

## Women's Unique Response to Stress

By Tian Dayton PhD, TEP

According to a cutting edge UCLA study; women have a range of response to stress that goes beyond *fight flight, freeze*, to what researchers are calling *tend and befriend*. In stressful situations most men and women produce the hormone oxytocin also known as the “touch chemical”, the one that makes both people and animals “calmer, more social and less anxious”, says the study’s main researcher, Shelley E. Taylor. But that’s where the similarity ends. The testosterone in men counteracts the calming effects of oxytocin while estrogen enhances it. Oxytocin can also lead to maternal behaviors making women want to grab the children, gather with other women and cluster for safety.

This research may turn some of our ideas about how stress affects men and women on it’s head and may also contribute to explaining why women live an average of seven and a half years longer than men. Oxytocin is a calming chemical that leads women to gather, talk and support each other through stress while men tend to isolate in order to calm down from their unmitigated release, “stand and fight” stress hormones such as adrenaline. All of this was evolution’s way of parceling out roles to maintain a tight “family of man” survival system. when encountering the preverbal saber tooth tiger but may be troublesome if applied to a “one size fits all” treatment modality today.

E. M. Jellinek, was hired in 1945 to analyze and interpret the data collected to help clarify the addiction process. The AA Grapevine sent out 16,000 questionnaires and received back 158 that were properly filled out.(Covington 1997) Ninety-eight respondents described their addiction and recovery in one way, while about fifteen described theirs in a very different way. The larger group was male, and the smaller group was female. Because the sample of fifteen women was too small to analyze separately, and because their data “differed so greatly” from that of the men, Jellinek threw out their responses. Consequently his famous curve, that has been a cornerstone of treatment for decades, was based on information pertinent to men and generalized to women.

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This material is excerpted from [The Magic of Forgiveness](#) by Tian Dayton PhD TEP, Health Communications