



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

Issued: Tuesday 19 February 2019

Believing your partner cares is good for health, research suggests

Having an attentive partner can significantly improve your long-term health and even life expectancy, research suggests.

Researchers have found that people in a long-term relationship who perceived their partner had become less caring, when questioned after 10 years, said they responded less well to everyday stresses.

The team, led by the University of Edinburgh, also found the stresses recorded after ten years were linked to a higher risk of death in the subsequent ten years.

Psychologists assessed a group of around 1,200 people, aged 25 to 74, who had spouses or live-in partners.

Participants were assessed over a 20-year period starting between 1995 and 1996 as part of the National Survey of Midlife Development in the United States (MIDUS).

Those taking part were asked to rate how much their partner understood, cared about and appreciated them.

Ten years later, participants responded to the same questions. They also filled out reports over an eight-day period, recording any daily stressful events – such as problems at home or work.

The participants also answered questions on how often they experienced a range of emotions in response to the stressful events. They reported when they felt negative emotions such as fear, hopelessness, frustration and anxiety and positive emotions such as cheerfulness, calm, satisfaction or pride.

The researchers found people who reported a significant drop in their partner's responsiveness during the first decade of the study ran a 42 per cent higher risk of mortality in 2015 – 20 years after the first wave of testing.

The team says the link to a risk of earlier death is explained by those people experiencing more negative reactions to daily stressors over a ten-year period up to 2006.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

Lead researcher Sarah Stanton, of the University of Edinburgh's School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, said: "These findings are among the first to investigate how long-term changes are an important marker of relationship quality and can predict mortality risk.

"The results suggest that if people have someone they can turn to – and whom they think supports them – then it can help them deal with the stresses of everyday living. This also has downstream associations with later health outcomes."

The study is a collaboration between the Middle East Technical University in Turkey, and Cornell and Wayne State Universities in the US.

The study is published in the journal of *Psychosomatic Medicine*. Link: https://journals.lww.com/psychosomaticmedicine/Fulltext/2019/01000/Perceived_Partner_Responsiveness,_Daily_Negative.3.aspx

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