

Health and Personality



Individual in Society
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Health and Personality

Aims:

- To examine the links between personality, behaviour and health
- To highlight the roles of personality in heart disease and cancer

At the end of the lecture you should:

- Be able to discuss and evaluate the main links between personality and health

Personality and Health

What is health?

Write down a brief summary (three things) which you think define 'health'

Personality and Health

- People assume that emotional factors are linked to health (Furnham 1994)
- Chinese medicine has long identified the impact of emotion on health

Two possible routes (Ranchor and Sanderman 1991)

- i) Personality causes the disease – peptic ulcers, ulcerative colitis, rheumatoid arthritis.
 - ii) Personality influences the link between the cause and the illness – making the illness worse or better.
- Some personalities act in a more unhealthy way

Beliefs and interpretative styles

Internal or external attributional style / locus of control

Internals:

- undertake more health enhancing behaviours,
 - take more interest in health messages, and
 - take active steps to control their health status (Strickland, 1989).
- Healthy coping styles can enhance one's ability overcome stress and disease.

Personality and Coronary Heart Disease

Friedman and Rosenman (1974)

- Followed 3000+ men for over 8 years
 - A number developed CHD
- Competitive, impatient, hostile, alert, strong need for advancement (Type A Behaviour Pattern)

Personality and Coronary Heart Disease

Type A Behaviour Pattern

Strenuous worker	Poor sleep pattern
Compulsive tendencies	Aggressiveness
Depressive/neurotic tendencies	Angry
Impatience	Low on introspection
Anxious	Hard driving
Little time for relaxation	Conscientious

Personality and Coronary Heart Disease

Are there any problems with this simple link idea?

What might these problems be?

Write down three possible problems with a simple link

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Personality and Coronary Heart Disease

Problems with simple link between CHD and Type A

- Culture, age, genetic factors
- Link between E and N and Type A
- Link between Type A and impulsiveness

The role of anger and its expression

- Negative affect, anger and hostility and antagonism linked to CHD
- Keeping emotions in may be related to CHD in women not men.
- Focus on 'potential for hostility'; 'anger directed outwards'; 'being irritated in queues'

Personality and Coronary Heart Disease

Why the link between Type A and CHD?

- interpretation of stressful events
- hostile people may have higher physiological malfunctions
- heart rate and catecholamine levels during stressful encounters

Personality and Coronary Heart Disease

Problems for health promotion

Type A self perception:

demanding	dominating	outspoken
impatient	tense	enterprising
aggressive	self-centred	energetic
enthusiastic	excitable	conceited

Type A Ideal personality:

- dominating, demanding, self-confident and conceited (Henley & Furnham 1989)

Personality and Cancer

Type C personality linked with cancer (Eysenck 1994)

suppression of emotion	depression
learned helplessness	low emotional expressiveness

Problems of replication

Personality and Cancer

Kavan et al (1995) personality impact on colon cancer

- Sample 61 male veterans
- Completed MMPI between 1947 and 1975
- Diagnosed with colon cancer between 1977 and 1988
- Matched sample 61 other vets who had completed the MMPI between 1947 and 1975
- Matched sample did not develop cancer
- Differences found in levels of hostile aggression

Personality and Cancer

Hostility / cancer link

- hostile people manifesting physiological responses when stressed
- anger alters the activity of the immune system
- neuro-endocrine responses which are responsible for immuno-suppression
- may be susceptibility to oncogenic viruses
- hostile people less likely to engage in healthy behaviours

Personality and Cancer

Emotional suppression

- Difference between women diagnosed with breast cancer and women diagnosed with benign breast disease
- Difference was on dimensions of emotional suppression (Greer & Morris 1975)

Emotionally suppressed people:

- i) accept their fate
- ii) attempt to hide anger
- iii) are emotionally controlled (Contrada et al 1990)

Women with breast cancer linked to major life event AND denial response (Cooper and Feregher 1993)

Personality and Cancer

Conclusions

- Relationships exist but for limited cancers
- Need to consider physiological processes
- Self blame at the time of diagnosis
- Some relationship between coping style and survival of breast cancer

- BUT best predictor of death was the size of the tumor and the stage of the disease (Buddeberg et al., 1996)
- Post 1988 treatment and positive attitude has reduced personality effects

Personality and General Health

Optimists get ill less and less seriously
Unrealistic optimism may lead to risky behaviour
(Peterson & DeAvila 1995)

Links with EPQ (Wistow et al 1990)

- P with CHD
- N with stress related illness (not cancer)
- E no relationship with any disease

Personality and General Health

Links with Big 5 (Marshall et al 1994)

- Wellness behaviours correlated with E and C
- Accident control with E and A
- Traffic risk taking with A and C (negatively)
- Substance risk taking with O

C seems to be important and predict longevity

Conclusions

Personality has been seen to have some varying influence in:

- Health and health behaviour via direct links, and beliefs;
- The main areas of study have been in CHD and cancers;
- Personality effects does not mean individuals bring illnesses upon themselves.

The role of personality is clear, although needs to be considered with contextual factors
