

The Impact of Love on our Lives

Love can be defined as a strong feeling of affection one experiences towards another person. Love is held in high regard and is featured heavily in the media. Try to listen to a song on the radio or watch a film in the cinema without love playing a part – it won't be an easy task. Love is all around us – especially around Valentine's Day. I thought I would look into the effects of love on mental health. Is love, in its various forms, good for you?

All we need is love? "All we need is love," sang the *Beatles*, and while there are some obvious exceptions, such as food and water, they may not have been too far off. A study conducted by Harlow (1958) demonstrated the powerful effects that love can have on the behavior and development of an individual. Harlow revealed the importance of love for healthy childhood development through showing the adverse effects of deprivation on young rhesus monkeys. Deprivation of comfort and love caused digestive problems and psychological distress in the monkeys. The results of this study suggested that **love and affection could be primary needs** as necessary as food or water, showing a new perspective on the nature of love.



Love and mental health: Depression and anxiety are two of the most common mental health disorders worldwide. Could love have any impact on these disorders? Higher rates of depression and anxiety are linked to social isolation, indicating that spending time with others could reduce the rates of these disorders. In fact, research has shown that getting married and staying married has been reported to reduce depression in both men and women. Particular therapy methods focus on interpersonal relationships as a way to improve depression. One in particular, Emotionally Focused Therapy, focuses on interpersonal relationships in order to transform difficult relationships into ones that feel safe and secure. This has been shown to significantly reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. These therapeutic methods emphasize the importance of personal relationships for good mental health. A 1981 study showed that those who were happier and more satisfied in their relationships showed lower levels of depression, anxiety and self-consciousness. This suggests that **intimacy could protect against depression and anxiety**. Encouraging one another to be involved in **loving, supportive** relationships could potentially help us to overcome or better manage common mental illnesses.

Love and physical health: According to Esch and Stefano (2005), love, compassion and joy improve the functioning of our immune system and help us to battle diseases. Supportive relationships have even been shown to improve prognoses in conditions such as cancer by reducing symptoms of anxiety and depression. It has also been reported that those who are married are happier, live longer, drink less alcohol and have less doctor's appointments than single people. **All is not lost if you are not in love, though** – research has also shown that **strong relationships with friends and family** improve health outcomes as much as quitting smoking or quitting drinking do.

Love can have positive effects on our mental and physical health. It can lead to better ability to cope with stress, lower levels of depression and anxiety and even better physical health. Based on psychological research, intimate relationships have the potential to foster good mental and physical health. For those not in love – **friendship** has also been shown to have a positive effect on your health. All of the benefits of loving relationships make it easy to see why love is so important to so many people and why this time of year is celebrated in many countries around the world.

Excerpts taken from article written by Fiona Kerrigan

To speak with an EAP counselor, please call (402) 398-5566 or (888) 847-4975.