

Study Shows that Women's Compassion for Others Benefits the Self

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(PhysOrg.com) -- The Dalai Lama holds that compassion -- concern for the well-being of others -- leads to happiness. Now a new study has found that compassion may also have health benefits in the form of stress reduction for women.

The study involving 59 women found that those who demonstrated high levels of compassion for others were more receptive to social support, enabling them to better handle acute [psychological stress](#) and maintain overall well-being, according to psychologists at the University of Maine, University of California - Berkeley and University of California - San Francisco.

The higher the women's compassion, the lower their blood pressure and cortisol levels, and the higher their beneficial heart rate variability when an emotionally stressful task was buffered by social support -- smiling, nodding and encouraging words -- offered by another person. When the same [stressor](#) was not buffered by social support, women experienced significant increases in blood pressure and cortisol, regardless of their individual levels of compassion.

The research demonstrates that concern for the well-being of others does, indeed, benefit the self. By increasing the effectiveness of social support, compassion served a [stress reduction](#) function for women in the study.

The research findings by graduate student Brandon Cosley and

psychologist Shannon McCoy at UMaine; Laura Saslow at UC-Berkeley; and Elissa Epel at UC-San Francisco were published in the [Journal of Experimental Social Psychology](#).

Provided by University of Maine

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