

Study finds that even aloof husbands have lower testosterone levels than unmarried men

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A fascinating new study is the first outside of North America to observe lower testosterone levels among married men. Supporting a growing body of research, the study reveals that even married men who are considered aloof spouses and provide minimal parenting have much lower testosterone levels than single, unmarried men.

In the October issue of *Current Anthropology*, Peter B. Gray (University of Nevada, Las Vegas), Peter T. Ellison (Harvard University), and Benjamin C. Campbell (Boston University) investigated the links between male testosterone levels and marital status among modern-day pastoralists in northern Kenya – of whom less than 1.5 percent consider their wives a source of emotional support.

The Ariaal males serve as herd boys until they reach puberty, at which point they are initiated, become warriors, and accumulate livestock. They do not marry and have children until around 30, and, the researchers suggest, value social bonds with male peers more than spousal bonds or familial bonds.

“These findings add to the cross-cultural scope of published data on the topic of human pair bonding, parenting and testosterone,” explain the researchers. “While a number of North American studies have shown lower testosterone levels among monogamously married men compared with their single counterparts, no study outside North America had observed this.”

The researchers measured testosterone in morning and afternoon saliva samples of more than 200 Ariaal men over the age of twenty. They found that monogamously married men had lower testosterone levels than unmarried men in both the morning and afternoon. However, contrary to expectations, married men with more than one wife (polygynously married men) had even lower levels of testosterone than the monogamously married men.

“These results lend further support to arguments that male testosterone levels reflect, in part, variation in male mating effort,” the researchers write. “[However], contrary to earlier findings... polygynously married men did not show higher testosterone levels. In fact, follow-up analyses among Ariaal men aged 40 and older revealed lower testosterone levels among polygynously married men compared with monogamously married men.”

The researchers suggest that this may be due to the fact that it is older men – who typically have lower testosterone levels – who have the social status and wealth required to obtain more than one wife.

Citation: Gray, Peter B., Peter T. Ellison, and Benjamin C. Campbell, “Consanguineous Marriage and Early Mortality in a Reproductive Isolate.” *Current Anthropology* 48:5.

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