

AREA TWO: PUBLIC HEALTH AND MEDICINE

Three research studies have been funded in the Public Health and Medicine section. These include a clinical intervention study in breast cancer patients and their partners, an epidemiologic case-control study of military veterans experiencing PTSD, and a sociological study of how broken lives are healed and empowered among participants in a charismatic church ministry program. Together, these investigations will document how love impacts on physical and psychological well-being across the natural history of disease in both clinical and community settings. This work promises to start a new field of medical research concerned with the health effects of love.

Research Area Consultant

Jeff Levin, Ph.D., M.P.H., an epidemiologist and former medical school professor, is IRUL's research area consultant for Public Health and Medicine. Beginning in the 1980s, his research helped create the field of religion, spirituality, and health. He is the author of over 130 scholarly publications, as well as the popular book, *God, Faith, and Health*. Dr. Levin is currently researching historical and theological perspectives on what it means to love and be loved by God, as well as the physical and mental health effects of such a loving relationship.

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1. Effects of Compassionate/Loving Intention as a Therapeutic Intervention by Partners of Breast Cancer Patients: A Randomized Controlled Trial

Ellen G. Levine, Ph.D., M.P.H., medical psychologist at California Pacific Medical Center, is principal investigator of this research project. This study will investigate the effects of compassionate loving intention by partners of breast cancer patients on a variety of health and health-care outcomes; it will also examine quality-of-life indicators in both patients and partners. The study will include measures of functional health, medical services utilization, psychological and spiritual well-being, marital satisfaction, physiological response to stress, and several psychological tests.

Stage I or II breast cancer patients and their partners will be recruited from the San Francisco Bay Area and randomized into experimental and control groups. Experimental-group partners will be given a training workshop structured to enhance their ability to provide loving compassion. Supported by daily home practice for three months, the training will consist of guided instruction in several meditative and mental focusing approaches, including a Tibetan Buddhist breath-based technique for eliciting compassion and LeShan type I healer training.

This project will provide an excellent opportunity to examine whether an intervention designed to strengthen the sense of self-efficacy in partners of breast cancer patients can enhance their success as caregivers. If systematic training in techniques of loving compassion is shown to be effective, it may offer a means of improving the care of people suffering from a wide range of chronic illnesses.

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2. Care for the Soul: The Role of Divine Love and Human Love in Adjustment to Military Trauma

Robert Hierholzer, M.D., psychiatrist with the Veterans Affairs Central California Health Care System, is principal investigator of this project, which is a longitudinal epidemiologic investigation of the protective effects of divine and human love on adjustment to military trauma among U.S. veterans.

Study subjects will be recruited from outpatient veterans at VA clinics in the Fresno area. A total of 100 case subjects who meet DSM-IV criteria for military-related post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and 100 control subjects who do not meet these criteria, will be sampled from this population. Participants will be given a battery of health-related tests – i.e., assessments related to PTSD, psychopathology, and symptomatology, as well as numerous psychosocial scales. These will include a set of validated measures assessing the presence of loving relationships with God and other people. Using a case-control design and epidemiologic methods of analysis, investigators will explore the relationships among different types of loving attachments, level of combat exposure, and development of current military-related PTSD in veterans.

This project promises to make exciting contributions to clinical care for sick veterans and to the validation of theoretical work in psychology that proposes salutary effects for secure attachments to significant others. Additionally, results should advance our understanding of the etiology and prognosis of PTSD.

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3. Charismatic Empowerment and Unlimited Love: A Social Psychological Assessment

Margaret M. Poloma, Ph.D., emeritus professor of sociology at the University of Akron, is principal investigator of the project, which entails a multifaceted investigation of dimensions of love, religious experience, and mysticism within a charismatic Christian church community serving Atlanta's poor.

Using a variety of qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches, Dr. Poloma will conduct a longitudinal evaluation of the church's training program, which seeks to rebuild and heal broken lives by empowering people with spiritual gifts. A centerpiece of this study will be the psychometric development and validation of a new multidimensional scale of love that is based on the work of sociologist Pitirim Sorokin and others. A battery of questions will be given to at least 200 respondents; the resulting scale will be used in subsequent analyses.

Results of this study will make an important contribution to research in the sociology and psychology of religion, as well as to ministries seeking to reach out to disadvantaged individuals through religiously grounded loving compassion.

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