

Narcissistic men have higher levels of stress hormone

January 23rd, 2012



Men who are narcissistic are likely to have higher levels of a primary stress hormone called cortisol, a new study finds.

However, the same trend was not as strong for women with narcissist traits, according to research published Monday in the journal Public Library of Science ONE.

“The more narcissistic, the more cortisol that men have in mundane situations,” said author Sara Konrath, who is the director of the Interdisciplinary Program on Empathy and Altruism Research at the University of Michigan.

Narcissism is a trait that exhibits “grandiosity, an inflated sense of self-importance, and over-estimations of uniqueness.” If severe, it can also be a personality disorder recognized by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

The trait has some positive qualities, such as abundance of self-esteem and positive sense of self. Narcissistic people characteristically tend to overestimate their intellectual abilities, attractiveness and positive personality traits, wrote Konrath.

But they don’t enjoy healthy relationships with others because they’re generally low on empathy and high in hostility – especially when their positive self-image is threatened. Since previous research confirmed that narcissism has a harmful effect on relationships, Konrath wanted to know more.

“I wondered if there’s harm going on, but it’s a harm we can’t articulate or recognize,” she said.

Narcissists aren’t likely to admit that they’re stressed or anxious. So she needed an objective measure and decided to use cortisol levels to understand how narcissism could affect one’s health.

In the study, 106 undergraduate students (79 females, 27 males, mean age 20.1 years) from one Midwestern and one Southwestern American university took two cortisol tests and answered several questions about themselves. They were unknowingly taking the [Narcissistic Personality Inventory](#), which is used to assess people’s narcissism.

It gives statements like "I find it easy to manipulate people," and "If I ruled the world it would be a better place," to which the respondent agrees or disagrees.

Konrath observed that men with higher levels of narcissism had more cortisol. It was minimal in women, but about 2.5 times stronger in men.

Cortisol is a measurement of how prepared your body is ready to respond to a threat, said Konrath. If the cortisol response is always high in the absence of a threat, it indicates an overactive response in the body. This can have long-term health effects such as blood sugar imbalances, heart problems and weight gain.

The study could not determine why men appeared to be much more affected than women. But Konrath suggested that there could be overlaps between narcissism and male gender roles.

"We think what's going on is, there's some sort of especially toxic relationship between both being male and having a sense of masculinity or threat to a masculine identity."

There could be a special vigilance for any threats that challenge their sense of toughness and competence, she said.

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