

Abstract

Mate choice is one of the most important choices in life, affecting satisfaction, health, and well-being of an individual. One of the specifics of human mate choice is the fact that aside from the individual, their relatives are frequently involved. But other close people can influence their relationship as well, for example friends. Our study's aim was to map the influence of friends on mate choice and subsequently on the quality and stability of the romantic relationship. We have conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with 10 men and 10 women in long-term romantic relationships. Using thematic analysis, we have found that while the individuals shared about their relationships more frequently with their friends rather than family, they assessed the importance of friends' and parents' opinion on average as comparable. The interviewees valued their family members' opinion more in matters of family, practical topics, and future plans. However, they preferred their friends' opinion in matters of relationship dynamics, problems in the relationship and emotional and sexual aspects of the relationship. Concerning differences between genders, we have found that men have shared about their romantic relationships significantly less with their family members but have shared about them more often with their friends. Friends had influenced the quality of the romantic relationships both in a supportive (e.g. their input had a strengthening effect on prior mate choice) and disruptive (e.g. their input resulted in a conflict between the interviewee and their partner) manner. We also found a discrepancy between the perceived and actual effects of friends' input on mate choice and romantic relationships. While most interviewees didn't perceive any effects of their friends' input on their mate choice and romantic relationships, some of them had an experience of not getting involved in a romantic relationship or ending it because of a close friend. Concerning the stability of romantic relationships, friends mainly contributed to their breakdown. Last but not least, the interviewees listed motivations for friends' input on mate choice and romantic relationships, where the three most frequent motivations were personal traits, wishing well-being on a friend and the closeness of friendship. The results of the study show, that mate-choice and subsequent romantic relationship are affected not just by family members, on whom most current studies focus, but also by friends.