

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE QUALITY OF FRIENDSHIPS ON STRESS LEVEL

Nazanin OVAICI, Nozhan TAJIK, Golnaz TAFRESHI*

MSc in Biology, Animal Physiology, Faculty of Basic Sciences, Tehran Teacher Training University, Iran.

* Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Introduction and Objectives: According to Sternberg, three dimensions of love is rarely possessed by an individual equally at a time and the extent of each one of these dimensions varies in romantic relationship. He also points out that intimacy, passion and desire and decision/ commitment create 8 different types of love combined. Each one of these features has its own advantages and disadvantages, while some types of love are associated with higher levels of satisfaction. So the present research aims to examine the effect of love on stress level. *Method:* In this research, using available sampling method and given the criteria for entering the study, 60 students of ninth grade were selected. The questionnaire was distributed among them, and then, 42 individuals who were in love were chosen. Then, ELISA method was used to measure cortisol concentration. Control samples were taken early in the morning to determine level of cortisol in the fasting students, at the same time, other tests (blood pressure, blood glucose and heart rate measurements) were performed. Then, students were allowed to spend time with their friends for two and half hours. In the next step, the same experiments were conducted. In this research we used Eviews Software and regression analysis for data analysis. *Findings:* Results showed that intimate friends lower each other's stress level and reduce the salivary cortisol by an average of 31 ng/ml when they spend time with each other. However, ordinary friends do not have significant effect on each other. *Conclusion:* According to the results of this research, true and appropriate types of love are one of the ways to avoid stress and concerns of life.

Keywords: Love, Stress, Sternberg.

INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the important aspects of human life, which has different dimensions and has developed in various ways. Communication, whether effective or weak, constitutes the main part of our lives and all our activities are a sort of connection (Mansournejad, 2004) which lead to love. One of the most important and notable theories that explains the components and types of love, is the triangular love theory which was proposed by a contemporary psychologist known as Sternberg. (Sternberg, 1986,1988)

In his point of view, love is an abstract concept and it is undoubtedly one of the most difficult things to define it by words. Whereas, there is no common and generally accepted theory about the nature of love. There has always been ambiguity and confusion about love. One of the most important theories about love has been proposed by Robert Sternberg (Duffy Rusbult, 1985). In 1987, Sternberg presented a theory in which he considered love like a triangle. He believes that love consists of three parts: Intimacy, enthusiasm and decision/commitment. In fact, Sternberg's view can be likened to a triangle in which these three elements are always involved in the process of love (Sprecher, 1999). According to Sternberg, three dimensions of love is rarely possessed by

an individual equally at a time and the extent of each one of these dimensions varies in romantic relationship. He also points out that intimacy, passion and desire (lust) and decision/commitment create 8 different types of love combined and each one has its own attributes, advantages and disadvantages. However, some types of love are associated with higher levels of satisfaction (Sternberg, 1986,1988), On the other hand, love affects human body. For example, according to study carried out last year at Pittsburgh University, it was proven that women who had good marriage have lower risk of cardiovascular disease compared to those who had stressful relations. In a comprehensive research on lifetime which has been carried out since 1979, researchers have found that married people live longer, suffer less from heart attacks and cancers. In addition, married people have even lower rates of diseases such as pneumonia compared to single individuals.

In a new study at University of L'viv, it has been proven that in patients with ovarian cancer who have great sense of belonging to family, more defensive cells are produced in the tumor and the white blood cells (defensive cells) fight cancer cells. Each person experiences stress during his life and it seems that this issue is an inevitable part of routine life and rarely can we avoid that (LeResche, 2002). Stress is perhaps the most common issue of human life and all human beings deal with that in everyday life. Many scholar and commentators regard stress as the most common disease of the century. Stress has positive and negative effect on people's lives. In other words, stress is essential and beneficial for human beings, but its level is of great importance. Extreme and prolonged stress can negatively affect the mental resources and mental health of us and make us vulnerable to stress-related disorders, from digestive disorder to allergic diseases, heart attack and depression. Stress is a term which is always redefined in the scientific studies of diseases, but it has never been considered a critical factor in etiology and progression of inflammatory diseases. In explaining the concept of stress, Selye stated that stress is a defensive respond of living creatures toward forces that act simultaneously on body and if these forces exceed limits of capacity of adaptive mechanism of body, they will lead to debilitating diseases and eventually death. He also explained that central mechanisms associated with stress activate the adrenal-pituitary cortex axis. The emergence of symptoms of adaptive diseases, which are derived from chronic, extreme and uncontrollable stress are controlled by automated nervous system in the organs of living beings. These diseases are cause by chronic inflammatory changes (Selye, 1976). Therefore, according to the above mentioned items, this research aims to investigate the effect of different types of love on stress level, because logotherapy aims to help individuals to live a meaningful life and cope with sufferings and hardships. In this research, we attempted to investigate the effects of different types of love on stress level.

