



Resiliency Training for Family Caregivers Leads to Improved Patient Care

Research Brief



Resiliency training empowers family caregivers to navigate the complexities of caregiving with greater confidence, resilience, and well-being, ultimately improving outcomes for both the caregiver and the care recipient.

CareLink360™

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What is Resiliency?

Resiliency is the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties and adapt to challenging circumstances. It is the ability to bounce back from adversity, trauma, or significant sources of stress.

Resiliency is the capacity to remain steadfast under pressure, even when you don't feel calm or confident. It's the ability to maintain energy during highly demanding tasks and swiftly regain your composure.



The following are key aspects of resiliency:

- **Emotional Resiliency** is the ability to manage and cope with emotional stress and challenges. Emotionally resilient people can maintain a positive outlook, manage their emotions effectively, and remain optimistic in the face of difficulties.
- **Physical Resiliency** is the capacity of the body to recover from physical stress, illness, or injury. This includes maintaining good physical health, having a strong immune system, and being able to heal and bounce back from physical setbacks.
- **Mental Resiliency** is the ability to stay focused, think clearly, and make good decisions under pressure. Mentally resilient individuals can handle complex problems, stay calm under stress, and remain productive during challenging times.

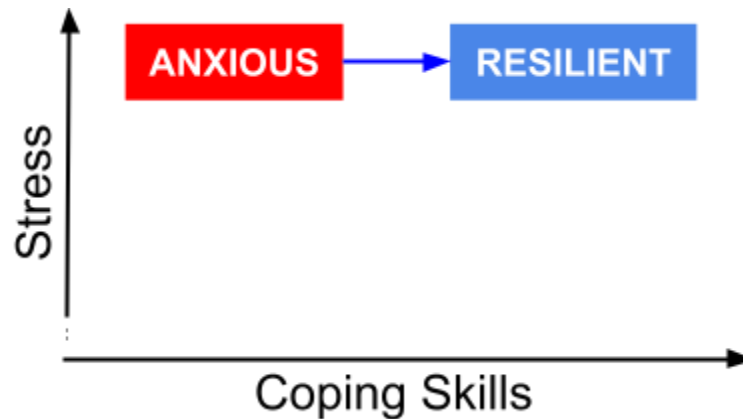
Resiliency is not about avoiding challenges or stress but developing the strength and flexibility to deal effectively. Building resiliency often involves fostering supportive relationships, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, developing coping strategies, and nurturing a positive mindset.

The good news is that resiliency can be learned, and while stressful situations can be emotionally draining, by becoming resilient, you learn to endure them and grow stronger as a result.

What is Resiliency Training?

Resiliency training is a structured program designed to help individuals develop the skills and strategies needed to cope with stress, adversity, and challenges effectively. The goal of resiliency training is to enhance a person's ability to bounce back from difficult situations, maintain psychological and emotional well-being, and adapt positively to life's changes and pressures.

When examining a graph mapping stress levels against coping skills, individuals experiencing high-stress levels coupled with low coping skills typically feel **anxious**. However, by enhancing an individual's coping skills, even amidst high stress levels, that person can transition toward **resilience**.



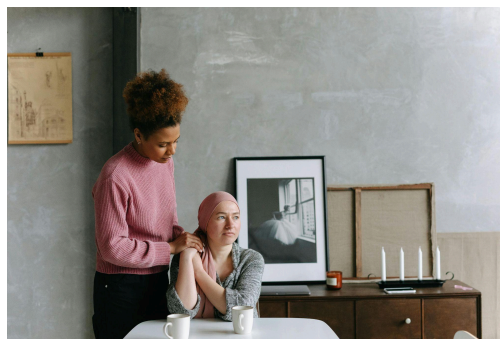
Key components of resiliency training typically include:

- **Stress management techniques:** Teach individuals how to identify stressors, manage stress responses, and develop coping strategies such as deep breathing, mindfulness, or relaxation exercises.
- **Cognitive reframing:** Helping individuals reframe negative thoughts or perceptions into more positive or constructive ones. This can involve cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques to challenge and change unhelpful thought patterns.
- **Emotional regulation:** Teaching skills to recognize and manage emotions effectively, including strategies for self-soothing, emotional awareness, and expressing feelings in healthy ways.
- **Problem-solving skills:** Enhancing an individual's ability to analyze problems, generate solutions, and make effective decisions under pressure or in challenging situations.
- **Building social support:** Encouraging the development of strong social connections and supportive relationships, that can serve as buffers against stress and provide emotional support during difficult times.
- **Self-care practices:** Promoting behaviors that contribute to physical and mental well-being, such as regular exercise, healthy eating, adequate sleep, and time for relaxation or hobbies.
- **Resilience mindset:** Cultivating a positive outlook, optimism, and belief in one's ability to overcome obstacles. This includes fostering a growth mindset that views challenges as opportunities for growth and learning.

