

# Do single people suffer more? The mere presence of a partner may reduce pain

August 23 2019

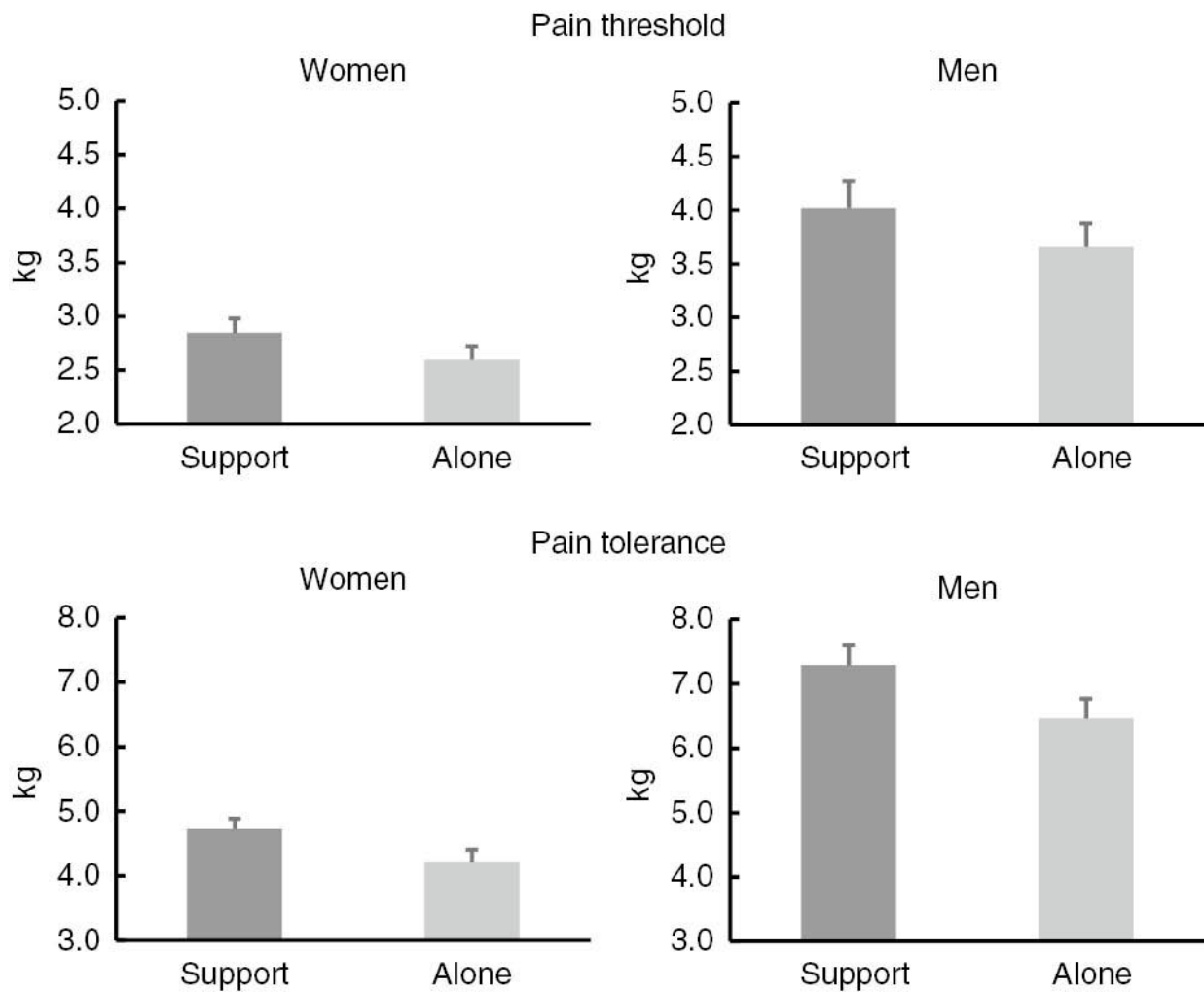


Fig. 1: Pain threshold and pain tolerance during both experimental conditions.

Researchers at the University of Health Sciences, Medical Informatics and Technology (UMIT, Hall, Austria) and the University of the Balearic Islands (Palma de Mallorca, Spain) have confirmed the analgesic effects of social support—even without verbal or physical contact.

The short communication, titled "Dispositional empathy is associated with experimental [pain](#) reduction during provision of social support by [romantic partners](#)," by Stefan Duschek, Lena Nassauer, Casandra I. Montoro, Angela Bair and Pedro Montoya, has recently been published in the *Scandinavian Journal of Pain*.

The authors assessed sensitivity to pressure pain in 48 [heterosexual couples](#) with each participant tested alone and in the passive presence of their partner. Dispositional empathy was quantified by a questionnaire.

