Partner Communication Behaviors and Diurnal Cortisol Patterns

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Why is marital communication related to health?

- Stress physiology may be an important link between marital variables and health

Marital Variables (e.g. marital communication behaviors)

Stress physiology, endocrine function (e.g. cortisol)

Health (e.g. morbidity, mortality, immune health)

(e.g. Taylor, Repetti & Seeman, 1997)
Background

(e.g., Aloia & Solomon, 2015b; Feinberg, Jones, Granger, & Bontempo, 2013; Kiecolt-Glaser et al, 1997; Laurent et al., 2013; Miller, Dopp, Myers, Stevens & Fahey, 1999, only for men; Robles, Shaffer, Malarkey, & Kiecolt-Glaser, 2006)
Current Study:
Observed / self-reported communication behaviors and diurnal cortisol patterns?

Positive self-reported communication behaviors

Negative self-reported communication behaviors

(Barnett, Steptoe, & Gareis, 2005; Blake-Mortimer, & Spiegel, 2000; Crockett & Neff, 2013; Ditzen, Hoppmann, & Klumb, 2008; Floyd, 2006; Floyd & Riforgiate, 2008; Kim et al., 2015; Saxbe et al., 2015; Stawski, Gichy, Piazza, & Almeida, 2013; Turner-Cobb, Sephton, Koopman)
Methods

– Participants:
  • Heterosexual couples ($N=124$)
  • Long-term relationships ($M=16.03$ years, $SD=5.81$)
  • At least one adolescent child
  • Income Median= $85,937$, $SD=68,531$
    – Range: $3,375$ to $450,000$

– Marital conflict discussion task
  • Positive to negative communication behavior ratios

– Measures:
  • Marital Conflict
  • Marital Resolution

• Collection of diurnal cortisol
  – Two days
    • At waking,
    • 30 minutes after waking,
    • At 4 PM,
    • Bed time

(Braiker & Kelly, 1979; Cummings et al., 2007; Kerig, 1996)
*Men’s greater observed communication quality = lesser allostatic load = healthier cortisol patterns for both men and women*

*Men’s greater reported marital conflict = women’s greater allostatic load = women’s lower (less healthy) waking levels*

*Women’s greater reported resolution = women’s greater allostatic load, men’s lesser allostatic load = less healthy pattern for women, but more healthy pattern for men*

Solid arrows = significant
Dashed arrows = marginal
Black = models without covariates
Green = only models with demographics
Conclusion/Discussion Q’s

*Men’s greater observed communication quality = women’s higher waking levels, men’s steeper slopes

*Men’s greater self-reported marital conflict = women’s lower waking levels

*Women’s greater reported resolution = women’s lower waking levels, men’s steeper slopes

Discussion questions:
*Why might we see associations among couple communication behaviors and diurnal cortisol patterns?
*Why might men’s observed communication quality be more predictive of both women’s and men’s diurnal cortisol patterns than women’s observed communication quality?