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Weekly self-disclosure and protective buffering
between parents and adult children in caregiving

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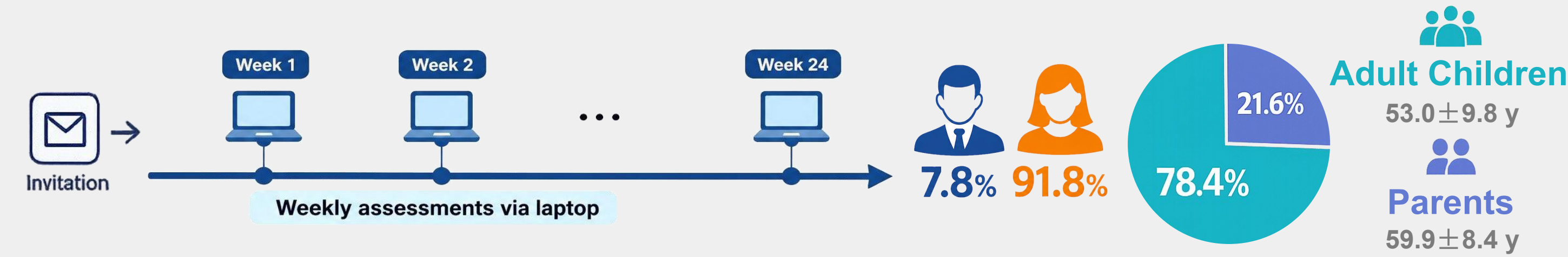
Background

- Communication is important between parents and adult children in caregiving.
- Caregivers may engage in both self-disclosure (sharing thoughts and feelings) and protective buffering (withholding concerns to protect the other).
- Little is known about how self-disclosure and protective buffering change and interact over time. Understanding these dynamics may inform tailored communication between parents and adult children in caregiving.

AIM: This study examined the stability, change, and co-occurrence of self-disclosure and protective buffering over time.

Method

- **Design:** 24-week intensive longitudinal diary study (ENTWINE iCohort, 9 countries)^a
- **Participants:** 106 parent caregivers and 384 adult-child caregivers
- **Measures:** Weekly self-disclosure and protective buffering
- **Analysis:** Null models, unconditional growth models, and linear mixed-effects models



Results

1. Variability - How stable are self-disclosure and protective buffering?

Self-disclosure fluctuated more from week to week, whereas protective buffering was more stable across caregivers (ICC = 0.54 vs. 0.70; Table 1).

2. Trajectories - How do self-disclosure and protective buffering change?

On average, self-disclosure stayed stable, whereas protective buffering declined slightly ($\beta = -0.12$, $p = .03$). But individual caregivers followed very different trajectories (Table 2; Figures 1 and 2).

3. Concurrent coupling - Do self-disclosure and protective buffering fluctuate together?

Across caregivers, no association was found between self-disclosure and protective buffering. However, within individual caregivers, more self-disclosure than usual was associated with slightly less protective buffering ($\beta = -0.02$, $p = .04$).

Table 1. Unconditional null model

Outcome	Variance		ICC
	Between-person	Within-person	
Self-disclosure	0.78	0.68	0.54
Protective buffering	0.90	0.38	0.70

Table 2. Unconditional linear growth models for self-disclosure and protective buffering

Model parameter	Self-disclosure		Protective buffering	
	Estimate (SE)	95% CI	Estimate (SE)	95% CI
Fixed effects				
Intercept	1.02 (0.05)***	[0.93, 1.11]	2.11 (0.05)***	[2.02, 2.19]
Time	0.01 (0.08)	[-0.14, 0.16]	-0.12 (0.06)*	[-0.23, -0.01]
Random effects				
Random intercept	0.80 (0.07)***	[0.68, 0.96]	0.81 (0.06)***	[0.70, 0.94]
Intercept-time	-0.24 (0.09)**	[-0.41, -0.07]	0.06 (0.05)	[-0.04, 0.16]
Random time-slope	0.87 (0.15)***	[0.62, 1.21]	0.38 (0.07)***	[0.27, 0.53]
Residual variance	0.63 (0.02)***	[0.60, 0.66]	0.36 (0.01)***	[0.34, 0.38]
AR(1) correlation	0.13 (0.02)***	[0.09, 0.16]	0.13 (0.02)***	[0.10, 0.17]

