In a literature review, we found that social support protects persons from the potentially pathogenic effects of stressors when support is defined as perceived availability of social resources. In contrast, social support is beneficial for health irrespective of whether protective or stress-buffering effects of stressors were assessed. These distinctions fit well with our theories about how the social environment might influence health and are still reflected in our current views of this area.

I think the major reasons this article has had such a broad impact are its timeliness and its attraction to a very broad interdisciplinary audience. The article has become the standard reference to this area of work, and I think it is often cited by persons who have never read it. Hopefully, the clarification of the state of the literature, suggestions for methodological approaches, and theoretical proposals have also played some role in its impact. I do not consider this article one of my most important publications. There are at least five others that I view as making more substantial contributions.

Recognition for our work in social support includes invited addresses, an award from the American Psychological Association’s Division of Health Psychology (1987), and a career award from the National Institute of Mental Health (1987). Although I am sure that the visibility the Cohen and Wills article contributed to receiving these honors, I like to think that they were a reflection of the broad array of empirical and theoretical contributions made by my laboratory.


Received June 9, 1992