ABSTRACT


The Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation model of marriage sustains that the outcome of partner relationships is based on three substantial fields. These fields concern enduring vulnerabilities, stressful events and adaptive processes. The general aim of this thesis was to focus on factors that concern enduring vulnerabilities and stressful events. More specifically, aspects of early social relationships, personality, romantic attachment, and the workload during transition to parenthood were linked to the quality of partner relationships.

Study I. Utilizing data from a Swedish longitudinal project, relationships with parents and friends in adolescence were linked with partner relationships in adulthood. The results of this longitudinal study showed that adolescents with affectionate and trusting relationships with their parents reported greater satisfaction with their partner relationships in mid-life. Shyness and worries concerning peer and cross-gender relationships also had certain associations with later relationships, but on the whole, adolescent boys’ relationships with fathers had the clearest link with adult partner relationships.

Study II. The question addressed in this study concerned both the long-term and current links between neuroticism and the quality of partner relationships. Data from a Swedish longitudinal project was utilized. Results showed that a lower degree of satisfaction in partner relationships in mid-life was linked with higher current neuroticism scores. Opposing most of previous studies, this association appeared for both men and women. The longitudinal link between neuroticism in adolescence and partner relationships in adulthood was, however, not significant.

Study III. This study examined associations between attachment styles and couple relationships after transition to parenthood. The results showed that fearful mothers and dismissing mothers and fathers were less happy in their couple relationships. Attachment styles predicted significantly dissatisfaction in couple relationships for the second but not for the first time parents.

Study IV. This paper investigated the association between the quality of couple relationships and household work-load after the transition to parenthood. The results revealed a significant association between experiences of household work and the quality of couple relationships. These results indicate that even in a society with a high level of equality between men and women domestic work appears to be a sensitive indicator of relationship happiness. To sum up, the results of this thesis indicate that individuals who have the best adult partner relationships are those who have affectionate and trusting relationships with their parents in adolescence. The relationship experiences of both women and men are colored by their neurotic tendencies. Individuals with insecure attachment seem to be less happy in their partner relationships, as do also those individuals who cannot agree with their partners about the domestic work.

Key words: Partner relationships, marital satisfaction, longitudinal, adolescence, personality, neuroticism, attachment, household work, transition to parenthood.

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ISBN 91-628-5848-3  ISSN 1101-718X  ISRN GU/PSYK/AVH/--123--SE