Resiliency training can benefit individuals by helping them navigate stressors and challenges more effectively and maintain well-being in the face of adversity.

Why is Resiliency Training Important for Family Caregivers?

Resiliency training is particularly important for family caregivers because it equips them with the tools and strategies necessary to navigate the demanding and often stressful role of caring for a loved one. Family caregivers face unique challenges that can impact their physical, emotional, and psychological well-being.



Here are several reasons why resiliency training is crucial for family caregivers:

- **Emotional and physical demands:** Family caregivers often experience high levels of stress, emotional strain, and physical exhaustion due to the demands of caregiving. Resiliency training equips them with tools to manage these stressors effectively, reducing the risk of burnout and improving overall well-being.
- **Adaptability to changing circumstances:** Caregiving situations can be unpredictable, with care recipients' needs evolving over time. Resiliency training helps caregivers develop flexibility and adaptability, enabling them to adjust to changing circumstances and handle unexpected challenges more effectively.
- **Maintaining relationships:** Caregiving responsibilities can strain relationships with other family members, friends, and even the care recipient themselves. Resiliency training teaches communication skills, boundary-setting, and conflict-resolution strategies, which are essential for maintaining healthy relationships while caregiving.
- **Self-care:** Caregivers often prioritize the needs of their loved ones over their own well-being, leading to neglect of self-care. Resiliency training emphasizes the importance of self-care practices, such as setting aside time for relaxation, engaging in enjoyable activities, and seeking support from others.
- **Coping with grief and loss:** Many caregivers experience grief and loss as they witness the decline of their loved one's health or independence. Resiliency training provides tools for coping with these complex emotions, processing grief, and finding meaning and purpose in caregiving.
- **Enhancing problem-solving skills:** Caregivers frequently encounter logistical, financial, and medical challenges in their caregiving roles. Resiliency training helps caregivers develop problem-solving skills and access resources to navigate these challenges more effectively.
- **Preventing caregiver isolation:** Caregiving can be an isolating experience, as caregivers may feel disconnected from their social networks or unable to participate in activities they once enjoyed. Resiliency training encourages caregivers to seek out support from peers, community resources, and support groups, reducing feelings of isolation and providing a sense of belonging.

Overall, resiliency training empowers family caregivers to navigate the complexities of caregiving with greater confidence, resilience, and well-being, ultimately improving outcomes for both the caregiver and the care recipient.

What We Learned by Providing Family Caregivers in Underserved Communities with Resiliency Training, Education, and On-Going Support?

Program Background

In 2023, Vital Options International in partnership with Whole Person Health undertook a comprehensive three-phase study to assess the impact of Resiliency Training, Education, and Ongoing Support for Family Caregivers in underserved communities. This initiative addressed a critical gap in healthcare success metrics for minority and underserved populations, where family caregivers play an indispensable role yet often face significant challenges that have been historically overlooked.

Secondary trauma, compassion fatigue, and burnout are increasingly acknowledged as prevalent issues among caregivers worldwide. These challenges are not confined to individual families but are also recognized and discussed across sectors including employers, government agencies, hospital staff, and broader society.

Family caregivers constitute a substantial but underserved segment of the healthcare population. For families, employers, and society at large, the core dilemma lies in how to effectively support caregivers while simultaneously enhancing their health and well-being, reducing healthcare costs, and improving patient outcomes.

Family caregivers frequently experience financial strain, emotional exhaustion, feelings of isolation, and difficulties in balancing their caregiving responsibilities with career and family obligations. These cumulative stressors underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions that can bolster caregivers' resilience and overall well-being.

