

# A Daily Diary Study of Stress, Health, and Well-Being Among Grandparent Caregivers

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## Background

- Approximately 7 million grandparents live with their grandchildren and 2.7 million grandparents are caregivers (Pew Research Center, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).
- Caregiving grandparents are more likely to be unmarried, female and racially diverse, have lower incomes, and have more grandchildren (Fuller-Thomson & Minkler, 2000; Pew Research Center, 2013; Luo et al 2012; Hayslip et al., 2005) than non-caregiving grandparents
- Past research suggests the positive effects of grandparent caregiving include slower declines in cognitive functioning and transferring family values to adolescent grandchildren (Sneed & Schulz, 2019; Peterson, 2017)
- Despite the potential vulnerable characteristics of grandparents most likely to provide care, research on the daily experiences and potential challenges of grandparent caregiving is limited
- This project used a daily diary methodology to examine daily experiences of stress, health, and wellbeing among grandparent caregivers

### Research Questions

1. How frequently do grandparents report daily stressors and positive events? Grandparents will report a greater number of stressors than national averages.
2. Are daily stressors associated with daily mood (i.e. emotional reactivity) and physical symptoms (i.e. physical reactivity)?

**Hypothesis:** It was expected that daily stressors would be associated with both emotional reactivity (higher negative affect) and physical reactivity (greater daily physical symptoms). Grandparents will report a greater number of stressors than national averages.

## Method

### Sample and Design:

Nineteen participants were recruited via convenience sampling and volunteer sampling at local organizations to complete a background survey and five consecutive days of daily diaries. Inclusion criteria was being a grandparent who currently provides regular care (10 or more hours a week) for grandchild(ren)

**Table 1.**  
Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Variable	M (SD) or %
Gender (% Female)	80%
Mean Age	59.42 (7.56)
Mean Household Income	\$59,249.73
Educational Status (% Bachelor's degree or higher)	52.6%
Marital Status (% Married)	78.9%
Ethnicity (% Non-Hispanic):	100%
Race (% White):	89.5%
Contact with Adult Children (%)	81.7%
Mean number of grandchildren	3.84 (3.08)

### Measures:

**Background Survey:** age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, employment status, household income, number of people living in household, number of children, number of grandchildren, amount of contact with adult children

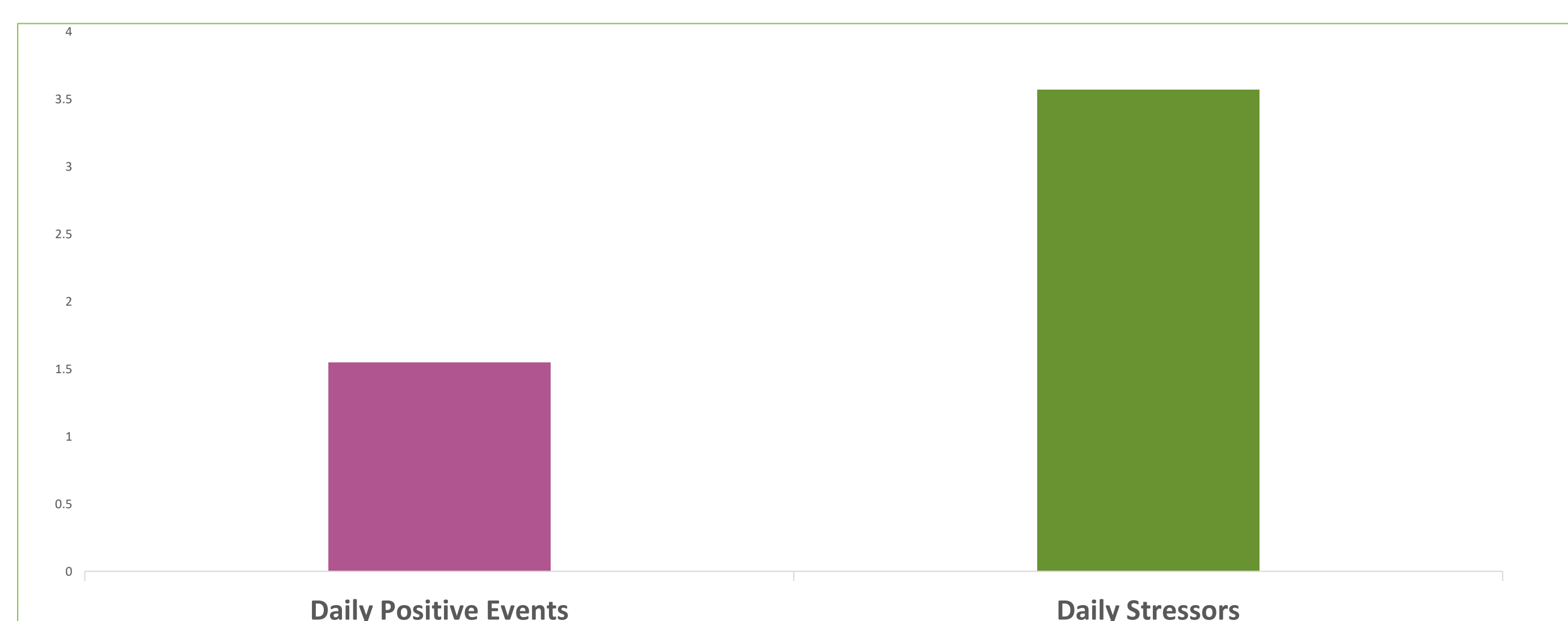
**Daily Diaries:** 5-day daily diary survey of Daily Stressors and Positive Events adapted from the Daily Inventory of Stressful Events (Almeida, Wethington, Kessler, 2002).

