

Sample essay plan

Essay topic: Explain the psychological and social/cultural factors that influence an individual's experience of pain

Introduction

It is important that health practitioners understand the factors that mediate a client's experience of pain. Research has suggested that pain is not just a physiological process but is a subjective experience influenced by psychological and socio-cultural factors. This essay will argue that although the experience of pain is predominantly psychological, the level of perceived pain depends on the brain's interpretation of painful stimuli in context of relevant past experiences and that the intensity of pain response depends on the brain's interpretation of sensory input. It will also be argued that socio-cultural factors including norms and empathy for the pain of others contribute to the biopsychological interaction of how pain is perceived by an individual. The discussion will first begin with a definition of pain. This will then be followed with a discussion of the psychological factors that contribute to pain. The next section of the discussion will address specific socio-cultural factors that also impact on pain.

Body

First main idea

Definition of pain

- An important sensation activated by nociceptors or sensory nerve cells that communicate with the spinal cord and brain, and indicate that the body is not functioning optimally or has come into contact with an unhealthy stimulus (Peterson, Beck & Rowell 1992).
- Particular factors influencing messages from the brain play a significant role in the level of pain experiences as part of the overall central nervous system (Myers & Dewall 2015).

Second main idea

Experience of pain is predominantly a psychological one.

- The level of pain perceived depends on the brain's interpretation of painful stimuli, in the context of relevant past experiences (Melzack & Wall, cited in Peterson, Beck & Rowell 1992).

- Children aged 9-14 with a history of painful hospital procedures have heightened pain sensitivity, which does not reflect the severity of the current pain stimulus ([Hermann et al. 2006](#)).
- Current pain thresholds may actually be higher in some instances in the context of past pain.
- Older patients have a lower perception of pain due to their broader life experiences for comparison psychologically; people with a broader range of past pain experiences to draw upon may experience lesser relative pain in a current situation (Ritchie et al. 2014).

Third main idea

Some socio-cultural factors also contribute to the level of pain.

- Differing physiological factors based on gender highlight that those who identify psychologically with traditionally masculine identities refrain from public expression of pain (Garcia et al. 2007). Participants of Japanese heritage had lower pain response when compared with Caucasian Belgian participants, partly associated with the higher emphasis on stoicism in Japanese culture (Komiya, Kawara & De Laat 2007).
- Empathy is another factor that impacts on pain. Individuals observing other people's pain may experience similar pain due to triggers in the neural networks (Fitzgibbon et al. 2010).

Conclusion

- Summarise arguments and evidence
- Highlight how this answers the question

References

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