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POSTER

THE POWER OF TOUCH: THE ROLE OF ATTACHMENT STYLES IN THE EXPERIENCE AND PHYSIOLOGICAL IMPACT OF CLASSICAL MASSAGE

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ABSTRACT

Social touch stimulates the release of endorphins in humans and primates, promoting bonding and relaxation. This study investigates the effects of classical massage therapy on women with different adult attachment styles, focusing on emotional well-being (PANAS), stress responses, and pain tolerance. Adult attachment styles vary from anxious (fear of losing connection) to avoidance. Avoidant individuals, value independence and may perceive touch as threatening due to neurobiological factors (e.g., reduced μ-opioid receptor activity in the anterior cingulate cortex) and might derive less benefits from a massage therapy.

Fifty women aged 20–35 participated in this study. On two consecutive days they were subjected to a 30-minute classical massage and a control condition (casual conversation) in randomized order. Measured parameters included PANAS (PA - Positive Affects, NA - Negative Affects), physiological stress indicators (e.g., galvanic skin response), and pain tolerance assessed via dolorimeter.

Higher avoidance scores showed a positive non-significant difference in positive affect ($r = 0.26$, $p = 0.072$), no significant association was found for negative affect ($p = 0.12$). Higher avoidance scores did not correlate with elevated stress during massage ($r = -0.04$, $p = 0.8349345$). However, pain tolerance significantly increased in individuals with higher avoidance scores during both massage ($p < 0.000001$) and control condition ($p < 0.00001$).

In conclusion, while massage did not significantly influence well-being or stress levels in the higher avoidance group, it was associated with a marked increase in pain tolerance. These findings highlight the complex interplay between attachment styles and responses to touch-based interventions.