

# PSY214 - Health Psychology

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## Topic 1 – Introduction to Health and Health Models

Health → the state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity – WHO, 2003

- Generally, health is identified by an absence of objective signs of disease eg blood enzymes, absence of pain and nausea, etc
- In reality, overlap exists between the two with both occurring to different degrees
- Antonovsky (1987) suggests we focus more on what helps people stay well as opposed to what makes people become become ill (preventative medicine).

## Changing face of illness:

- life expectancy increased in Western countries as a result of:
  - advancements of medical treatments including vaccinations and antibiotics
  - social changes such as improvement in nutrition and sanitation
- Results in shift from infectious disease to long-term chronic illness and degenerative disease
- Leading causes of death in Australia today are heart disease, cancer, and stroke
- This contrasts with the health of the Indigenous population
  - lower life expectancy
  - increased circulatory and respiratory issues, injury, and poisoning
  - lead to the Close The Gap program
- Healthy migrant effect:
  - cases where people born overseas tend to have longer life expectancies
  - possibly due to health screening or simpler staple diet

Mind-Body relationship: Changing perspectives

- How the mind and body interact
- Theories and beliefs have changed over time
- Stone Age: Illness attributed to evil spirits
  - trephination (drilling small holes in the skull) and allows the evil spirits to leave the skull
- Ancient Greece: Mind and body are separate entities
  - Illness due to imbalance between the four humours
  - Good diet important to maintain balance
- Middle Ages: Illness associated with punishment from God or evil spirits
  - Mind and body work together
  - Treatment often aimed at driving out spirits
- Scientific revolution: Mind and body are again viewed as separate entities, but communication between the two is possible
  - Body is viewed as a machine
  - Foundation of the biomedical model approach to health

#### Biomedical model of health:

- The basis of modern medicine
  - Illness is caused by physical or biochemical mechanisms, or infection
  - treatment or cure through medical intervention
  - Direct causal relationship between illness, symptoms, and outcomes
  - Fails to account for differences in the way people cope differently with the same disease
    - Resulting from differences in cognition, personality, beliefs, etc

#### People in health and illness:

- health is fluid and varies through life
  - biological causes as well as social and psychological factors play roles
- certain diseases have risk factors
  - biological, genetic risks or behavioural risks
  - risk factors do not necessarily result in disease
- personality linked to disease and health outcomes
  - positive people tend to outlive negative people

#### Role of psychology in health:

- Sigmund Freud noticed symptoms in patients without an organic cause
  - felt represented unconscious emotional conflicts, conversion hysteria
- Psychosomatic medicine
  - symptoms are not imagined, both mind and body are involved
  - analyses interrelationships between physiological, psychological, and social factors
- behavioural medicine
  - analyses behaviour as a risk factor for disease
  - resulting from classical and operant conditioning
- health psychology
  - based principally on psychology

#### Role of psychology:

- Promotion and maintenance of health