

Cobb S. Social support as a moderator of life stress.

Psychosom. Med. 38:300-14, 1976.

[Brown University, Providence, RI]

Social support is defined as information leading the subject to believe that he or she is loved, esteemed, and belongs to a network of mutual obligation. The evidence showing it to be protective against the health consequences of various life stresses is reviewed. [The *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (SSCI)® indicates that this paper has been cited in over 400 publications since 1976.]

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In 1969, Susan Gore asked me if I had any problems on my mind worthy of a thesis. I was, at the time, at the Institute for Social Research of the University of Michigan and beginning to analyze the data from a major longitudinal study of the health and mental-health effects of job loss. I told her that the preliminary analyses were showing that the comparison between our urban and rural plant closings were suggesting that though the social effects were worse in the rural area, the health effects were less striking. She was intrigued and agreed to join the research team. After scouting the data a bit, and after much discussion, she decided to pursue the hypothesis that the dif-

ference was due to the more supportive behavior of the people in the small, tight-knit, rural community where feelings and concerns were shared and accepted.

The fact that she was able to find reasonable support for this hypothesis in the data already collected led to the further discussion within the research program entitled *Mental Health in Industry*. My colleagues, John R.P. French, Jr., and Robert L. Kahn, also became intrigued. We all started looking for effects in current studies, and I began to browse in the widely scattered literature on the subject.

Then I was elected president of the American Psychosomatic Society. By that time, I was convinced that social support was of serious importance to psychosomatic medicine, so it was hardly surprising that I picked the topic for my presidential address.

I suppose one of the reasons that this paper has been cited more often than other reviews appearing at about the same time is because the report defined the term social support (reference 1 shows how the definition has since evolved and been clarified) and because the review limited itself to the health and mental-health effects discovered in studies from a wide variety of disciplines. Probably much more important than these intrinsic characteristics of the paper is the simple fact that it appeared in a widely read journal at the beginning of an explosion of interest in this subject.

1. Cobb S & Jones I M. Social support, support groups and marital relationships. (Duck S, ed.) *Personal relationships. 5: repairing personal relationships*. London: Academic Press, 1984. p. 47-66.