

Providing Social Support and Health: Conditions and Temporal Dynamics

Although social interactions are integral for humans, understanding the conditions for when they benefit or impair health remains limited for several reasons: 1) It has been assumed that only recipients profit from social support, whereas providers suffer a loss of resources. While, there is evidence to indicate that support provision can, at times, be detrimental to providers' health (e.g., caregiver burnout), more recent studies show that helping others not only feels good, but can even elicit physiological benefits in support providers (e.g., longevity of volunteers). However, due to the lack of an overarching theory on the conditions for healthy support provision, findings remain descriptive and incoherent. 2) Previous research has mostly examined between-person differences in 3) clinical populations (e.g., dyads with an ill partner), neglecting momentary contextual influences on support provision. By observing the provision of support from an intra-individual perspective in healthy individuals' natural surroundings, more ecologically valid implications for health-promoting support can be provided. Based on these research gaps, the PROSPECT program aims to a) define, operationalize and manipulate the conditions for health benefits from providing support and b) develop a time-sensitive theory for capturing the dynamic health effects of providing support in the general population (i.e., peer-dyads). We propose – based on self-determination theory – that support is only positively associated with providers' health under three conditions: if it is *freely chosen*, builds *competence* and *relatedness*. Our Polish-German research team uniquely combines expertise in social interactions, theoretical groundwork, multimodal health assessment and statistical modelling. Subproject I will provide insights from an immediate short-term temporal resolution in a video-observation on dyadic interactions (Study 1) and a controlled experiment, manipulating the proposed conditions in the laboratory to test their effects on self-reported psychological and objective physiological health (e.g., affect, cortisol, alpha-amylase; Study 2). Subproject II will focus on the medium- to long-term dynamics and accumulative associations between support provision and health under these conditions in real-life momentary assessment bursts, spanning 12 months (Study 3), including objective heart rate variability (Study 4). Understanding under which conditions supporting others is beneficial for providers' health is essential for all scientific and applied areas investigating social interactions, e.g., relationships in private and professional contexts (e.g., romantic partners, co-workers, therapeutic relations), motivational and life-span research (e.g., helping motives, caregiving), as well as applied prevention and intervention issues (e.g., non-profit work, help in times of crises).