Protocol

This study consisted of three (3) phases:

- Phase 1: Pre-Training Analysis reflecting the current state
- Phase 2: Resiliency Training and Certification
- Phase 3: Ongoing Support and Online Community

3 Key Phases of Our Family Caregiver Resiliency Training and Ongoing Support Program



Phase 1 of the study aimed to gather baseline data on family caregivers in underserved communities. This section outlines the study protocol, including participant recruitment, survey administration, and data collection procedures.

- **Participant Recruitment:** Participants were recruited from underserved communities in the United States through the Vital Options platform. Family caregivers who were caring for someone with a chronic, terminal, or rare condition were eligible to participate in the study. Recruitment efforts targeted diverse populations to ensure representation across different demographic groups.
- **Survey Administration:** The survey was administered electronically via the Internet through the Vital Options platform. Participants were provided with a unique link to access the survey, which they could complete at their convenience over a 90-day period. The survey collected demographic information and assessed various aspects of the caregiving experience, including stress levels, coping strategies, and support needs.
- **Data Collection:** Demographic information collected from participants included:
 - Name
 - Email
 - Years as a Family Caregiver
 - Employment Status

All participants were required to be full-time family caregivers to be included in the study. Surveys that were incomplete or missing demographic information were excluded from the study results to ensure data quality and reliability.

- **Confidentiality and Ethical Considerations:** Participants were assured that their identity and individual survey responses would remain confidential and would not be published or distributed. This confidentiality safeguard was crucial for fostering trust and encouraging honest responses from participants.

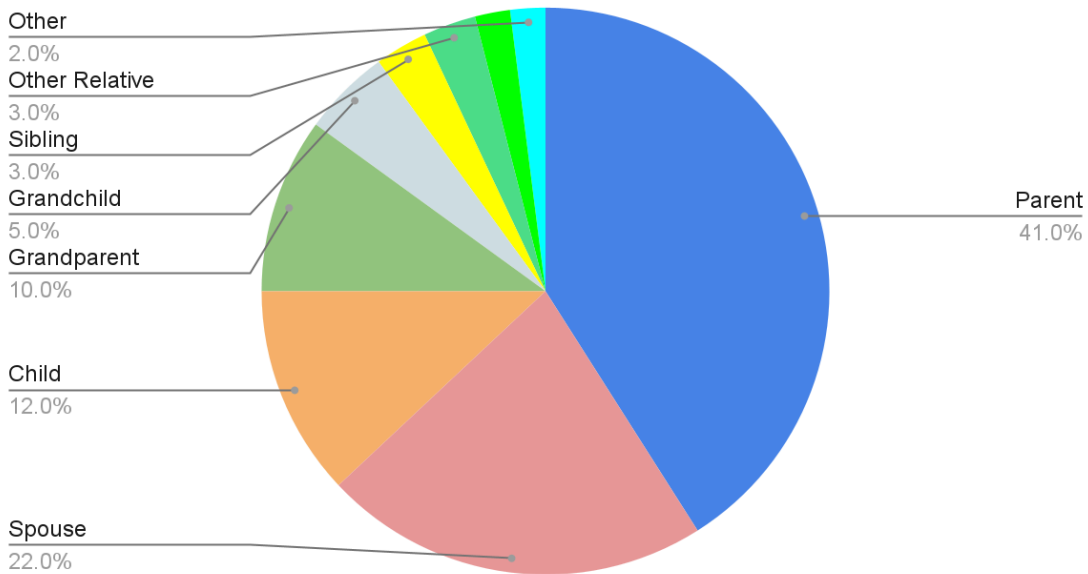
Phase 2 of the study consisted of the Resiliency Training and Certification, while Phase 3 included the Ongoing Support and the formation of the Online Community.

Respondent Demographics

The study involved a total of 2,504 participants, of whom 2,395 completed the entire training. 109 caregivers dropped out of the training due to no longer being family caregivers.

