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Family caregiving for older people from a life-span developmental point of view

Family members are the most important informal carers for older people. Past research has primarily focused on caregiver burden and its detrimental impact on family carers' health. More recent research has highlighted caregiver gains and its positive effects on health and quality of care. However, both branches underestimate the active role of family carers as authors of important decisions for their own and their care-recipients' life (e.g., personal caregiving vs. initiating home admission). Moreover, they do not provide a differentiated analysis of carers' emotions and their role for motivating and shaping carers' actions. To resolve these shortcomings we analyse family caregiving with core concepts from life-span developmental psychology. Here, we draw on action- and emotion-theoretical approaches to clarify how the multi-faceted caregiving situation partly frustrates and partly fulfils family carers' goals concerning their own development and that of the care recipient and how this gives rise to family carers' emotions and action tendencies. Family carers' goals, goal conflicts, and major action possibilities are highlighted as well as goal adjustments and the development of competencies and personality attributes in response to caregiving. We conclude that concepts from life-span developmental psychology enable a more comprehensive analysis of family caregiving and promise future progress in research.