HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY STUDIES

DISSERTATION DEFENSE FOR

STEPHANIE WILSON

TITLE: ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN DAILY PAIN COMMUNICATION AND PHYSICAL HEALTH FOR CHRONIC PAIN PATIENTS AND THEIR SPOUSES

Dissertation Committee
Dr. Lynn M. Martire, Chair
Professor of Human Development and Family Studies

Dr. David M. Almeida
Professor of Human Development and Family Studies

Dr. Martin J. Sliwinski
Professor of Human Development and Family Studies

Dr. Rachel A. Smith
Associate Professor of Communication Arts and Sciences

Date: December 18, 2015
Time: 9:00 – 11:00 AM
Location: 412 Biobehavioral Health Building

ABSTRACT

The majority of older adults in the U.S. and other countries suffer from persistent pain. As a leading contributor to missed work, lost wages, and medical expenses, the cost of chronic pain and pain-related disability in the United States is estimated at an annual $635 billion. Indeed, when pain is chronic, problems arise for individuals, families, and societies because of its long-term impairment on everyday physical function.

Together, the present studies seek to elucidate the health effects of pain expression and spouse responses for patients and spouses in daily life using intensive longitudinal assessments. Study 1 examines the frequency of patient pain expression in daily life and spousal parasympathetic activity in response to patient pain expression during interactions audio-recorded in the homes of three couples. In order to gauge the long-term physical impact of daily spouse responsiveness on patients, Study 2 investigates the associations of daily pain expression and spouse responses with changes in patient physical function over 18 months.

Study 1 found that the frequency of pain expression varied across the three patients—none, on average 3 times per day, and an average of 11 times daily. Also, contrary to prediction, spouse respiratory sinus arrhythmia (RSA) increased after patient expression, suggesting successful emotion regulation and social engagement. Results from Study 2 suggest daily empathic spouse responsiveness promotes long-term improvement of patient physical function.

Together, the current studies illustrate the proximal and distal health consequences of couples’ daily interaction patterns for patients and spouses.