

Sources of stress as predictors of partner relationship quality

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Abstract

The purpose of this survey is to establish whether, and in which manner, different sources of stress predict the partner relationship quality, as well as to establish differences concerning the gender, age and job of respondents. Sources of stress are defined as individual, interpersonal and organizational, whereas the quality of partner relationship was tested as a degree of satisfaction with the romantic relationship. The survey was conducted on an adequate sample of 100 respondents involved in a partner relationship, similar in terms of gender and aged 18 to 44. Questionnaires were used to measure the sources of stress and partner relationship quality (Hendrick, 1988). The results indicated that all three sources of stress were significantly connected with the partner relationship quality, also that family-related sources of stress were the only significant predictor ($\beta = -0.286$, $p < 0.01$). The greater the family-related sources of stress, the poorer the partnership relation quality. Differences were obtained in assessing the individual factors of stress according to gender and age categories.

Keywords Partner relationship quality • Sources of stress • Gender • Age

Introduction

Stress is a negative life experience accompanied by physiological, cognitive, emotional and behavioral changes. The factors causing stress are numerous

and multiple and they are referred to as stressors. They could be individual and concern the inner state of individuals and the way they experience different changes in life, demands from their environment; interpersonal, concerning different interpersonal relations; and organizational (incompatibility of the job contents, working hours, poor physical conditions in the work environment). At the present time, stress has become an inevitable problem and, in order to mitigate the effects of stress, we must examine how and which aspects of a person's life it affects. One of the significant aspects is having a partner relationship. Zotovic (2002) emphasizes that stress is a threat to life, but also a threat to other persons that matter to us, to ourselves and the emotional relations we create. However, how partner relationship is affected by stress circumstances outside the relationship has been significantly less studied. In this respect, the main issue arising from this survey concerns the question whether and in which manner the stressors from different aspects of life predict and determine the satisfaction with and quality of the partner relationship?

Definition of Stress

There are a number of different definitions of stress, with respect to its causes, characteristics, sources and consequences, viewed from the perspective of different scientific disciplines. Authors Steinberger and Cizmici (1991) consider these definitions and indicate that stress reflects the pressures from the environment, causing an emotional tension and anxiety, while according to other authors, this emotional tension is the essence of stress, while pressures from the environment are stressors, or agents of stress. Any agent that disturbs the balance of an organism, or its mental, physical and social integrity, may cause a stress. These agents are referred to sources of stress, i.e. stressors (Kalicanin et al., 2011).

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There are many sources of stress and they are classified into several groups:

- 1) Personal (types of personality, life changes, demographic characteristics),
- 2) Interpersonal (different interpersonal conflicts),
- 3) Organisational (incompatibility of the job contents, working hours, poor physical conditions in the work environment)

Partner relationship quality

Partner relationship quality may be defined as an objectively existing set of desirable characteristics, such as the feeling of mutual love and respect, equal division of responsibilities and duties, joint decision-making, agreeing on important issues in life. Close partner relationship is a form in which most people spend their lifetime. Therefore, it is very important to understand the factors connected with the quality of our partner relationship. Stress certainly is a significant factor, which is a threat to the partner relationship on the one hand, while on the other hand, the quality partner relationship may be efficient in the reduction of stress.

Assessment of the high quality of intimate relations makes a person feel protected and loved, emotionally and socially supported, which results in perceiving the problems as less threatening (Batinic & Vukosavljevic-Gvozden, 2008).

For this reason, the main purpose of this survey is to analyze the nature of interconnection between the three sources of stress, individual, interpersonal and organizational and satisfaction in a romantic relationship, as well as to determine differences in the quality of partner relationships and frequency of

various stressors, with reference to age and gender of the respondents.

Method

Sample

The survey sample is adequate, comprising 100 respondents, both male and female, above the age of 18, who were either married or in a relationship.

Instruments

The three groups of stress sources were measured by the Stress Sources Questionnaire (Interpersonal Skills for Business, 2007).

In assessing the degree of the partner relationship quality, we used the Relationship Assessment Scale (Hendrick, 1988).

