

Health Psychology Syllabus

Introduction

Over the past century the relationship between behaviour and individual health has attracted attention because of an increase in diseases caused by personal habits. Health psychology is concerned with how different factors, such as lifestyle and social context, may influence health and illness. One of the goals of health psychology is to promote an understanding of behaviour that leads to a healthier lifestyle. The health psychology option focuses on stress, substance abuse, addiction, obesity and health promotion.

Health psychologists have investigated causes of health problems such as stress, substance abuse, addiction, overeating and obesity in order to find ways to counter their damaging consequences and prevent their occurrence. One of the benefits of this research is an improved understanding of the relationship between environmental and biological factors as well as cognition in determining individual behaviour. This helps in the development of prevention and treatment strategies, for example, in terms of understanding how people value their health. It also enables health promotion campaigns to be more efficiently designed.

There are differences in attitudes towards health-related behaviour among different cultures, as well as variations in the incidence of health problems such as stress, eating disorders and substance abuse. It is important for health psychologists to take these factors into account.

Learning outcomes

General framework (applicable to all topics in the option)

To what extent do biological, cognitive and sociocultural factors influence health-related behaviour?
Evaluate psychological research (that is, theories and/or studies) relevant to health psychology.

Stress

Describe stressors.
Discuss physiological, psychological and social aspects of stress.
Evaluate strategies for coping with stress (*for example, stress inoculation therapy, hardiness training, yoga and meditation*).

Substance abuse, addictive behaviour and obesity

Explain factors related to the development of substance abuse or addictive behaviour.
Examine prevention strategies and treatments for substance abuse and addictive behaviour (*for example, Alcoholics Anonymous, family therapy, drugs and biopsychosocial treatments*).
Discuss factors related to overeating and the development of obesity.
Discuss prevention strategies and treatments for overeating and obesity.

Health promotion

Examine models and theories of health promotion (*for example, health belief model, stages of change model, theory of reasoned action*).
Discuss the effectiveness of health promotion strategies (*for example, measurement of outcomes, cultural blindness, cognitive dissonance*).