

The Journal Writing Study – Summary

The journal writing study gives credence to a physical-psychological connection of stress and illness. The randomized, controlled study was conducted at the State University of New York at Stony Brook between October 1996 and December 1997.

A group of 112 patients with asthma or rheumatoid arthritis participated in the study. Thirty-nine asthma patients and 32 rheumatoid arthritis patients were instructed to write about the most stressful event in their lives.

Serving as a control group, 22 asthma patients and 19 rheumatoid arthritis patients were asked to write about their daily plans. The patients were asked to write for 20 minutes on 3 consecutive days. There were 107 participants who actually completed the task.

Rheumatoid arthritis patients were examined and assessed by a rheumatologist. (a doctor who specializes in arthritis and related conditions). Spirometry (a simple lung function test) was used to evaluate the asthma patients.

Following the journal writing assignment, for comparison to baseline, the journal writing study patients were re-examined at intervals of 2 weeks, 2 months, and 4 months.

Results

Substantial improvement was demonstrated by **47.1 percent** of the overall group after journal writing about stressful experiences they endured.

Comparatively, **24.3 percent** of those who wrote about daily plans improved.

Conversely, **21.6 percent** who wrote about daily plans exhibited a worsening condition compared to only **4.3 percent** who wrote about stressful occurrences.

The journal writing study results specific to the rheumatoid arthritis group revealed a **28 percent** reduction in overall disease activity for those journal writing about stress compared to no change in the control group. It was notable that the group of rheumatoid arthritis patients did **not** improve until the end of the 4-month study. The reason is unexplained.

Conclusions

Stress

Though many questions remain regarding the study, the data is considered "clinically relevant", certainly enough to suggest that psychological events impact medical events. Stress and stress relief are likely contributory to disease.

Journal Writing

Journal writing, which chronicles experiences of anxiety and disquietude, can serve as a vehicle for the expression of negative emotion. Assuming a physical-psychological connection, the release of negative emotion has a positive influence on physical well-being.

References: JAMA, Effects Of Writing About Stressful Experiences On Symptom Reduction In Patients With Asthma Or Rheumatoid Arthritis, Abstract April 14, 1999. Study Shows Stress-Illness Link, Intellihealth, April 14, 1999