

Impact of love on psychological well-being

In 2007, archaeologists uncovered a burial site containing two skeletons dating back to approximately 5,000-6,000 BCE. The remains, identified as those of a man and a woman, indicated that the couple was huddled together in what appeared to be a romantic embrace. Although we may never know the full history of this Neolithic couple, their discovery stirs the imagination, evoking powerful images of love. Our pop culture is full of such iconic examples of love. Take, for instance, Homer's Iliad with Paris and Helen of Troy, the medieval tale of Tristan and Isolde, Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, Pride and Prejudice's Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy, and Titanic's Jack and Rose. Each of these stories centers on love—love that defies death and suffering, love that can initiate conflicts, love that can destroy and take lives, and love that can create life, foster family, purpose, and meaning. But love is not only a captivating story or a construct of literary fiction. In our two recent studies, based on a sample of 93,158 participants from 93 countries, we found that love is a universal human experience and is widely regarded as a prerequisite for a long-term romantic relationship.

Love is a key predictor of relationship quality and satisfaction. Being in a successful romantic relationship has been linked to various life domains, including enhanced well-being, fewer mental health issues, greater happiness. Conversely, conflict within romantic relationships has been associated with relationship dissolution, divorce, and family instability. Given the hypothesized central role of love in these areas, it is crucial to deepen our understanding of this universal human experience. However, surprisingly few scholars have focused directly on love. Much of psychological research has instead focused on related constructs, such as mate selection, relationship satisfaction, and relationship stability. Although these phenomena are closely linked to love, some scholars suggest that love itself may be the driving force behind them all. Therefore, this project, comprising three studies, will focus directly on love and its connection to well-being.

In longitudinal **Study 1**, we will verify if intensity of experienced love and perceived intensity of partner's love influence well-being. In **Study 2**, we will synthesize existing research on the love–well-being link through a systematic review and meta-analysis. In **Study 3**, we will conduct a large-scale cross-cultural study, spanning at least 31 countries. We will test the universality of the love–well-being link in diverse populations, while also examining the role of socio-cultural factors, which may shape the love–well-being link.

In summary, the present project will contribute to expanding the focus of relationship science from relationship-related constructs, like relationship satisfaction or relationship quality, to love as a driving force of well-being and relational stability. By examining the antecedents, trajectory, and consequences of love through cross-cultural lenses, we aim to expand current psychological understanding and generate comprehensive insights into how love functions within diverse social and cultural contexts. This approach will allow us to break new ground by viewing love not merely as an individual feeling but as an experience that dynamically changes in time, stemming not only from within a person, but in relation to oneself and one's partner.