Results

To respond to the main goal of this survey, Table 1 presents the results of the Pearson Correlation of the quality of romantic relationships in three groups of stress sources. As noted, all three sources of stress are negatively and statistically significantly correlated with the partner relationship quality. The relationship quality shares the largest percentage of variation with the personal and family-related source of stress ($r=-0.286$, $p<0.01$), then the individual ($r=-0.241$, $p<0.05$) and significantly less with the organizational source ($r=-0.266$, $p<0.05$). This indicates that the less present the stressors from all three groups, the better assessed the partner relationship quality.

Table 1. Results of the correlation analysis

Dimension		Sources of stress		
		Individual	Personal and family-related	Organisational
Partner relationship quality	r	-0.241	-0.286	-0.206
	p	0.016	0.004	0.040
	N	100	100	100

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to establish that all three sources of stress provide an incremental contribution to predicting the partner relationship quality. The variable of partner

relationship quality was used as a criterion, while three predictors were the three sources of stress. The stepwise regression analysis method was used. The results were presented in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2. Multiple Correlation Coefficient and Determination Coefficient

Model	R	R ²	Corrected R ²	F	p
1	0.286	0.082	0.072	8.723	0.004

Table 3. Standardized Beta Coefficient

Predictor	β	t	p
Personal and family-related sources	-0.286	2.953	0.004

Discussion

The main issue in this survey was to examine the nature of connection of stress, caused by different agents outside a partner relationship and to assess its quality. It seems that surveys most often focus on establishing the agents of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a romantic relationship that concerned the agents alone, such as quarrels, infidelity and so on. Consequently, two main goals were set in this survey.

When it comes to the first goal, the results indicated that individual, personal and family-related, as well as organizational sources of stress were significantly connected with the assessment of quality of romantic relationships. In other words, those who think they encounter a number of stressors, regardless of their source, will be less satisfied with their partner relationship. This may indicate that, when an individual is under stress, this will reflect on different aspects of their life, and at that particular moment the origin of that stress is irrelevant. In this respect, for instance, negative things experienced by an individual at work will be transferred to their private life, because the state of stress, no matter what its source is, will reduce the capacity and willingness of the individual to engage in a positive, efficient and functional partner relationship.

Nevertheless, the regression analysis indicated that the partner relationship quality is most closely connected with the personal and family-related source of stress and that individual and organizational factors do not provide any novel explanation. This means that what is common to individual and organizational sources of stress and the partner relationship quality is also common to the assessment of personal and family-related stressors. It may be assumed that a certain predisposition determines whether some individuals will simply perceive their environment as more stressful (Funder, 2016; Rauthman, Sherman, & Funder, 2015) or, when exposed to the intense effects of a concrete stressor, any situation will seem to be stressful to them. In any case, it is reasonable that stressors arising from personal and family life

are the main agents of satisfaction with a romantic relationship, because this relationship also belongs to personal and family-related aspects of life.

Differences with regard to gender were obtained only in cases of assessing the individual agents' effects on stress, where women achieved significantly higher score on the scale. These results could perhaps be explained by the fact that there are cultural differences in the role of men and women in a society. Consequently, it seems to be more acceptable that "women tend to be weaker" and the main source of their own stress. In other words, women are more inclined to introspection, which makes them more vulnerable towards a wide range of stressors. As far as the assessment of the partner relationship quality is concerned, no differences were obtained with reference to gender.

In assessing the individual sources of stress, differences were obtained with reference to age groups as well. In fact, younger respondents assessed that their traits were often the source of stress, in a much greater extent than with the older respondents. It is possible that it is so because of the higher emotional instability of young people, along with significant changes and challenges of their age, so they tend to reconsider things more, what makes them realize that they alone are the source of their stress.

Considering the fact that differences with reference to gender and age were obtained in assessing the individual source of stress, it turned out that once the variability of these two grouping variables is eliminated, the connection with the assessment of the partner relationship quality disappears. This indicates that the connection probably exists only in a subsample of women and young people, if we monitor the connection direction between the two variables, as well as the fact that these two categories have a higher score in the assessment of individual stressors' effects. In other words, it is possible that individual stressors influence the quality of partner relationship, although to a greater extent among women and young people.

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