- Stressors: *I had a financial problem; I had a conflict with a family member; I gave up or avoided leisure/social activities because I am caring for my grandchildren.*
- Positive Events: *I had an interaction with someone that most people would consider particularly positive; A positive event happened at work/volunteering position; I had an experience at home that most people would consider particularly positive*
- Daily Positive and Negative Affect (adapted for daily use from the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule; Crawford & Henry, 2004). Participants reported on a Likert scale from 0 (*none of the time*) to 5 (*all the time*) for positive affect (cheerful, extremely happy, calm, peaceful, satisfied, full of life) and negative affect: (sad, nervous, restless, worthless, hopeless)
- Daily Physical Symptoms (e.g., backache, muscle soreness, joint pain, fatigue; Larsen & Kasimatis, 1991)

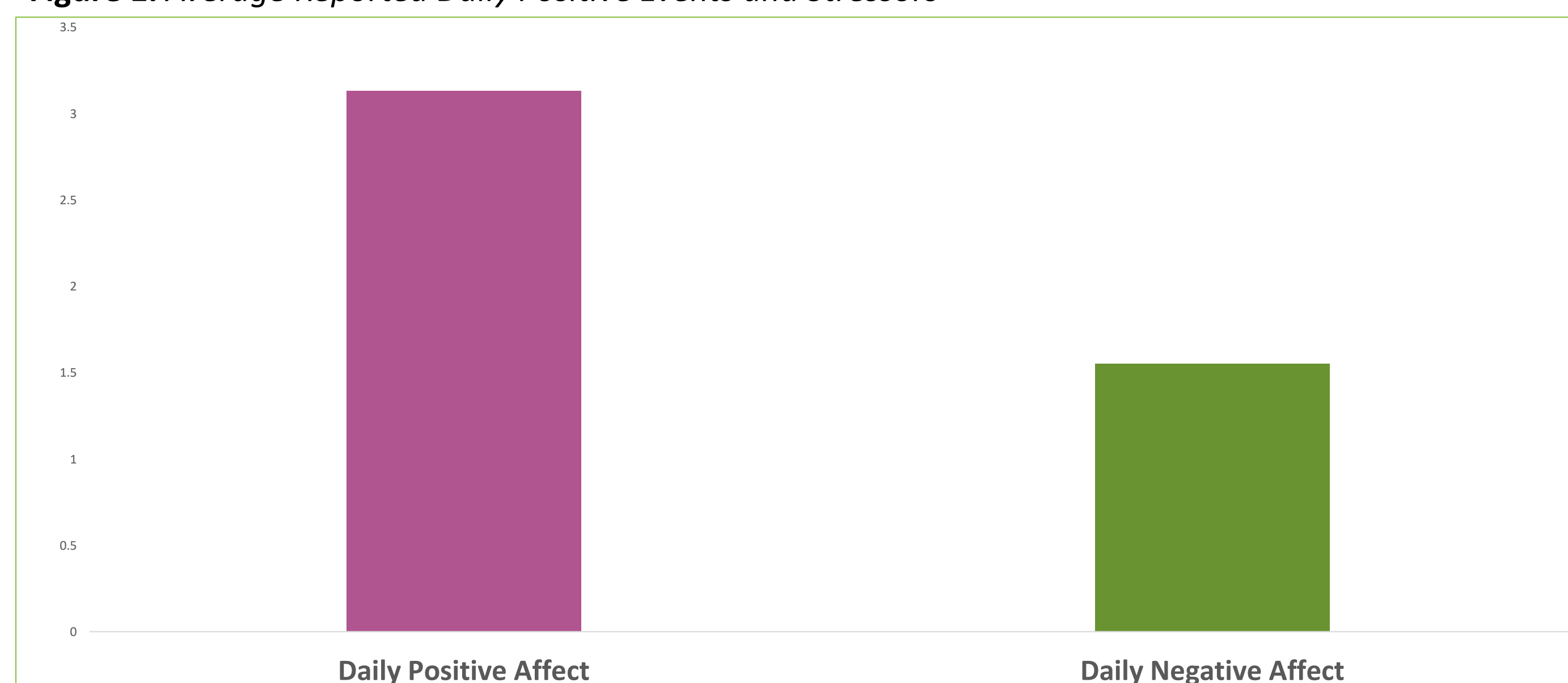
## Results

### How frequently do grandparents report daily stressors and positive events?

- Grandparents reported 3.5 daily stressors, on average ( $M = 3.57, SD = 2.74$ ) and fewer daily positive events ( $M = 1.55, SD = 1.37$ )



