ABSTRACT

Many older adults find themselves in the role of a caregiver to a family member later in life. Caregivers often experience compassion fatigue, or a decreased ability to feel sympathy for the patient. Older caregivers may be at even greater risk of developing compassion fatigue than younger adults because they show reductions in empathy and changes to the brain circuit involved in empathy. Exercise interventions have been proposed as a way to reduce stress in caregivers with compassion fatigue. By reducing stress levels, caregivers have additional reserve that can be used to empathize with their patients and attend to their needs. My research investigates the psychological, behavioral, and neural correlates of empathy changes in aging and the development of compassion fatigue. The goal of my research is to characterize the brain and behavioral mechanisms by which older adults experience compassion fatigue in order to develop interventions that will reduce caregiver burden. I use behavioral experiments, questionnaire measures, neuropsychological testing, hormone assays, and neuroimaging measures to investigate this question. Ultimately, characterizing compassion fatigue in older caregivers will serve as a starting point to develop targeted interventions to decrease compassion fatigue and improve patient outcomes.

ABOUT DR. BEADLE

Dr. Janelle Beadle received a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Notre Dame. She then completed a Ph.D. in Neuroscience at the University of Iowa. Following her Ph.D., she completed postdoctoral fellowships at Brandeis University and the University of Iowa. During this time, she also participated in a teaching fellowship at Augustana College.

Janelle investigates the brain basis of social cognition and perception in healthy aging, aging-related disease, and patients with brain damage. In particular, she is interested in how brain changes with age affect our ability to empathize with others.