years ($SD = 11.41$, range = 25–74), 67% were female, 65% were married, 38% had resident children younger than 18, and the majority of the sample was Caucasian (94%), with high school education or higher ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.93$). These participants were on average moderately high on neuroticism ($M = 2.24$,

$SD = 0.74$, range = 1–4) and on mastery ($M = 5.91$, $SD = 0.92$, range = 1–7).

On average, participants provided assistance on 28% of the study days (approximately 2 out of 8 days). A total of 66 participants (55%) provided routine assistance to their parents on only 1 of the days, compared to 53 (45%) who provided assistance on more than 1 day of the study (not shown in Table 1). On average, each day participants spent approximately 2 hr on routine chores ($M = 2.19$, $SD = 2.25$); 4.5 hr on work-related activities ($M = 4.26$, $SD = 4.60$); and approximately 11 hr on leisure activities, sleep, and exercise ($M = 10.68$, $SD = 3.92$). These participants also provided assistance to other family members, friends, and work colleagues on 4% of the study days. Out of the 119 participants, only 27 (22.69%) provided assistance to other family members on parent care days. A total of 39 participants (32.77%) provided instrumental support to a parent, 60 participants (50.42%) provided emotional support, and 20 participants (16.81%) provided both instrumental and emotional support to a parent.

Univariate Analysis Examining Psychological Distress and Role-Related Experiences

In order to examine if engaging in the helping role has an immediate association with psychological distress and other role-related experiences, we next considered time-use data and role-related experiences to test using paired t tests whether days when assistance was provided to parents were different from days when it was not, as shown in Table 2. Participants reported significantly higher psychological distress ($t = -2.01$, $p < .05$) on days when assistance was provided ($M_{\log} = 0.76$) than on days when it was not ($M_{\log} = 0.66$). With regard to everyday living activities, on average participants spent the same amount of time on routine chores and leisure activities, however they spent significantly less time ($t = 2.54$, $p < .01$) on work-related activities on days when assistance was provided ($M = 3.67$) than on days when it was not ($M = 4.61$). Participants also reported a significantly greater number of stressors on days when assistance was provided ($t = -3.00$, $p < .01$). On average, they experienced stressors on 57% of days when assistance was provided, compared with 43% of the days when it was not ($t = -2.90$, $p < .01$). Out of all stressors, network stressors (i.e., events that occurred in the lives of close family members and friends) occurred more on days when assistance was provided (experienced on 17% of helping days) than on days when it was not (experienced on 7% of non-helping days).

Multivariate Analysis Examining Psychological Distress and Role-Related Experiences

To take into account the clustering of participants on 8 days of the study and in order to adjust for floor effects in reported negative affect, in the next set of analysis we used a left-censored random effects tobit regression model to predict daily psychological distress. One of the main reasons for using daily diary designs is that we expected there would be as much within-person variation (i.e., helping days are different from non-helping days) as between-person variation (i.e., participants differ from one another) in psychological distress among participants. To examine this, we began our analysis with the

Table 2. Paired *t* Tests Comparing Psychological Distress, Daily Activities, and Stressor Variables on Days When Assistance Was Provided Versus Not (*N* = 119)

Variable	Days Assistance Provided		Days Assistance Not Provided		<i>t</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Psychological distress (log)	0.66	0.63	0.76	0.72	-2.01*
Everyday tasks					
Time spent on routine chores	2.07	1.61	2.30	2.11	-1.25
Time spent on work	4.61	3.79	3.67	4.06	2.54**
Time spent on leisure	10.81	3.29	10.73	3.73	0.26
Routine assistance to others					
Provision of assistance to others	0.04	0.10	0.06	0.21	-1.06
Provision of emotional assistance to others	0.43	0.39	0.45	0.68	-0.33
Provision of instrumental assistance to others	0.11	0.22	0.15	0.33	-1.24
Stressor variables					
Number of stressors	0.57	0.49	0.79	0.80	-3.00**
Any stressors	0.43	0.31	0.57	0.43	-2.90**
Arguments	0.24	0.23	0.29	0.39	-1.27
Work stressors	0.13	0.21	0.12	0.29	0.41
Home stressors	0.09	0.16	0.13	0.29	-1.50
Network stressors	0.07	0.15	0.17	0.32	-3.12**

Note: **p* < .05; ***p* < .01.

standard unconditional model that estimated the average psychological distress and tested whether there was significant variation in daily psychological distress. As we expected, we found as much intraindividual variability as interindividual variability. The intraclass correlation coefficient (ρ) of 0.49 suggested that approximately half of the total variation in daily psychological distress was within-person and the other half of the variation was between-person. Model 1 in Table 3 indicated that on average psychological distress was higher on days when

assistance was provided than days when it was not ($p < .05$). We next estimated a series of models, beginning with a model with everyday situational factors (within-person predictors) followed by background characteristics (between-person predictors) predicting daily psychological distress.