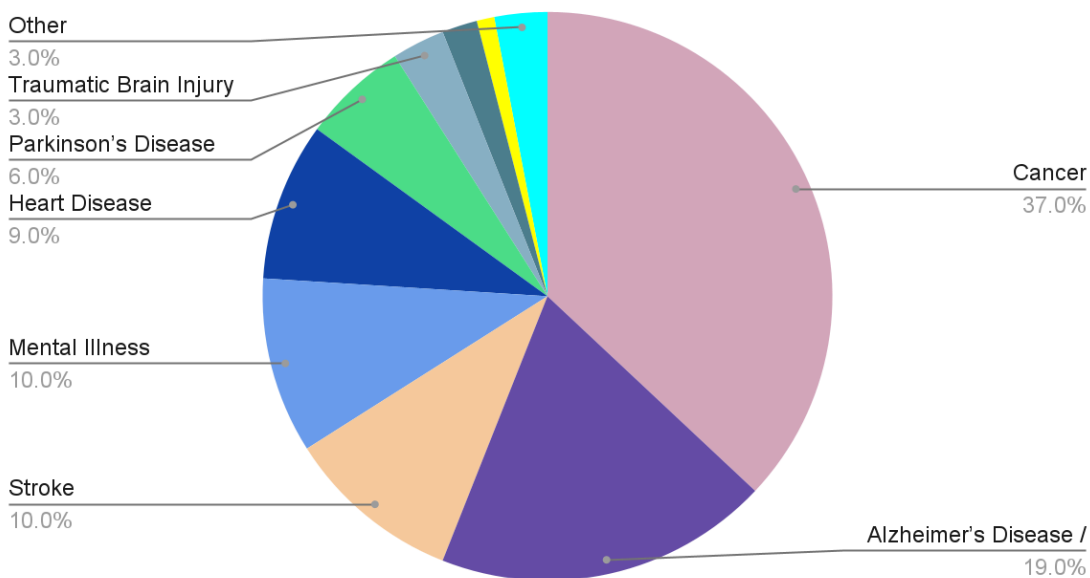
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Relationship to Care Recipient



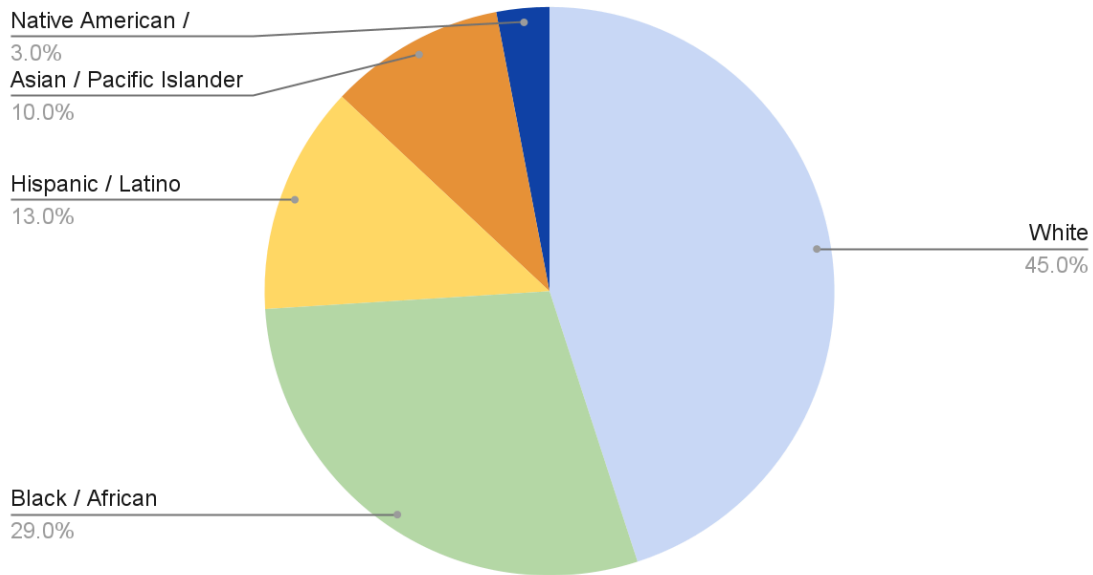
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Diagnosed Conditions of Care Recipients