NOTE: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

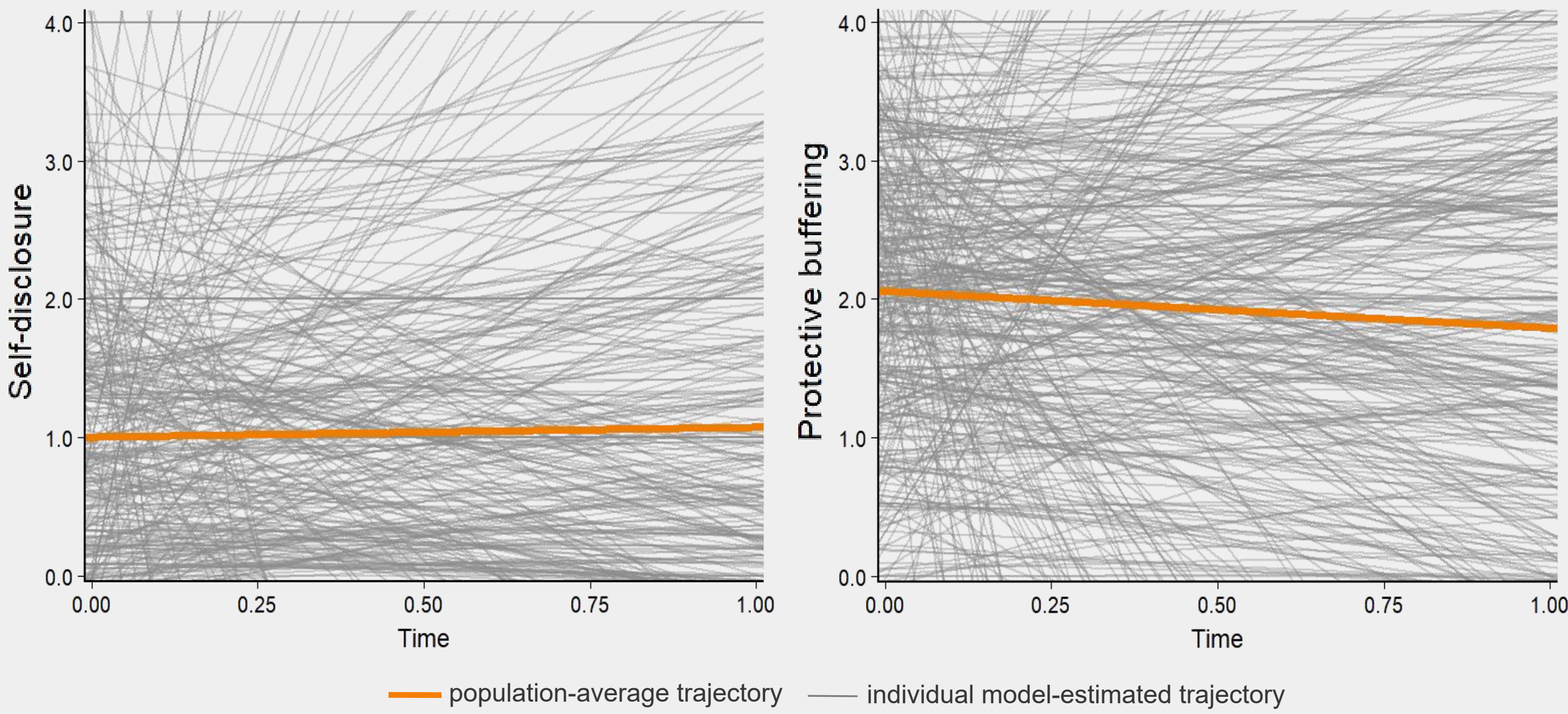


Figure 1. Population-average and individual communication trajectories over 24 weeks.