METHOD

This is an analytical and cross-sectional study in which the 9th grade students of Kherad School who had intimate friendships participated. The samples (60 students of Kherad School) were selected by available sampling and the questionnaires were distributed among them. Having collected the questionnaires, they were analyzed and a table of friendship among students was drawn. Then, 42 samples were selected. After obtaining license from the authorities of Kherad School, researchers were allowed to perform the study. After explaining the research objectives, the students were asked to provide the researchers with their written consent for participating



in the research. They were told that whenever they want they can quit and their exclusion will not have effect on their research process.

Entry criteria include being in the ninth grade of Kherad School and collaborating in all stages of research. The research tools included a questionnaire and ELISA reader machine for examining the cortisol level of the participants. In a few consecutive days, saliva samples were taken from 6 groups (ordinary friendship vs. intimate friendship) in two stages. The samples were frozen and maintained until they were placed in the ELISA device. ELISA method was used to measure the cortisol concentration. Then, control samples (fasting students) were checked early in the morning to determine the level of cortisol. Accordingly, other tests (blood pressure, blood glucose and heart rate measurements) were performed. Then, students were allowed to spend time with their friends for two and half hours. In the next step, the same experiments were conducted. In this research we used Eviews Software and regression analysis for data analysis.

RESULTS

Results showed that intimate friends lower each other's stress level and reduce the salivary cortisol by an average of 31 ng/ml when they spend time with each other (Table 1). However, ordinary friends do not have significant effect on each other (Table 2). Results of the experiments and regression analysis are presented in Diagram (1).

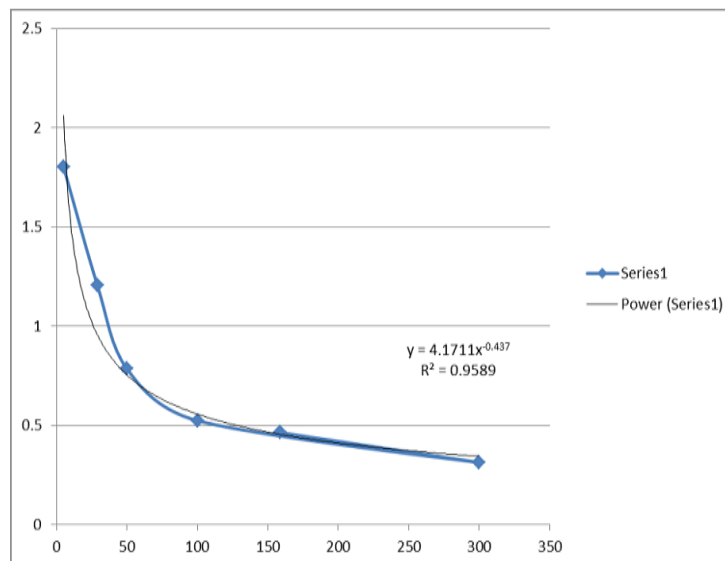


Diagram 1: Results of the test

Table 1: Results of Highly Intimate Friendship

Name	Before cor.	After cor.	Difrence
Gazal	15.88	10.68	~5.19
Deniz	11.38	4.84	~6.53
Zahra	10.00	9.37	~0.63
Asal	29.64	5.47	~24.17
Yasgol	22.03	12.21	~9.82



Nazgol	19.79	12.94	-6.85
Maha	18.92	10.66	-8.26
Yas	51.08	8.52	-42.56
Tara	6.75	4.01	-2.73
Kimiya	38.22	6.84	-31.39

