Psychophysical Disorders

Psychology 311
Abnormal Psychology

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Overview

• Has a mind/body connection
• Many disorders
  • Coronary Heart Disease
  • Cancer
  • HIV/AIDS
  • Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
  • Headaches
  • Irritable bowel Syndrome
  • Others

Coronary Heart Disease (CHD)

• Highly correlated with obesity and/or smoking
• Contributes to 40% of all deaths
• Is the leading cause of death after age 66
• Is the leading cause of death for men after age 39
• Stress
  • Causes heart to work harder
  • Is fine when being confronted by a bear
  • Is not fine for a traffic jam

Personality subtypes and CHD

Type A Subtype

• Has an intense and competitive drive for achievement and advancement.
• Has an exaggerated sense of urgency for passing time
• Need to hurry
• Often has considerable aggressiveness and hostility toward others

Early Studies

• Friedman Rosenman (1975)
• Used a structured interview technique
• Followed 3,154 individuals for 8 years
• Controlled for high cholesterol
• Contended CHD was associated with particular personality types
• Type A Personality
• Type B Personality
Type B Personality

- Are less driven than type A's
- Were less hostile

Results

- Type A personality subtypes had twice as many individuals with CHD as Type B individuals.

Problem

- Recent studies did not replicate the results
- Several studies found no predictive relationship of Type A's and mortality or heart attacks
- Other studies found no relationship between Type A and CHD

Why?

- Used a different method (questionnaires) to assess personality subtypes
  - May have not adequately measured it.
  - Not all aspects of Type A were related to CHD

Examples

- Found Hostility and Anger were the major predictors for CHD
  - Were related to higher BP reactivity to stress
  - Higher cholesterol
  - More smoking and alcohol use
  - Greater activation of Platelets (block arteries)
- Sex Differences
  - Women – indirect expressions of antagonism,
  - Men, Overt expressions of anger

Other Studies

- Cynicism may be important in Type A
  - Higher coronary artery blockage rates and coronary death correlated with high MMPI cynicism levels.
  - Also predicts arteriosclerosis, heart attacks and CHD death.
  - Is higher in men than women
  - Higher among African Americans than Caucasians
Problem

• Difficult to objectively identify constructs or agree on vague terminology
  • anger, hostility, cynicism
• Researchers define differently – creates problems
• Measures do not correlate highly

Type D personality

• Defined by high scores on negative affectivity
  • High levels of anxiety, anger, depression
• Plus inhibition in the expressions of these emotions
• Studies
  • Of heart attack patients, 52% of Type D’s experienced another heart problem vs. 12% of non-type D’s

Conclusions

• Many variables are correlated with CHD
• Studies indicate correlations, not causations.
  • Interpret with caution
  • But something is there

Other Disorders having Psychological Components

Asthma

• In an asthma attack
  • Air passages in lungs become narrowed
  • Breathing becomes hard and wheezy
• Triggers
  • Viral infections
  • Pollution
  • Smoke
  • Allergens
  • Emotional States
  • Others

Symptoms

• Usually begins suddenly
• Person has a tightness in the chest
• Wheezing
• Coughing
• If severe, may cause a panic attack as well which increases the symptoms
  • Person cannot get air into their lungs
  • Feels like they are suffocating
  • Sounds and symptoms increase the fear
• Think how you would feel if you could not breath.
Psychological Factors

- Personality tests often show individuals with high levels of negative emotions
- Stress can precipitate attacks
  - Often associated with anxiety
- Individuals also feel more hostile and more helpless.

Treatments for Psychophysical Disorders

- Medications
  - Cannot be underestimated
  - Can be useful for many disorders
  - Can reduce the damage or prevent damage
  - Can stop symptoms when present
  - Can be lifesaving
- Issue
  - Drugs only treat symptoms.
  - May not treat the underlying stressors that may cause or contribute to the problem

Psychological Emphasis

- Try to identify the variables associated with the disorder – then reduce them
  - Stress/Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Anger
- Many approaches
  - Psychoanalytic
  - Behavioral
  - Cognitive
  - Community

Psychoanalytic

- Use free association, dream analysis etc.
- Try to confront infantile origins of fears.
- Get at underlying issues, then make the client confront the issue
- Assumption, when made conscious and confronted, the issue goes away

Behavioral and Cognitive

- Use many techniques
- Systematic Desensitization
- Assertion training
- Relaxation training
- Rational Emotive Therapy
  - Confront the clients thinking patterns
- Others

Community Techniques

- Works on large scale
  - Communities, towns, etc
- May use
  - Advertisements, PSAs, other media
  - Try to reduce some problem (CHD)
  - May include education or active interventions
- May be used in worksites as well
  - Change in building design
  - Old vs. new Psychology offices
Conclusions

- Many different types of disorders can be influenced by psychological variables.
- Disorders can also be reduced by psychological interventions.
- Combinations of biological and psychological interventions can be very effective in reducing or eliminating psychophysical problems.