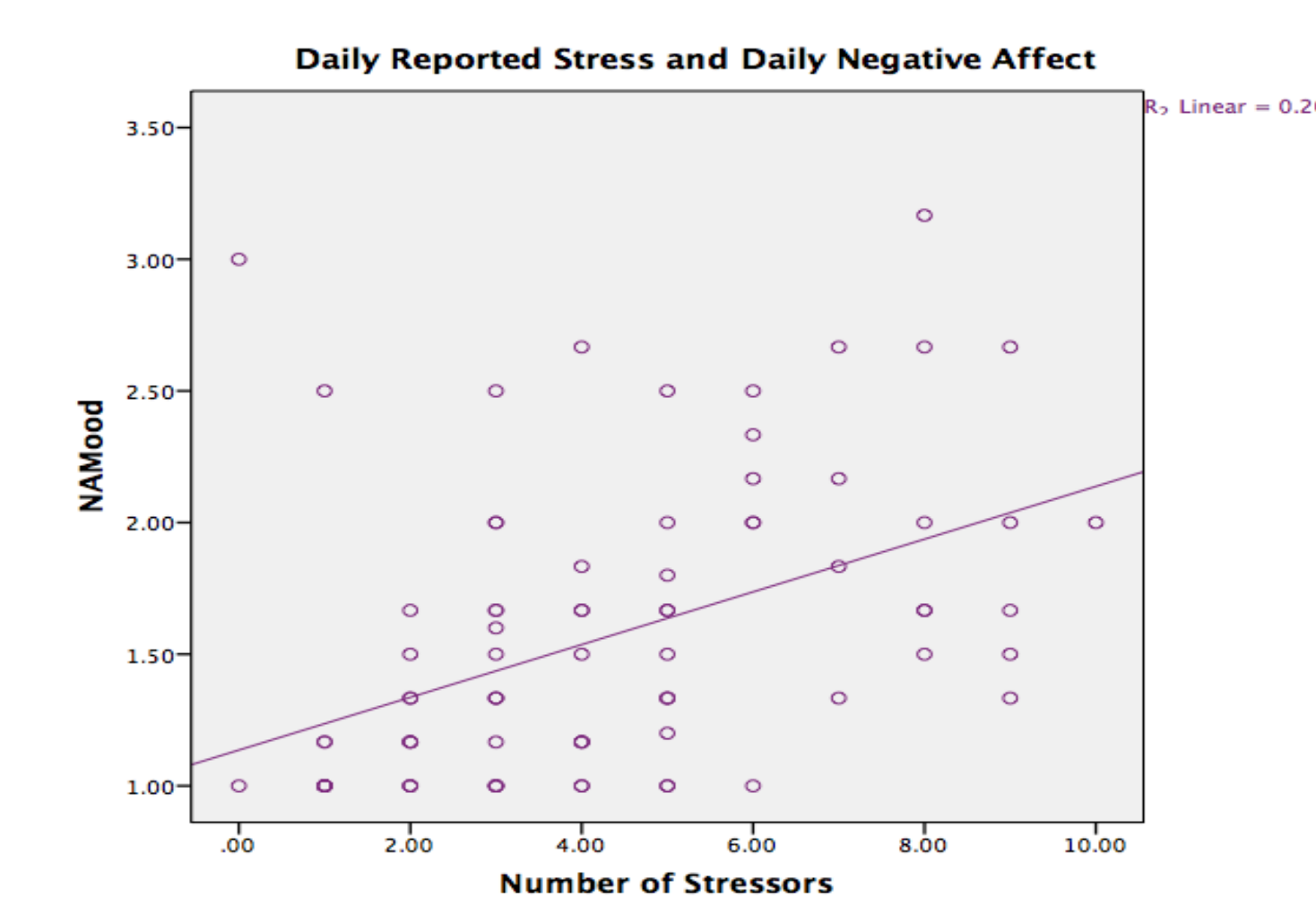
**Figure 1.** Average Reported Daily Positive Events and Stressors