Table 2: Results of Ordinary Friendship

Name	Before cor.	After cor.	Difrence
Dina	7.66	20.25	12.60
Shokofe	8.27	26.04	17.77
Mahsa	11.67	4.69	-6.98
Aylin	19.88	11.80	-8.08
Sara	43.27	5.51	-37.75
Nika	56.59	57.23	0.64
Mahta	22.06	4.99	-17.07
Saba	8.58	4.57	-4.00
Yalda	8.48	28.83	20.36
Parmida	6.54	28.19	21.65
Standard deviation	0.30		
Average difrance	-0.09		

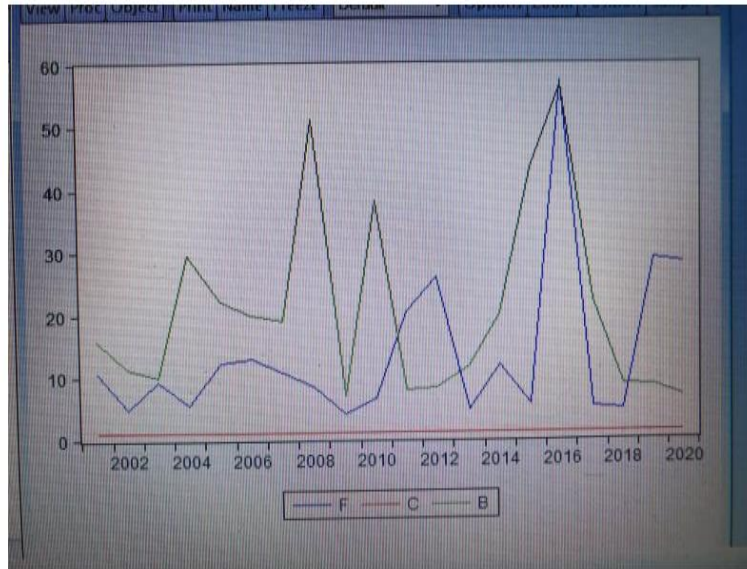


Diagram 2: Regression Analysis

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the effects of different types of love on stress level. From Yalom's perspective, the feeling of loneliness along with death, freedom and meaninglessness is one of the ultimate human issues and its role and significance is so remarkable that it has been told that expense that should be paid for separation and growth is loneliness (Yalom, 1980, Translated by Habib, 2011). Loneliness is felt when an individual neglects his routine activities due to an event and an instant unfamiliarity happens. This situation is regarded as a golden opportunity which drives further development. That person may use this opportunity to obtain the highest

values and deepest meaning of life (i.e. suffering). Pain and suffering are best manifestation of human existential value and what matters the most is person's attitude toward suffering. Love can be basis of all this loneliness. According to results of the present research, it becomes clear that intimate friends lower each other's stress level and reduce the salivary cortisol by an average of 31 ng/ml when they spend time with each other. But ordinary friends do not have significant effect on each other. This shows that love can have great impacts on lowering the stress level and regulate the vital function of body. Griff and Malherb (2001) stated that women and men perceive perception love and intimacy differently. The way they spend their leisure time as two aspects of intimacy differs (Griff and Malherb 2001). Lemohill proves the three components proposed by Sternberg (intimacy, passion and enthusiasm) as predictive factors of satisfaction in married couples. He emphasizes that intimacy has the greatest predictive power on couples' satisfaction (Lemohill et al.). The consistency of the finding of this study with previous studies that carried out by Sternberg shows that this theory is capable of predicting love and satisfaction and reducing the stress level. Therefore, based on research carried out last year, it can be said that women who had good marriage had lower risks of diseases, in comparison to those who had stressful relation. And during life time married people are less likely to get heart attacks or cancers and even level of pneumonia is lower among married individuals in comparison to single ones. Therefore, based on the research, good relationship is a proper way to avoid stress and routine concerns. Eventually, it should be noted that in this study, as described earlier, we used available sampling method, we can consider it as circumstances of present study. In these cases, it was better to use random sampling method. According to these explanations and cross-sectional study, further studies should be performed in this field. It is recommended to use random sampling for predicting satisfaction.



CONCLUSION

We can conclude from the results of this study that love affects human body. In this research, it reduced stress in individuals. Based on a research carried out last year, women who have good marriage in comparison to those who have stressful relations, are less likely to get diseases. Based on finding of this study, it is recommended to examine more individuals.

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