

Rocky marriages not always bad for your health

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Credit: Michigan State University

For men, an unhappy marriage may actually slow the development of diabetes and promote successful treatment once they do get the disease, finds a national study led by a Michigan State University sociologist.

Why? It may be because wives are constantly regulating their husband's

health behaviors, especially if he is in poor health or diabetic. And while this may improve the husband's health, it also can be seen as annoying and provoke hostility and emotional distress.

"The study challenges the traditional assumption that negative marital quality is always detrimental to health," said Hui Liu, MSU associate professor of sociology and lead investigator of the federally funded research. "It also encourages family scholars to distinguish different sources and types of marital quality. Sometimes, nagging is caring."

Using data from the National Social Life, Health and Aging Project, Liu and colleagues analyzed survey results from 1,228 married respondents over five years. At the onset of the study, the respondents were 57 to 85 years old; 389 had diabetes at the end of the study.

Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death in the United States. More than 29 million Americans had diabetes in 2012, or 9.3 percent of the population.

Liu, an expert in population-based health and family science, investigated the role of marital quality in [diabetes risk](#) and management and found two major gender differences:

*The most surprising finding was that, for men, an increase in negative marital quality lowered the risk of developing diabetes and increased the chances of managing the disease after its onset. Diabetes requires frequent monitoring that the wives could be prodding the husband to do, boosting his health but also increasing marital strain over time.

*For women, a good marriage was related to a lower risk of being diabetic five years later. Women may be more sensitive than men to the quality of a relationship and thus more likely to experience a health boost from a good-quality relationship, Liu said.

"Since diabetes is the fastest growing chronic condition in the United States, implementation of public policies and programs designed to promote [marital quality](#) should also reduce the risk of [diabetes](#) and promote [health](#) and longevity, especially for women at older ages," the study says.

The study, published online in the *Journals of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, was co-authored by Shannon Shen, an MSU graduate, and Linda Waite, professor at the University of Chicago.

Provided by Michigan State University

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