Participants' provided support and partners' provided support.

We assessed reciprocity (1) as the difference between participants' provided and received support and as validation of this outcome (2) as the difference between support provision and support receipt (Gleason, Iida, Bolger & Shrout, 2003; Knoll, Burkert & Schwarzer, 2006; Walster, Walster & Berscheid, 1978).

The first aim of the present study was to examine the associations between several types of social support (emotional, practical, and informational support) and relationship satisfaction by investigating everyday support exchanges from both the recipient's and the provider's perspective. The second question was whether the reciprocity in support exchanges of healthy couples would account for more variance in relationship satisfaction than support receipt and support provision. Therefore, we assessed reciprocity (1) as the difference between participants' provided and received support and as validation of this outcome (2) as the difference between participants' provided support and partners' provided support.

Method

Sample

111 couples, living in a steady relationship for at least one year

N = 222 participants

Length of partnership: 1-29 years, M = 4.9 years (SD = 4.6)

56% were living together

7% were married

15% had children

Females

N = 111

Age: 19-47 years, M = 24.2 years (SD = 5.6)

81% students

Males

N = 111

Age: 18-53 years, M = 25.9 years (SD = 6.1)

57% students

Measures

Social support received from the partner within the last 6 month: Inventory of Social Support in Dyads (ISU-DYA, Winkeler & Klauer, 2003)

emotional: 15 items, α = .85, "My partner consoled me when I was upset"

practical: 7 items, α = .69, "My partner assisted me with severe problems"

informational: 12 items, α = .76, "My partner gave me advice how to behave"

Social support provided to the partner within the last 6 month: Inventory of Social Support in Dyads (ISU-DYA, Winkeler & Klauer, 2003)

emotional: 15 items, α = .89, "I consoled my partner when he/she was upset"

practical: 7 items, α = .74, "I assisted my partner with severe problems"

informational: 12 items, α = .82, "I gave my partner advice how to behave"

Relationship satisfaction: Relationship Assessment Scale (RAS, Hendrick, 1981)

7 items, α = .83, “How satisfied are you with your relationship”

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS, Watson et al., 1988)

positive affect: 10 items, α = .94, “In general, I feel interested”

negative affect: 10 items, α = .85, “In general, I feel afraid”

Types of support

Participants who received and provided more emotional support as well as participants whose partners provided more emotional support reported a higher relationship satisfaction. Moreover, participants’ provision of practical support was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction.

Reciprocity

Unexpectedly, reciprocity (1) indicated by differences between provided support (P1) and received support (P2) as well as reciprocity (2) indicated by differences between provided support (P1) and provided support (P2) did not explain any additional variance in relationship satisfaction.

Results and Discussion

Multiple Regression

Step 1

Relationship satisfaction (P1)

sex (P1)

positive affect (P1)

negative affect (P1)

β = .12**

0.05

0.17**

-0.25**

Step 2

ΔR² = .31**

received support (P1)

- emotional

- informational

- practical

β = .38**

-0.08

0.06

provided support (P1)

- emotional

- informational

- practical

β = .24**

-0.07

-0.16*

provided support (P2)

- emotional

- informational

- practical

β = .20**

-0.00

-0.04

Step 3

ΔR² = .02

Reciprocity (1)

- emotional

- informational

- practical

β = .02

-1.2*

0.00

Reciprocity (2)

- emotional

- informational

- practical

β = .04

-0.14*

-0.02

Note. P1 = Partner 1, P2 = Partner 2.

Reciprocity (1) = Difference provided support (P1) and received support (P1).

Reciprocity (2) = Difference provided support (P1) and provided support (P2).

** p < .01, * p < .05, + p < .10

Results

Types of support

Participants who received and provided more emotional support as well as participants whose partners provided more emotional support reported a higher relationship satisfaction. Moreover, participants’ provision of practical support was negatively associated with relationship satisfaction.

Discussion

Not all types of social support contributed equally to relationship satisfaction. Results highlighted the distinction between emotional, practical and informational support and are consistent with findings suggesting that emotional support is the most relevant type of support. In line with previous research, the best predictor of relationship satisfaction in healthy couples was the receipt as well as the provision of emotional support. Thus, previous results could be generalized to social functioning in the daily life of healthy couples.

Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS, Watson et al., 1988)

positive affect: 10 items, α = .94, “In general, I feel interested”

negative affect: 10 items, α = .85, “In general, I feel afraid”

References


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