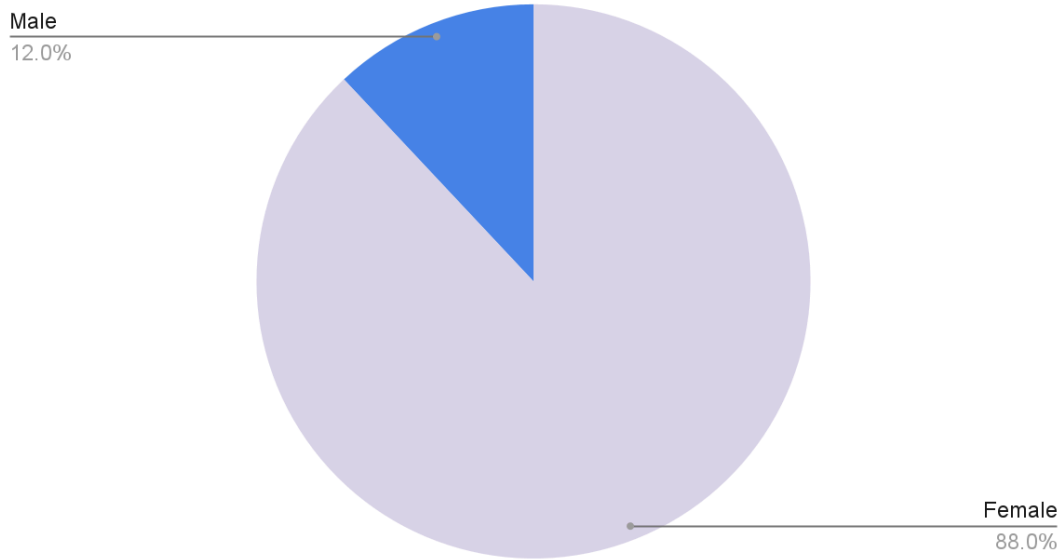
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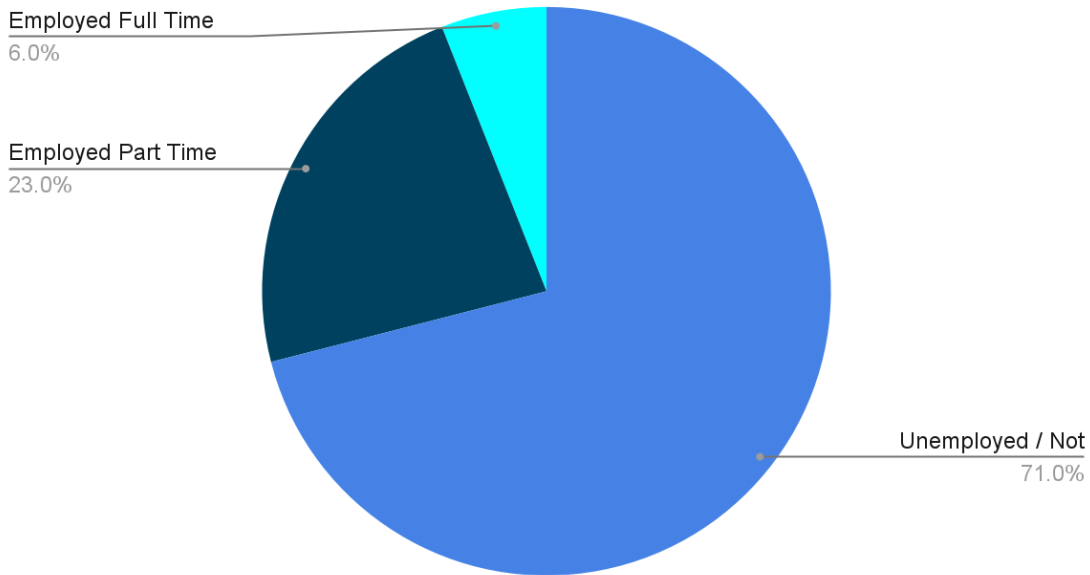
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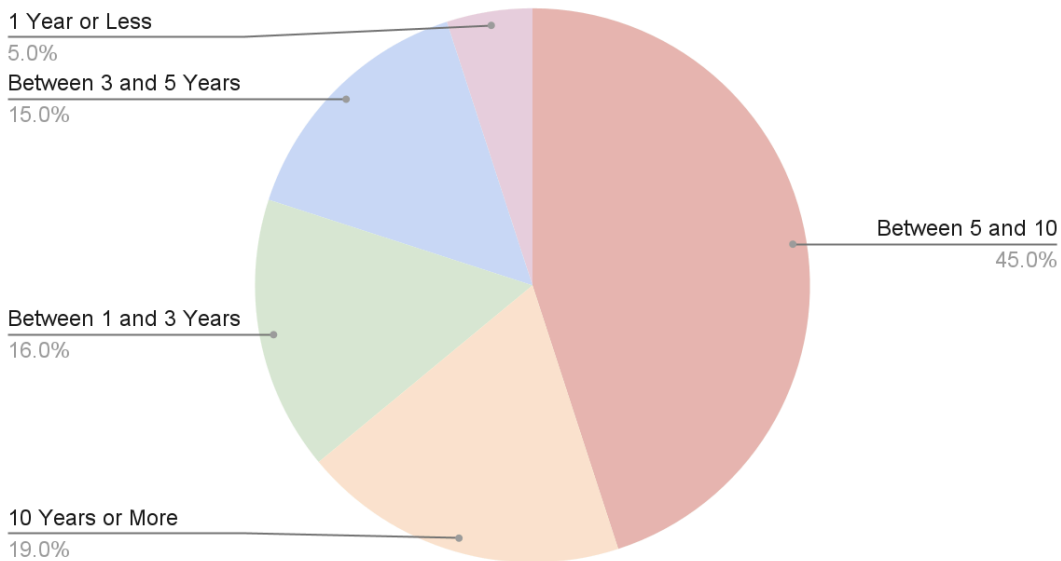
Caregiver's Current Employment Status:

Caregiver's Current Employment Status



Years as a Family Caregiver:

Years as a Family Caregiver



These demographic insights provide a comprehensive understanding of the diverse backgrounds and caregiving experiences of the study participants, highlighting the need for tailored support and interventions to address their unique needs and challenges.

Stress Reactions Pre-Training

Pre-raining Stress Reactions

Participants were asked to identify the secondary traumatic stress reactions they were currently experiencing or had experienced in the past 24 months as a consequence of their caregiving responsibilities. They were provided with 15 options to choose from. The three most prevalent secondary traumatic stress reactions reported were increased anxiety, diminished concentration, and sleep disturbances. These findings highlight the significant emotional and cognitive impacts that caregiving can have on individuals, underscoring the critical need for targeted interventions to support caregivers in managing these stressors effectively.

Stress Reaction	Percentage Pre-Training
Increased anxiety	75
Diminished concentration	67
Sleep disturbances or nightmares	62
Decrease in energy	60
Depression	57
Isolating from family or friends	54
Episodes of sadness	53
Overindulgence (food, drink, drugs, sex, purchases)	52
Sense of depletion	47
Emotional roller coaster	45
Increased anger	42
Sense of helplessness	42
Lessened ability to tolerate strong emotions	30
Thoughts of self-harm	17
Thoughts of harming others	5

Additional Findings: Broader Impacts on Health Outcomes

The study revealed several critical insights into the broader impacts of secondary traumatic stress on family caregivers. Participants reported significant compromises in their personal relationships with family and friends due to their caregiving responsibilities. Many caregivers were unfamiliar with resiliency training and expressed a need for more support in managing their stress. Alarming, a considerable number of caregivers indicated that they had considered relinquishing their caregiving duties due to overwhelming stress reactions. Furthermore, caregivers frequently missed medical appointments for the individuals they were caring for and, in some cases, forgot to administer necessary medications due to stress.

Overwhelmingly, the responses were affirmative, highlighting the profound effects of secondary traumatic stress not only on caregivers' well-being but also on the health outcomes of the care recipients. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive support systems and training programs to mitigate the adverse effects of caregiving stress on both caregivers and those they care for.

Impact of Secondary Traumatic Stress Reactions	Percentage Pre-Training
Responded that they have not had any assistance with their caregiver responsibilities	93
Responded that they are unfamiliar with resiliency training	98
Responded that the secondary traumatic stress reactions have compromised personal relationships with family and friends	75
Responded that they have considered giving up their responsibilities as a primary caregiver due to secondary traumatic stress reactions	72
Responded that they had missed a medical appointment for the person they were caring for due to the stress of being a family caregiver	61
Responded that they had forgotten to administer the medications to the person they were caring for due to the stress of being a family caregiver	77

Post Training Key Findings: Resiliency Training Has an Overwhelming Positive Impact

The resiliency training program had a profoundly positive impact on the family caregivers who participated. After completing the training, there was a significant decrease in all reported secondary traumatic stress reactions, including increased anxiety, diminished concentration, and sleep disturbances. Additionally, the training led to substantial improvements in areas related to caregiver support, personal relationships, and health outcomes. Caregivers reported feeling more supported and equipped to handle their responsibilities, resulting in strengthened relationships with family and friends. Importantly, there was a marked reduction in missed medical appointments and instances of forgotten medication administration for care recipients. These outcomes demonstrate that resiliency training not only enhances the well-being of caregivers but also positively influences the health and care quality of those they support.

