

RELATIONSHIP SATISFACTION & DIET

Exploring the Mechanisms through which Intimate Relationships Influence Physical Health

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ABSTRACT

Understanding how intimate relationships influence physical health has been an important topic of focus; however, research remains unclear on the mechanisms through which this influence occurs. The purpose of this study was to examine how relationship satisfaction relates to diet quality, through mental health (depression and anxiety) and diet self-efficacy. Using a dyadic mediation model with a sample of 234 heterosexual couples, researchers found that women's higher relationship satisfaction was associated with better diet through lower depression and higher diet self-efficacy. Results revealed the same association between women's relationship satisfaction and diet through lower anxiety. Interestingly, rather than mediation through mental health, the association between men's relationship satisfaction and diet was mediated through their *partners'* diet self-efficacy.

SAMPLE

- 234 heterosexual, married couples who lived together and had been married at least 3 years; 87% of men and 82% of women were Caucasian
- Relationship Length ranged from 3.17-60.92 years, M = 20.66 years (S.D. = 15.29 years)
- Age range for men was 20-84 years, Mode = 32 years (S.D. = 15.37 years); Age range for women was 20-77 years, Mode = 39 years (S.D. = 15)
- Combined average income between \$60K and \$80K
- Majority had a bachelor's degree and health insurance and were mostly satisfied with their health

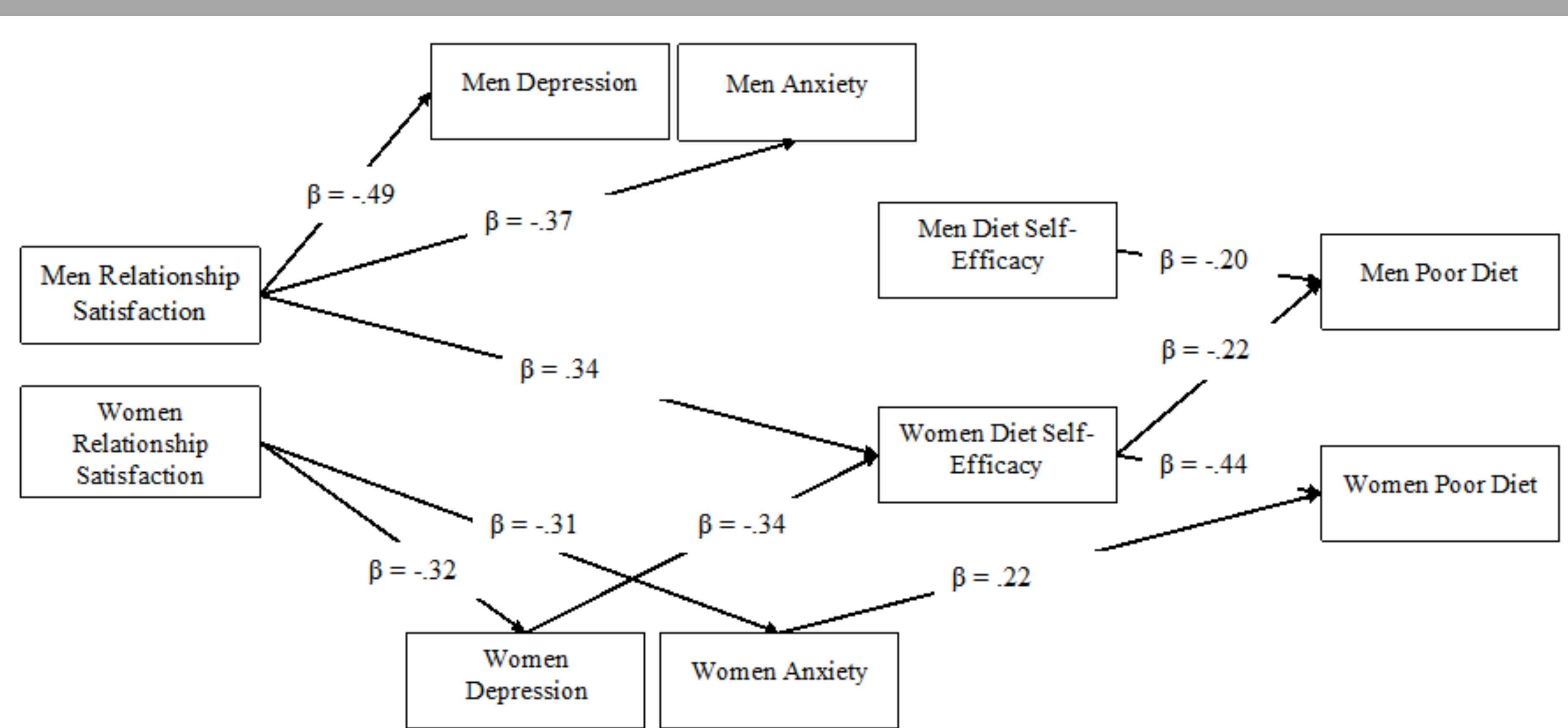
MEASURES

Relationship Satisfaction – *Couple Satisfaction Index (CSI)*, assesses overall happiness, comfort, security, and satisfaction in the relationship

Mental Health (Depression and Anxiety) – *Patient Health Questionnaire-4 (PHQ-4)*, evaluates frequency of depressive and anxious symptoms

Diet Self-Efficacy – 5 items assessing confidence in eating healthful foods in certain situations

Diet Quality – *Starting the Conversation (STC)* questionnaire, examines frequency of certain foods consumed in the previous week



Controls: BMI, Education, Age, Relationship Length, Income

$\chi^2 = 26.96 (24)$, $p = .306$, CFI = .996, TLI = .981, RMSEA = .023 (.00 - .06), SRMR = .037

DISCUSSION

Women with higher relationship satisfaction had lower depressive symptoms and greater diet self-efficacy, which was associated with better diet for both her and her partner. Women with higher relationship satisfaction also had less anxious symptoms and better diet quality. On the other hand, men's relationship satisfaction was associated with their diet quality *through their female partner's* diet self-efficacy. In most American homes, women oversee the meal preparation for the whole family (Pew Research Center, 2019) and thus their diet self-efficacy, or confidence in preparing and eating healthy food, influences both theirs and their partner's diet. Working to improve their relationship may improve couples' mental health (Kouros, Papp, & Cummings, 2008), promoting greater diet self-efficacy (Suman & Malhotra, 2016) in females and better dietary outcomes for both partners (Gibson-Smith, Bot, Brouwer, Visser, & Penninx, 2018).