

AIMS OF HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

CC-10 (Health Psychology) Unit 1; SEM III

By

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AIMS OF HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

Health psychology emphasizes the role of psychological factors in the cause, progression and consequences of health and illness. The aims of health psychology can be divided into

- (1) Understanding, explaining, developing and testing theory and
- (2) Putting this theory into practice.

Health psychology aims to understand, explain, develop and test theory by:

- (a) Evaluating the role of behavior in the etiology of illness.

For example:

- Coronary heart disease is related to behaviors such as smoking, food intake, lack of exercise.
- Many cancers are related to behaviors such as diet, smoking, alcohol and failure to attend for screening or health check-ups.
- A stroke is related to smoking, cholesterol and high blood pressure. An often overlooked cause of death is accidents.
- These may be related to alcohol consumption, drugs and careless driving

(b) Predicting unhealthy behaviors.

For example:

- Smoking, alcohol consumption and high fat diets are related to beliefs.
- Beliefs about health and illness can be used to predict behavior.

(c) Evaluating the interaction between psychology and physiology.

For example:

- The experience of stress relates to appraisal, coping and social support.
- Stress leads to physiological changes which can trigger or exacerbate illness.
- Pain perception can be exacerbated by anxiety and reduced by distraction.

(d) Understanding the role of psychology in the experience of illness.

For example:

- Understanding the psychological consequences of illness could help to alleviate symptoms such as pain, nausea and vomiting.
- Understanding the psychological consequences of illness could help alleviate psychological symptoms such as anxiety and depression.

(e) Evaluating the role of psychology in the treatment of illness.

For example:

- If psychological factors are important in the cause of illness they may also have a role in its treatment.
- Changing behavior and reducing stress could reduce the chances of a further heart attack.
- Treatment of the psychological consequences of illness may have an impact on longevity.

Health psychology also aims to put theory into practice.

This can be implemented by:

Promoting healthy behavior.

For example:

- Understanding the role of behavior in illness can allow unhealthy behaviorist be targeted.
- Understanding the beliefs that predict behaviors can allow these beliefs to be targeted.
- Understanding beliefs can help these beliefs to be changed.

Preventing illness.

For example:

- Changing beliefs and behavior could prevent illness onset.
- Modifying stress could reduce the risk of a heart attack.
- Behavioral interventions during illness (e.g. stopping smoking after a heart attack) may prevent further illness.
- Training health professionals to improve their communication skills and to carry out interventions may help to prevent illness.

Thank you