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Biography

Stephanie Susinski, is a clinical research coordinator in Dr. Heather Tulloch's Cardiovascular Health Psychology lab at the University of Ottawa Heart Institute and incoming graduate student in psychology. She coordinates a randomized controlled trial, Healing Hearts Together, evaluating a couples-based intervention to improve relationship quality and cardiac health outcomes. She has presented at behavioral medicine conferences covering topics on mental health interventions and neuropsychological outcomes following cardiac events. Stephanie authored a scoping review on psychological interventions for women with cardiac disease and led a meta-analysis on mental health interventions for this population.

Relationship Quality, Motivation and Health Behaviors Among Patients with Heart Disease

Abstract:

Background: Cardiac disease is the leading cause of global mortality. Social relationships may engender self-determined motivation for risk-reducing behaviors. The present study examines the association between couple relationship quality and cardiac health behaviors, and if it is mediated by motivation.

Methods: Participants completed validated questionnaires on motivation and health behaviors, including fruit and vegetable intake, alcohol use, and physical activity (Godin Leisure-Time Exercise Questionnaire). Relationship quality (RQ) was assessed using the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. Global motivation (adapted GMS-28) was calculated using the Relative Autonomy Index. PROCESS macro in SPSS was used to examine whether motivation mediated the association between relationship quality and health behaviors.

Results: A total of 263 patients (77% male; Mean age = 63 years; 91% White) participated; 75% were in satisfying relationships. Alcohol consumption was the only health behavior in which a direct effect of RQ was present. Higher RQ was associated with increased alcohol intake ($b = .0457$, $p = .0366$) albeit with low levels of consumption ($M=3.4$ drinks/week); motivation did not mediate this relationship. Motivation mediated small but significant indirect effects of RQ on fruit and vegetable intake ($b = .0025$, 95% BCa CI [.0003, .0056]; $M=2.8$ servings/day) and MVPA ($b = .3282$, 95% BCa CI [.0105, .8427]; $M=198$ minutes/week).

Conclusion: These findings suggest that RQ is related to alcohol consumption, while motivation may foster exercise and healthy eating. Future research with a diverse sample (e.g., ethnicity, relationship distress) is required to validate these findings.