

Emotion-health connection not limited to wealthy nations

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(Medical Xpress)—Positive emotions are known to play a role in physical well-being, and stress is strongly linked to poor health, but is this strictly a "First World" phenomenon? In developing nations, is the fulfillment of basic needs more critical to health than how one feels? A UC Irvine researcher has found that emotions do affect health around the world and may, in fact, be more important to wellness in low-income countries.

The study, which appears online in [Psychological Science](#), is the first to examine the emotion-health connection in a [representative sample](#) of 150,000 people in 142 countries. Previous research on the topic has been limited to industrialized nations.

"We wondered whether the fact that emotions make a difference in our health is simply because we have the luxury of letting them," said Sarah Pressman, assistant professor of [psychology](#) & social behavior and the study's lead author. "We wanted to assess the impact of emotions on health in places where people face famine, homelessness and serious safety concerns that might be more critical correlates of wellness."

Against expectations, researchers found that the link between positive emotions (enjoyment, love, happiness) and health is stronger in countries with a weaker gross domestic product. In fact, the association increased as GDP decreased, according to Pressman.

People in Malawi, which has a per capita GDP of \$900, show a more

robust connection between positive emotions and health than residents of the U.S., which has a per capita GDP of \$49,800.

"A hostile American with hypertension can take blood pressure-lowering medication. A Malawian cannot," Pressman said. "Medical interventions might lower the impact of emotions on health."

Using data from the Gallup World Poll, researchers noted whether participants had reported experiencing enjoyment, love, happiness, worry, sadness, stress, boredom, depression or anger during the previous day. They also measured physical health and the degree to which subjects' basic needs were met. Security was assessed by asking if participants felt safe walking alone at night or whether they had been robbed, assaulted or mugged.

"We hope that by showing that this phenomenon is prevalent and stronger than some factors considered critical to wellness, more attention will be drawn to the importance of studying both positive and negative emotions," Pressman said.

She co-authored the study with Shane Lopez of the Gallup Organization and Matthew Gallagher of Boston University.

Provided by University of California, Irvine

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