In the presence, as compared to the absence, of their partners both men and women exhibited higher pain thresholds and tolerance as well as lower sensory and affective pain ratings on constant pressure stimuli. Partner empathy was positively associated with pain tolerance and inversely associated with sensory pain experience.

"Repeatedly, talking and touching have been shown to reduce pain, but our research shows that even the passive presence of a romantic partner can reduce it and that partner empathy may buffer affective distress during pain exposure," said Professor Stefan Duschek of UMIT, speaking on behalf of the authors.

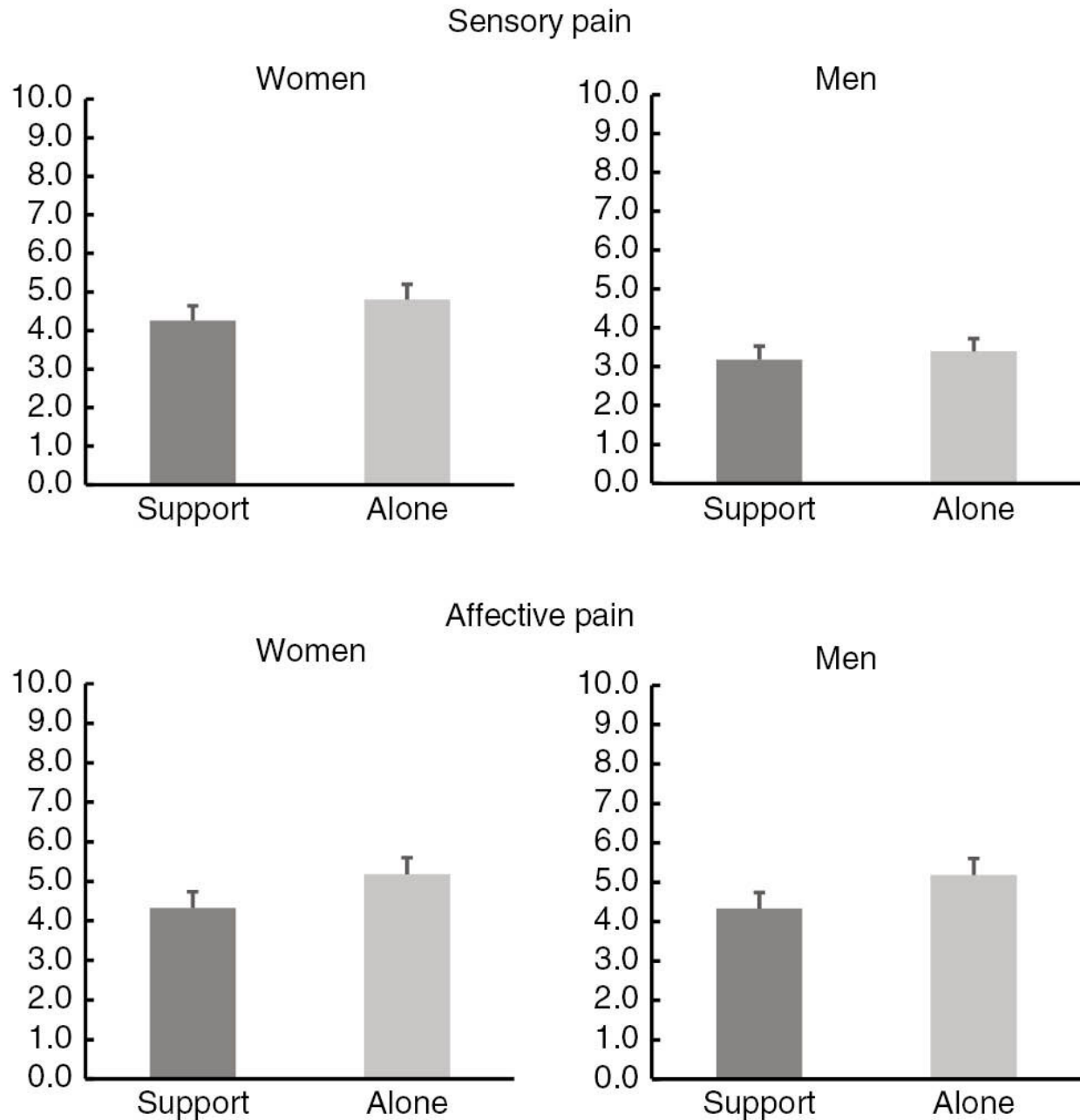


Fig. 2: VAS ratings on constant pressure stimulation during both experimental conditions.

**More information:** Stefan Duschek et al. Dispositional empathy is

associated with experimental pain reduction during provision of social support by romantic partners, *Scandinavian Journal of Pain* (2019).

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