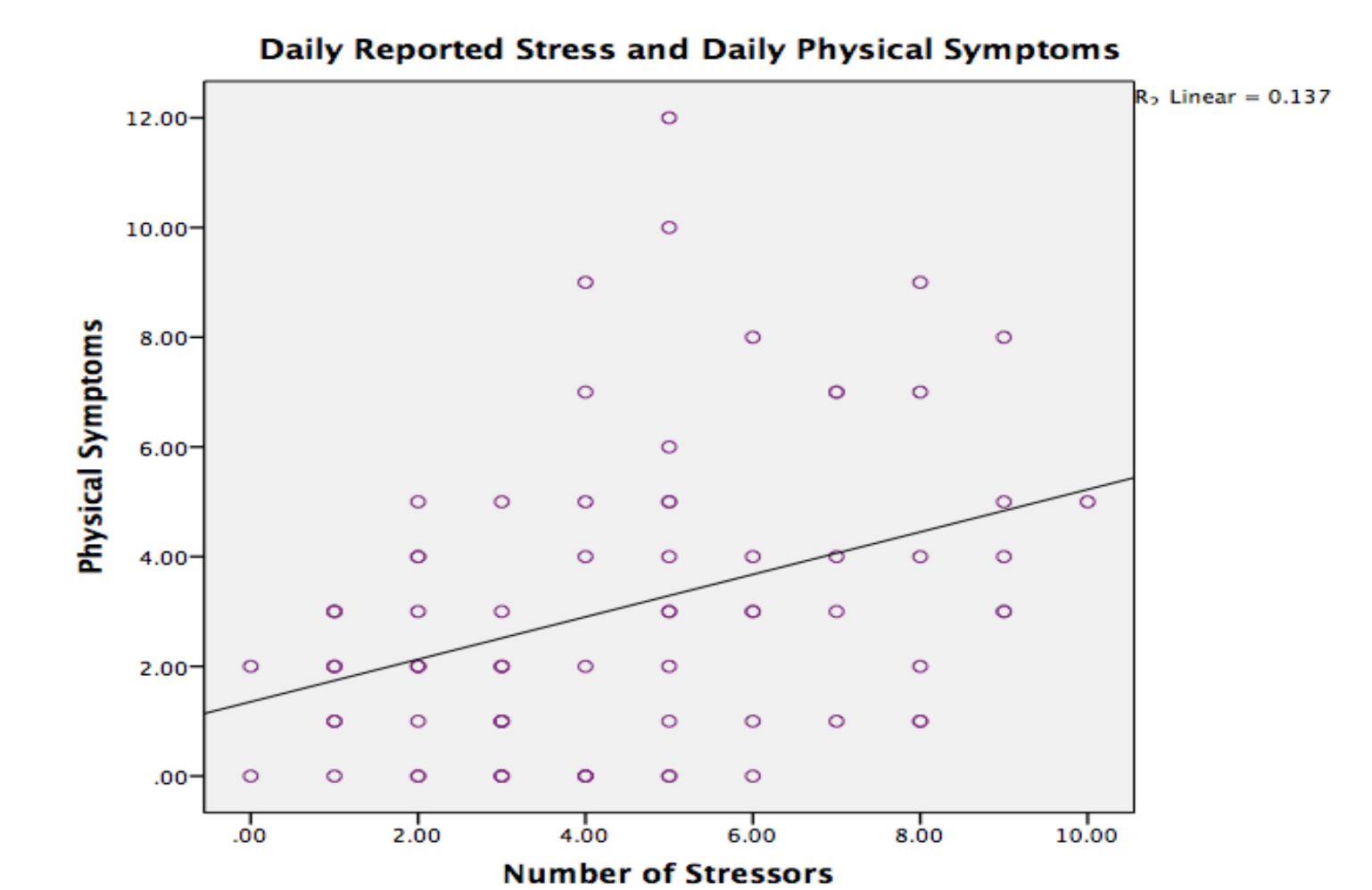
**Figure 2.** Average Reported Daily Mood

### Are daily stressors associated with daily mood (i.e. emotional reactivity) and physical symptoms (i.e. physical reactivity)?

- In Pearson correlation analysis, daily stressors were significantly associated with daily positive affect ( $r = -0.47, p < 0.0001$ ), daily negative affect ( $r = 0.46, p < 0.0001$ ) and daily physical symptoms ( $r = 0.37, p = 0.001$ )
- However, daily positive events were not associated with daily physical symptoms ( $r = 0.058, p = 0.62$ ), daily positive affect ( $r = 0.098, p = 0.38$ ), and daily negative affect ( $r = -0.009, p = 0.934$ ).
- Daily stressors were significantly associated with negative affect, but positive experiences were not associated with positive affect



**Figure 3.** Daily Reported Stress and Daily Negative Affect



**Figure 4.** Daily Reported Stress and Daily Physical Symptoms

## Conclusions

- The findings supported the hypothesis that daily stressors would be associated with both emotional reactivity (higher negative affect) and physical reactivity (greater daily physical symptoms)
- Daily stressors were significantly associated with negative affect, but positive experiences were not associated with positive affect
- The current study contributed a daily health and wellbeing perspective to existing research on the health of grandparents.
- This study is consistent with past work that has found negative health implications with caregiving including limitations in activities of daily living, lower health satisfaction, and depressive symptoms (Minkler & Fuller-Thompson, 1999).
- A limitation of the current study is that non-caregiving grandparents were not included in the sample, however future work is planned to compare the data to previously published national sample data from the Midlife in the United States study
- Race and ethnicity, especially African Americans and Hispanics, may exacerbate or attenuate grandparent longevity and healthy grandparenthood (Margolis & Wright, 2017).
- The prevalence of daily stressors suggests a need for more community resources and social supports for grandparent caregivers.

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References on handout