Model 2 in Table 3 presents the results including the everyday situational factors measured on 8 days of the study. Results indicated that on days that participants devoted more time to paid work ($b = 0.12$, $p < .05$) and leisure activities and

Table 3. Random Effects Tobit Regression Predicting Daily Psychological Distress

Fixed Effect	Model 1 (Baseline)	Model 2 (Time-Varying Covariates)	Model 3 (Full Model)
	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)
Day assistance provided	0.84 (0.40)*	0.87 (0.39)*	0.88 (0.39)*
Everyday situational factors			
Time spent on routine chores		-0.01 (0.09)	-0.03 (0.09)
Time spent on work		0.12 (0.05)*	0.13 (0.05)*
Time spent on leisure and sleep		0.18 (0.05)**	0.19 (0.05)**
Engagement in additional helping tasks		2.70 (0.85)**	2.68 (0.86)**
Background characteristics			
Age of adult child			0.40 (0.25)
Daughter			0.13 (0.57)
Married			-0.96 (0.56)
Black			-0.01 (1.04)
Any children			2.14 (0.60)**
Education			-0.54 (0.27)*
Neuroticism			2.08 (0.38)**
Mastery			-0.53 (0.29)
Intercept	1.01 (0.31)**	-1.59 (0.81)*	-3.24 (2.76)
Variance components			
Between-person (Level 2)			
Variance (Intercept)	16.83 (0.34)**	15.73 (0.33)**	9.32 (0.29)**
Within-person across days (Level 1)			
Variance (Intercept)	17.33 (0.16)**	16.69 (0.16)**	16.83 (0.16)**

Notes: *N* = 119. Days of interviews = 824.

p* < .05; *p* < .01.

sleep ($b = 0.18, p < .01$), they reported higher psychological distress as compared to days when they spent less time on these activities. Spending time on routine household chores was not related to psychological distress. Additionally, psychological distress was higher on days when the participant provided assistance to another family member other than the parent ($b = 2.70, p < .01$). Even after we controlled for the amount of time spent on paid work, on leisure activities and sleep, and engaging in other helping tasks, providing assistance to a parent was associated with the experience of greater psychological distress ($b = 0.87, p < .05$).

Model 3 in Table 3 presents the results including situational (within-person) as well as background factors (between-person), such as age of adult child, gender, marital status, race, parental status, education, and personality factors such as neuroticism and mastery. Examination of the between-person variables showed that having less education ($b = -0.54, p < .01$), being single ($b = -0.96, p = .07$), and having young children ($b = 2.14, p < .01$) increased the chances of experiencing psychological distress across all days. Conversely, having lower neuroticism ($b = 2.08, p < .001$) and higher mastery ($b = -0.53, p < .06$) acted as protective factors against psychological distress. Age and gender of the adult child as well as race did not predict daily psychological distress among participants. Finally, even after we controlled for the situational factors as well as the background characteristics, providing assistance to a parent continued to be associated with greater psychological distress on the day help was given compared to days when it was not ($b = 0.88, p < .05$). We explored several interactions between everyday situational factors and background characteristics of the adult children; however, perhaps due to the limited sample size, we did not find any in the present study.

DISCUSSION

Previous research has examined assistance between generations primarily using retrospective accounts of assistance provided over long time spans. These methods do not capture the everyday hassles and disturbances that are associated with the act of providing daily assistance to a parent. In the present study, we took a microlevel approach to examining the association of providing routine assistance amid everyday circumstances and the psychological consequences for the adult child over shorter time spans.

In order to address our first research question, we began by examining how daily role-related experiences were affected on days when assistance was provided compared with when it was not. Past studies that have examined the relationship between work roles and helping roles have found that helpers often have to give up or cut down on personal roles (employee or parental role) to provide assistance (Murphy et al., 1997; Stephens et al., 2001). Consistent with this idea, we found that our sample of helpers was reasonably involved in routine daily chores and work-related activities, but on days when assistance was provided they spent less time on work-related activities. Notably, we also found that helpers reported more stressors on days when assistance was provided than on days when it was not. Many of the stressors revolved around participants' social networks. This is an interesting finding, because network stressors are events that occur in the lives of others. Perhaps helpers'

expression of care and compassion further exposes them to the stressors of friends and family.