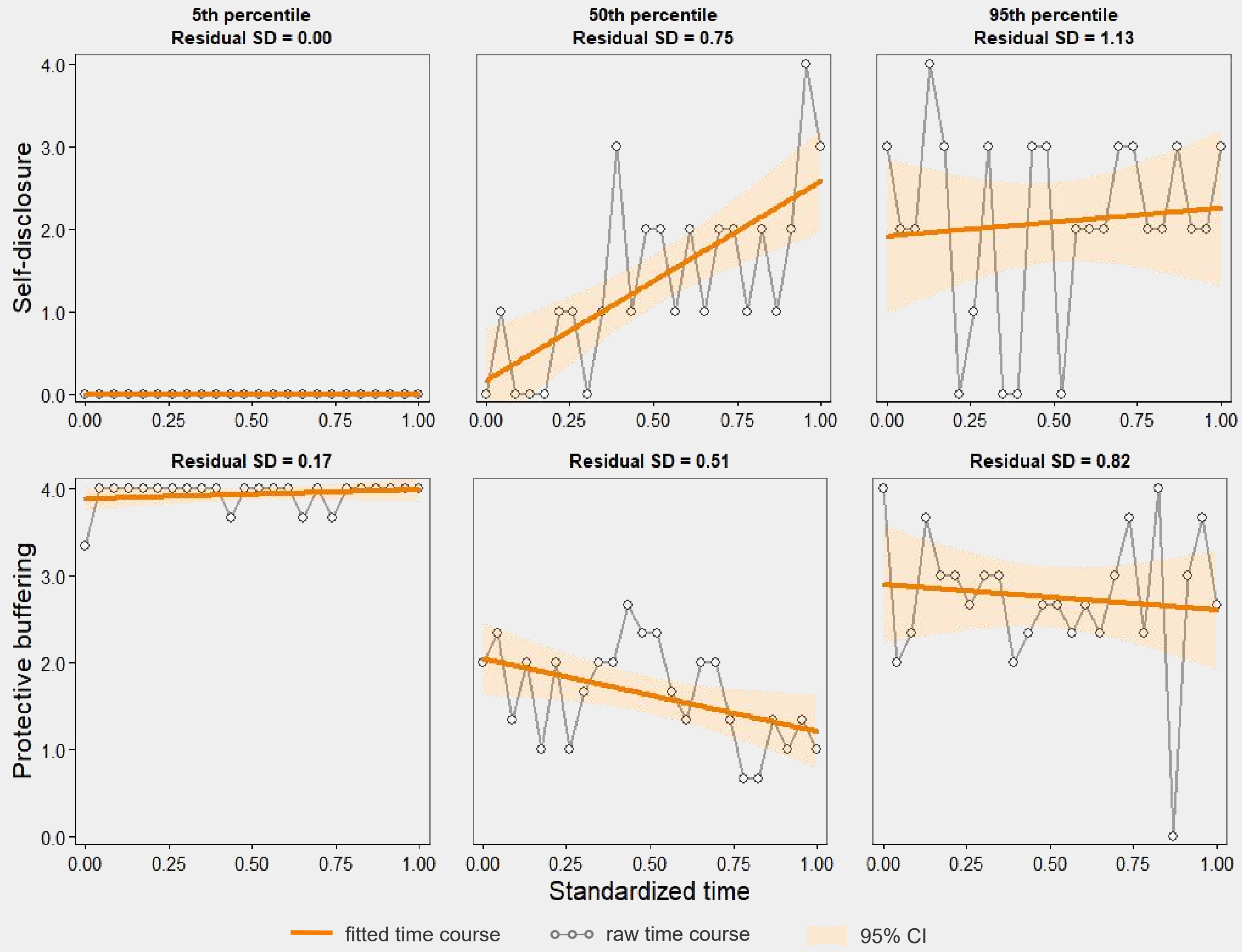


Figure 2. Examples of individual trajectories with low (5th percentile) to high (95th percentile) weekly fluctuation.

Conclusions

- Self-disclosure and protective buffering are not purely stable, but also change within caregivers over time.
- Average trends do not reflect how individual caregivers communicate over time.
- Self-disclosure and protective buffering may operate relatively independently rather than being tightly coupled.

Implications

- Investigate the drivers and consequences of communication dynamics for caregivers.
- Consider multiple communication behaviours and their dynamic interplay.
- Tailor communication support to individual communication patterns.

Limitations

- The sample was predominantly female (91.8%), which may limit the generalisability of the findings.
- Self-disclosure was assessed using a single-item measure, which may have limited measurement reliability and precision.
- Missing observations and attrition may have influenced the estimated communication trajectories.

a. Elayan S, Bei E, Ferraris G, Fisher O, Zarzycki M, Angelini V, Ansmann L, Buskens E, Hagedoorn M, von Kutzleben M, Lamura G, Looijmans A, Sanderman R, Vilchinsky N, Morrison V. Cohort profile: The ENTWINE iCohort study, a multinational longitudinal web-based study of informal care. PLoS One. 2024 Jan 18;19(1):e0294106. doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0294106. PMID: 38236932; PMCID: PMC10796045.