Psychological Perspectives On Health And Illness

This essay aims to examine the psychological perspective of factors that affects health and illness, with a primary focus on addiction. The essay will also review the difference between health and illness. The factor “addiction” will also be examined using diverse psychological perspectives. Existing literature on this factor will also be shared for deeper understanding.

There are several definitions of Health. According to Felman (2017), health is a state of complete emotional and physical well-being. The Felman definition of health is, however, a bit narrow compared to a much earlier definition provided by the World Health Organisation (WHO). According to WHO (1948), 'Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. The WHO (1948) health definition is more holistic and will be considered for this study. On the other hand, illness is a comprehensive term that defines the poor state of mind, body, and, to a certain extent, spirit (Docdoc, 2020). It is the general feeling of being sick or unwell (Docdoc, 2020). Malnutrition, stress, disease and other factors are the main cause of illness (Mishra, Kusuma & Babu, 2013). However, several factors affect health and illness. One of these factors is addiction.

Whenever the word “addiction is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is drug or substance abuse. Meanwhile, there is more to addiction than just substance abuse. The word addiction is a broad term used to describe a chronic dysfunction of the brain system (Legg, 2016). It is a psychological and physical inability to stop consuming a chemical, drug, activity, or substance, even though it is causing psychological and physical harm (Saripalli, 2018). Addiction is often voluntary during the initial stage. The development of a full addiction is caused by a lot of factors. According to Lea et al (2009), an individual’s genetic makeup can affect how vulnerable the person is to develop an addiction. This is confirmed by the Biopsychology perspective by Lumen (2020). Furthermore, family history (Psychology Today, 2020), peer pressure (Lynch, 2019), self-prescription (NIDA, 2012) are some of the proven factors that cause addiction. Symptoms of addiction often include declining physical health, irritation, nausea, vomiting, shaking, loss of appetite, fatigue, an inability to cease using a substance, an uncontrollable urge for some activities, etc. (Mayoclinic, 2017). There are several types of addictions; these can be categorized into behavioral addiction and substance addiction (Tracy, 2012). Substance addiction includes drug abuse, alcohol, cocaine, hard drugs, etc. (Alavi, 2012). Meanwhile, behavioral addiction is broader. Gambling, uncontrollable sexual urge, excessive video gaming, eating disorders, etc. are all behavioral addictions (Iliades, 2016). Surprisingly, one can get addicted to virtually anything. Once there is an uncontrollable desire to do something, it could be tagged as addiction.

Addiction has diverse effects on health and causes illness to the victims. One of the leading causes of obesity is food addiction. Uncontrollable appetite could lead to excessive food consumption which graduates to weight gain (Avena et al, 2008). A huge appetite for sugary food is one of the major causes of diabetes. People that are addicted to sugar have a high tendency of contracting diabetes (Fortuna, 2010). Behavioral addiction is a huge threat to health and has been confirmed to be a major cause of some life-threatening medical conditions like heart failure, stroke, cancer, mental health conditions, etc. (NIDA, 2018). Furthermore, addiction, especially substance abuse, weakens the immune system and increases the risk of

illness and infection. It also causes increased strain on the liver, which puts the person at risk of significant liver damage or liver failure (Mayo Clinic 2017). According to the 2019 UK Drug Report, 7,376 hospital admissions for drug-related mental and behavioral disorders were recorded between 2018 and 2019. In the same year bracket, 2,917 deaths related to drug misuse were recorded. The numbers are on increase compared to the previous years (NHS, 2019).

The psychological effect of addiction on the victim cannot go unnoticed. Addiction not only affects the body physically but also imposes a huge threat to the psychological health of the victim. Depression, anxiety, and paranoia are some of the psychological effects of addiction (TRH, 2020). According to Freud Sigmund's psychodynamics perspective, addiction has a lot to do with childhood experience and interpersonal relationships (Albert, 2020). On the other hand, the bio-psychological perspective believes that behaviors like addiction are caused by the victim's genetics, hormones, and neurotransmitters (Lumen, 2020). Meanwhile, the behavioral perspective is of the view that behaviors like addiction are learned. The cognitive psychologist's perspective, however, believes that disorders like addiction are rooted in the way the victims interpret, perceive, and remembers the events and occurrences around them (Cherry, 2019). These perspectives seem to be contradicting themselves, but a closer look at them will reveal some similarities. Take, for example, a child that the father smokes. There is a high tendency for that child to pick up a smoking addiction. This could be linked to the inherited genes (bio-psychology perspective), the constant exposure to smoking (psychodynamics perspective), the belief that the father could not be wrong (cognitive perspective), and the father's frequent unconscious lessons of how to smoke (behavioral perspective).

In conclusion, it is safe to say that addiction is caused by a combination of different factors. The background of the victims, childhood experience, and interpersonal relationships all play a major role in addiction; people learn unhealthy behavior in response to their environment. Even with the threats addiction pose to health, the number of victims keeps multiplying every day. The thoughts and belief that recovery is not possible to have made most victims not to put forth an effort to quit. No wonder the psychopathological model sees mental disorders as the cause of addiction. Is there a way out from this? Well, good problem-solving skills, sufficient motivation, and alternative ways to cope with uncomfortable feelings or stress could do the trick. Psychotherapy is a good option to strengthen people's motivation and to improve their problem-solving skills, stress reduction skills, and coping skills.

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