

TALK

REPRODUCTIVE STRATEGIES AND WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH: AN EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE ON MATING CONFIDENCE AND WELL-BEING

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ABSTRACT

Mental health (MH) is a set of adaptations selected by natural selection that enhance survival and reproduction. A mismatch between the evolved mechanisms and the current modern environment may cause mental illness. Studies show that the mental health of both men and women is better when they are married. However, while married men have better MH than single, divorced and widowed men, married women have better MH only than single women. Relationship quality influences MH of both men and women, but married women in a poor relationship quality exhibited worse MH than single women, which was not seen in men. We investigated associations among MH (considering well-being and ill-being) and reproduction-related factors in 1,173 predominantly heterosexual Brazilian women ($M=31.89$; $SD=11.10$). They responded to online instruments measuring well-being (self-perceived happiness, life-satisfaction), ill-being (depression), mate value, intrasexual competition, age, and sociosexuality. Women who scored higher in mate value and lower in intrasexual competition and sociosexual desire reported better MH; age affected MH positively. While intrasexual competition and unrestricted sociosexuality may enhance reproductive success in some contexts, they are generally risky and less effective, often leading to poorer MH, whereas women with greater confidence in their mate value tend to have better MH. Also, contradicting evolutionary perspectives on women's mate value, the results suggest that, over the years, women improve their mental health regardless of the decrease of their reproductive potential, pointing to a possible role of maturity and emotional stability acquired over the lifespan.