To address our second research question, we used a multivariate analysis approach to examine psychological distress on days when assistance was provided versus days when it was not, taking into account daily role-related experiences and responsibilities and background characteristics. Our results clearly show that even at the microlevel, the enactment of the role of providing routine assistance to a parent is in itself stressful. Consistent with our first hypothesis and in line with previous research that suggests that conflicting demands of helping and fulfilling other personal roles (e.g., employee, parent) are important factors that account for negative effects on the well-being of the helper, we found that any increase in the amount of time spent on work on a given day increased psychological distress on days when assistance was provided. A surprising finding was that time spent on leisure and sleep was also related to higher psychological distress on days when assistance was provided. Because leisure and sleep are also planned activities that may cause role conflict and overload on days when assistance is provided, it is not surprising to find that distress was higher on those days. Further research is required to examine the implications of these findings. Some researchers have suggested that if these factors are held constant, providing assistance might lead to positive appraisals of the helping role (Marks, 1998). Our findings do not support this. Even after we controlled for the amount of time spent on activities such as household chores, work, as well as providing help to others, providing assistance to a parent was still significantly related to higher daily psychological distress.

Consistent with our second hypothesis, we found clear evidence that being single, being non-White, and having lower education was associated with higher daily psychological distress (Couch et al., 1999; Pinquart & Sörensen, 2006). Moreover, we also found evidence that personal characteristics such as low neuroticism and high mastery buffered the effects of care enactment on psychological distress. However, we did not find any effects for age, gender, and race in our study. This could be because of the relative homogeneity of this sample, as the study was not specifically designed to study assistance provided by adult children. The age range within a sample of adult children would also be more restricted than in a sample that also included assistance provided by spouses. It is also possible that differences between sons and daughters are less pronounced than those found between husbands and wives (e.g., Aneshensel et al., 1995; Miller, 1990; Zarit, Todd, & Zarit, 1986; Zarit & Whitlatch, 1992) or across a wider continuum of assistance (Davey & Szinovacz, 2007). Likewise, the small proportion of non-Whites in the sample made it difficult to find any race effects and also restricts the generalizability of the results.

The present study is among the first systematic studies that have examined the daily impact of providing routine assistance to a parent living outside the house; however, there are several limitations that we need to acknowledge. First of all, the present data were not collected with the intention of understanding routine assistance to parents. We therefore had to rely on global measures of assistance instead of specific dimensions of care, such as number of hours of assistance to a parent. Because measures of intensity of providing care were not available, we

are not able to clarify whether it is the act of providing care or the intensity of providing care that is more important for predicting psychological distress. Future research should examine the daily intensity of help provision and its consequences on indicators of distress. Additionally, variables that are important predictors of intergenerational exchanges, such as parent's health status and proximity to the parent, were not known and so could not be included. Providing assistance to a parent who lives in closer proximity might be physically draining and exhausting; however, being far away from a parent might not give adult children immunity from feeling overwhelmed on days the parent requires care. The lack of information about parent's health status and proximity to parents did not allow us to assess variability in everyday distress due to these factors. Finally, we tested several interactions between providing daily assistance, daily exposure to stressors, and resilience variables, but due to the low power of the study, these could not be estimated and remain to be explored in future diary studies.

Despite these limitations, the current study clearly suggests the possible link between assisting a parent and the downward trajectory of health and well-being in caregiving. The accumulation of small and large daily stressors may build up and spill over into other areas of life, eventually undermining psychological resources and well-being. Our results also imply that individuals who experience greater role conflict and demand on their time as well as those with the fewest resources experience the most distress on days when assistance is provided to parents. These results also suggest new strategies for supporting people assisting parents and other older relatives. Rather than designing respite and support programs in a non-specific way, experts could design programs that specifically target the everyday care events that are stressful. By building on an understanding of the daily events that people find stressful, this approach could make daily life easier for older adults and the individuals who support them and prevent the depletion of care resources. By focusing on stressors in this way, support programs may be more effective in relieving caregiver burden while also giving financial and other support for those with the fewest resources.

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