Stress Reaction	Pre	Post	Decrease
Increased anxiety	75	59	16
Diminished concentration	67	61	6
Sleep disturbances or nightmares	62	41	21
Decrease in energy	60	58	2
Depression	57	37	20
Isolating from family or friends	54	41	13
Episodes of sadness	53	38	15
Overindulgence (food, drink, drugs, sex, purchases)	52	36	16
Sense of depletion	47	41	6
Emotional roller coaster	45	27	18
Increased anger	42	30	8
Sense of helplessness	42	26	16
Lessened ability to tolerate strong emotions	30	28	2
Thoughts of self-harm	17	5	12
Thoughts of harming others	5	0	5

Impact of Secondary Traumatic Stress Reactions	Pre	Post	Decrease
Responded that they have not had any assistance with their caregiver responsibilities	93	73	20
Responded that they are unfamiliar with resiliency training	98	19	79
Responded that the secondary traumatic stress reactions have compromised personal relationships with family and friends	75	33	42
Responded that they have considered giving up their responsibilities as a primary caregiver due to secondary traumatic stress reactions	72	61	11
Responded that they had missed a medical appointment for the person they were caring for due to the stress of being a family caregiver	61	44	17
Responded that they had forgotten to administer the medications to the person they were caring for due to the stress of being a family caregiver	77	39	38

Conclusion

This study underscores the critical importance of resiliency training, education, and ongoing support for family caregivers, particularly in underserved communities. The intervention had a remarkable impact, significantly improving the emotional and mental well-being of the caregivers. Participants reported reduced levels of anxiety, improved sleep, diminished feelings of depression, emotional instability, and episodes of sadness. The training also lessened their sense of helplessness and overindulgence.

Equally important were the improvements in the health outcomes of the care recipients. There was a notable decrease in incidents where caregivers forgot to administer medications or missed medical appointments due to stress. These findings highlight that providing caregivers with the tools and support they need not only enhances their quality of life but also ensures better care for those they look after.

In conclusion, the implementation of resiliency training, coupled with education and ongoing support, is essential for the sustainability of caregiver roles. It addresses the multifaceted challenges caregivers face and promotes a more effective, compassionate, and resilient caregiving environment. This study provides compelling evidence for the integration of such programs into healthcare systems, advocating for a holistic approach to health that includes the well-being of caregivers as a fundamental component.

About the Author

Paula Muller, Ph.D. Founder & Chief Clinical Officer of CareLink360™

Paula has a lifelong passion for technology applied to healthcare. She got her M.S. in Biomedical Engineering in Chile working with the blind, later in Switzerland, she analyzed EEGs to prevent epileptic seizures, followed by her Ph.D. and Post-doc work at Rutgers with Parkinson's patients, and later at Authentidate with Telehealth products and services.

Paula has been certified in Individual Cognitive Stimulation Therapy (iCST), a Dementia Sales Advisor (DSA-NC), a Dementia Care Certified (CDC), a Certified Alzheimer's Disease & Dementia Care Training (CADDCT), and a Certified Dementia Practitioner (CDP), and volunteers as a bilingual Community Educator and support group facilitator for the Alzheimer's Association.

The concept of CareLink360™ evolved from her professional background and her strong commitment to family relations and lifetime connections. CareLink360™ was created to keep those aging in place and their families connected and closer together.

About CareLink360™

At **CareLink360™**, our mission is to **Change The Way The World Ages** by being the global leader in assisting aging adults, their caregivers, families, and extended care teams with solutions, and our ecosystem supporting and enhancing the aging journey; even for those experiencing cognitive decline. We also work with and help our customers and partners to deliver high-quality, person-and-patient-centered care across the care continuum; through our integrated, patented, and easy-to-use Digital Health Companion™. We strive to mitigate the global epidemic of isolation and loneliness affecting people of all ages, races, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

To learn more about us, please visit mycarelink360.com