You Make Me Sick: Daily Relational Stress Mediates the Relationship between Protecting and Changing with Somatic Symptoms
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Abstract
Relational stress may affect health. In a study of 75 couples, we found that daily stress fully mediates the relationship between daily protecting (c, p < .001, c', p > .05), and partially mediates the relationship between daily changing (c, p < .0001, c', p < .02), with daily somatic symptoms.

Background

Somatic symptoms are significantly associated with interpersonal stress (Aanes, Mittelmark, & Hetland, 2010). Individuals often regulate their own emotions. However, couples may attempt to regulate each other’s emotions to promote feelings of positivity. In relationships, negative emotions and distress in one partner can influence the level of stress and negative emotions in the other partner (Stadler, Snyder, Horn, Shrout, & Bolger 2012). The psychological health of an individual and her partner mediates the association of her own and her partner’s physical health and marital quality (Galinsky & Waite, 2013).

How does attempting to regulate a partner’s emotions or negative feeling affect the stress and health of an individual?

Present Study

Few studies explore how the daily effect of managing a partner’s emotions can affect health and well-being. We examined the effect of stress as a mediator of the relationship between protecting one’s partner from feeling badly or distressed (Model 2).

Data Analysis

We fit two dyadic, multilevel mediation models utilizing the Barron and Kenny approach and indirect effects were confirmed through a bootstrap procedure.

Model 1: Somatic symptoms predicted by changing, mediated by stress.
Model 2: Somatic symptoms predicted by protecting, mediated by stress.

Results

Table 1: Estimates of Changing and Protecting and Somatic Symptoms Mediated by Daily Stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>0.1743***</td>
<td>0.1149***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>0.0500</td>
<td>0.0461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C' path</td>
<td>0.1171**</td>
<td>0.0799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Std. Error</td>
<td>0.0497</td>
<td>0.0458</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Intercept for Model 1 = 6.73, Intercept for Model 2 = 6.71
p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001. ****p < .0001.

• Results were confirmed by a bootstrap procedure

Conclusions and Implications

Summary and Discussion

Daily protecting of partners emotions and changing one’s own emotions to accommodate partners affects one’s somatic symptoms.

We found the more an individual protected their partner, the more stress and somatic symptoms they reported each day.

The more an individual tried to change their partner’s emotions, the more stress and somatic symptoms they reported.

Trying to change or protect partner’s emotion causes more stress, which in turn; causes increased reporting in experiencing somatic symptoms on a daily basis.

Clinical Implications

These results may influence therapeutic techniques that emphasize acceptance of partners’ feelings and emotions to reduce stress, and increase daily well-being.

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