

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

PATNA UNIVERSITY, PATNA

HEALTHPSYCHOLOGY, SEM.3

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HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

Health psychology is the branch of psychology that studies the relation between psychological variables and health, which reflects the view that both mind and body are important determinants of health and illness. Health psychologists believe that our beliefs, attitudes, and behavior contribute significantly to the onset or prevention of illness.

In 1900, many of the leading causes of death could be traced to infectious diseases, such as influenza, pneumonia, and tuberculosis.

In the context of health psychology, the overall pattern of decisions and behaviors that determine health and quality of life.

Leading causes of death could be prevented if people would eat nutritious food, reduce their alcohol consumption, practice safe sex, eliminate smoking, and exercise regularly.

It is concerned with understanding how **psychological**, **behavioral**, and **cultural** factors contribute to physical health

and illness. Psychological factors can affect health directly. For example, chronically occurring environmental stressors affecting the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis, cumulatively, can harm health. Behavioral factors can also affect a person's health. For example, certain behaviors can, over time, harm (smoking or consuming excessive amounts of alcohol) or enhance health (engaging in exercise).

Nature of health psychology

Health psychologists conduct research to identify behaviors and experiences that promote health, give rise to illness, and influence the effectiveness of health care. They also recommend ways to improve health care policy. Health psychologists have worked on developing ways to reduce smoking and improve daily nutrition in order to promote health and prevent illness. They have also studied the association between illness and individual characteristics. For example, health psychology has found a relation between the personality characteristics of thrill seeking,

impulsiveness, hostility/anger, emotional instability, and depression, on one hand, and high-risk driving, on the other.

Health psychology is also concerned with contextual factors, including economic, cultural, community, social, and lifestyle factors that influence health. Physical addiction impedes smoking cessation. Some research suggests that seductive advertising also contributes to psychological dependency on tobacco, although other research has found no relationship between media exposure and smoking in youth. OHP research indicates that people in jobs that combine little decision latitude with a high psychological workload are at increased risk for [cardiovascular disease](#). Other research reveals a relation between unemployment and elevations in blood pressure. Epidemiologic research documents a relation between social class and cardiovascular disease.

Health psychologists also aim to change health behaviors for the dual purpose of helping people stay healthy and helping patients adhere to disease treatment regimens (also see [health action process approach](#)). Health psychologists

employ cognitive behavioral therapy and applied behavior analysis (also see behavior modification) for that purpose.