

Mortality and blood pressure directly linked to relationship quality

7 April 2015

While other studies have shown that stress and negative marital quality can influence mortality and blood pressure, there has not been research that discussed how it might affect married couples over time. Using systolic blood pressure as a gauge, researchers assessed whether an individual's blood pressure is influenced by their own as well as their partner's reports of chronic stress and whether there are gender differences in these patterns.

The *Journals of Gerontology, Series B: Psychological Sciences* published these findings in the article titled, "Stress and Negative Relationship Quality among Older Couples: Implications for Blood Pressure" on April 7, 2015.

This article addresses several questions:

- Does [chronic stress](#) predict blood pressure?
- Does the association between chronic stress and blood pressure vary between husbands and [wives](#)?
- Does negative relationship quality predict blood pressure?
- Does the association between negative relationship quality and blood pressure vary by gender?
- Does negative marital quality moderate the stress-blood pressure link?
- Does the moderating effect of negative marital quality differ for wives and husbands?

The findings support previous research that asserts stress and relationship quality have both direct and moderating effects on the cardiovascular system. This research also indicates that it is important to consider the couple as a whole rather than the individual when examining marriage and health. Most importantly, this study revealed that wives' stress has important implications for husbands' [blood pressure](#), particularly in more

negative relationships. Specifically looking at the effects of negative relationship quality, researchers found that effects weren't recognized when examining individuals but there were when examining interactions between both members of couple.

"We were particularly excited about these findings because they show that the effects of stress and negative relationship quality are truly dyadic in nature," says lead author Kira S. Birditt, "An individual's physiology is closely linked with not only his or her own experiences but the experiences and perceptions of their spouses. We were particularly fascinated that husbands were more sensitive to wives' stress than the reverse especially given all of the work indicating that wives are more affected by the marital tie. We speculate that this finding may result from [husbands](#) greater reliance on wives for support which may not be provided when wives are more stressed."

Provided by Oxford University Press

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