

Research finds human emotions hold sway over physical health worldwide

March 4 2009

A researcher from the University of Kansas has spearheaded a new investigation into the link between emotions and health. The research proves that positive emotions are critical for upkeep of physical health for people worldwide, above all for those who are deeply impoverished.

The study, a joint undertaking between KU and Gallup, will be presented today at the annual meeting of the American Psychosomatic Society in Chicago.

"We've known for a while now that emotions play a critical role in physical health," said Sarah Pressman, assistant professor of psychology at KU and a Gallup senior research associate. "But until recently, most of this research was conducted only in industrialized countries. So we couldn't know whether feelings like happiness or sadness matter to the health of people who have more pressing concerns — like getting enough to eat or finding shelter. But now we do."

Data from the Gallup World Poll drove the findings, with adults in more than 140 countries providing a representative sample of 95 percent of the world's population. The sample included more than 150,000 adults.

Participants reported emotions such as happiness, enjoyment, worry and sadness. They described their physical health problems — such as pain and fatigue — and answered questions about whether their most basic needs like food, shelter and personal safety were adequately met.

According to Pressman, positive emotions unmistakably are linked to better health, even when taking into account a lack of basic needs. The inverse holds true as well: Negative emotions were a reliable predictor of worse health.

Most strikingly, the association between emotion and physical health was more powerful than the connection between health and basic human physical requirements, like adequate nourishment. Even without shelter or food, positive emotions were shown to boost health. Indeed, this association was strongest in the poorest countries surveyed.

Thus, the link between emotional health and physical health looks to be a worldwide fact, and especially so for people living with the fewest creature comforts.

More information: More on the Gallup World Poll is available online at: [www.gallup.com/video/106357/In ... llup-World-Poll.aspx](http://www.gallup.com/video/106357/In...llup-World-Poll.aspx) .

Source: University of Kansas

Citation: Research finds human emotions hold sway over physical health worldwide (2009, March 4) retrieved 3 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-03-human-emotions-sway-physical-health.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--