****

**BEHL1004:  
  
Major Essay  
 Part 1: Essay structure**

**Sample essay**

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

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Introduction** | **Comments** |
| **1.** 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. **2.** This essay will argue that although the experience of pain is predominantly psychological, past experiences can impact on current level of pain and that the intensity of pain response depends on the brain’s interpretation of sensory input. It will also be argued that 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. **3.** The discussion will first begin with a definition of pain. This will then be followed by 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. | **1. An overview or context of the topic. This information gives the reader some orientation and background to the topic. It is very general information (usually one or two sentences)**  **2. Thesis statement or your response to the topic and the main ideas that will be addressed in the body section. This clearly states what your main argument of the paper is and the information that will be used to make this argument. The number of main ideas you address in the essay will depend on the word limit. In a 1200-word essay, you would generally discuss 3-4 main ideas.**  **3. Outline of the discussion. This section clearly shows the reader what evidence you are going to use and how you are going to present the evidence to support your thesis.** |
| **Body** |  |
| **First main idea: Definition of Pain**  **1.** Pain can impact on an individual’s quality of life. **2.** Pain is 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).  According to Melzak and Wall (as cited in Peterson, Beck & Rowell, 1992), the spinal cord encompasses a neurological “gate” and that large nerve fibres and messages from the brain my help close this “gate” and impact the severity of the body’s experience of sensory information from a painful stimulus. Therefore, past psychological and socio-cultural experiences can play a significant role in the level and severity of pain experienced by an individual (Myers & Dewall, 2015) **3.** … **4.** The next section of this discussion will identify how particular psychological factors can contribute to pain. | **Often the first paragraph in the body section of the essay usually defines key terms, theories or concepts that are related to the topic.**  **1. Topic sentence (mini introduction of the first main point). Every paragraph should ideally have a topic sentence.**  **2. Supporting statements (expansion of main point with evidence and examples). Source of information is cited using the recommended referencing style.**  **3. As this is only a sample essay, the rest of the discussion for this section has been left out. You would need to write more about this main point for your actual essay.**  **4. Concluding sentence which links to the topic sentence of the next paragraph.** |
| **Second main idea**  **1.** Research has highlighted that psychological factors related to previous experiences of pain can contribute to the current level of pain. **2.** For example, it was found that children aged 9-14 who had experienced painful hospital procedures have heightened pain sensitivity which did not reflect the severity of the current pain. It was possible that the level of pain experienced by these children were linked to the stress associated with the history surrounding the pain (Hermann et al., 2006). Inadvertently, these young children’s pain threshold had decreased because of their past experience.  On the other hand, pain thresholds can also increase as a result of past pain experiences. A study conducted by Ritchie et al. (2014) found that younger cancer patients experienced higher rates of symptom distress compared to those who were older. The researchers concluded that older patients had lower perceptions of pain because of their broader life experiences. **3**. However, these findings were not conclusive and more studies in this nature ought to be undertaken to conclude whether this applies to patients suffering from different types of cancer, experiencing different treatment procedures and age specific psychological processes that mediate pain sensitivity. **4.** … **5.** Although, it was found that psychological factors significantly impacted on the experience of pain, some socio-cultural factors also played a role in determining the level of pain. | **There is link between this paragraph and the one above. Your essay should be coherent and cohesive. Your discussion and arguments must flow smoothly from one idea to the next.**  **1. Topic sentence (mini introduction of the second main point).**  **2. Supporting statements (expansion of main point with evidence and examples).**  **3. Evidence of writer’s voice and critical thinking.**  **4. … As this is only a sample essay, the rest of the discussion for this section has been left out. You would need to write more about this main point for your actual essay.**  **5. Concluding sentence which links to the topic sentence of the next paragraph.** |
| **Third main idea**  **1.** Underlying the psychological causes of pain are socio-cultural factors such as social norms and empathy for others who are experiencing pain. **2.** For example, in a study by Garcia et al. (2007) which explored how norms can impact pain, it was found that women have a higher sensitivity to pressure pain compared to men. **3.** In this context, it is important to acknowledge differing physiological factors based on gender when investigating sensitivity and level of pain. This is especially significant in situations where traditionally, males regularly refrain from expressing their experience of pain in public. It thus important that when practitioners deal with their client’s pain, they should consider what their client’s value system is. For example, whether they identify strongly with traditionally masculine or feminie identities associated with their gender as this will contribute significantly on the pain management system that is implemented.  Similarly, Komiyama, Kawara and De Laut (2007) found that participants of Japanese heritage displayed lower pain response compared to those who were of Caucasian Belgian because there was higher emphasis on stoicism in Japanese culture. Therefore, it is pertinent that the links between social norms associated with some cultures and their pain experience should be examined when considering a method of pain management. **4.** … | **1. Topic sentence (mini introduction of the third main point).**  **2. Supporting statements (expansion of main point with evidence and examples).**  **3. Writer’s voice and critical thinking.**  **4. … As this is only a sample essay, the rest of the discussion for this section has been left out. You would need to write more about this main point for your actual essay.** |
| **Conclusion**  **1.** This essay has argued that psychological and socio-cultural factors contribute to an individual’s experience of pain. **2.** The discussion has highlighted that an individual’s previous experience of pain can impact on their current experience. Whereas some individual’s threshold of pain decreases because of their previous experience, others appear to have a higher threshold. Age also appears to influence one’s tolerance to pain. Younger individuals seem to be more sensitive to pain compared to those who are older in some situations such as when someone is afflicted with cancer. Furthermore, aspects such as norms and empathy also play a role in an individual’s experience of pain. Traditional gender roles associated with males and females appear to impact on their sensitivity to pain. Similarly, the value system related to one’s culture also seems to contribute to pain. These factors need to be examined when determining a pain management approach for an individual. **3.** More rigorous research in this area needs to be undertaken so that the findings can be used to inform best practice. | **1. Thesis statement is reaffirmed.**  **2. The main points that were discussed in the body section of the essay are summarised.**  **3. The writer concludes their discussion with a recommendation. This can also be a suggestion or implications for the future.** |

**\*References**Garcia, E., Godoy-Izquierdo, D., Godoy, J. F., Perez, M., & Lopez-Chicheri, I. (2007),   
 Gender differences in pressure pain threshold in a repeated measures assessment.   
 *Psychology, Health & Medicine*, *12*(5), 567-579.

Hermann, C., Hohmeister, J., Demirakca, S., Zohsel, K., & Flor, H. (2006). Long-term   
 alternation of pain sensitivity in school-aged children with early pain experiences.   
 *Pain*, *125*(3), 278-285.

Komiyama, O., Kawara, M., & De Laat, A. (2007) Ethnic differences regarding tactile and   
 pain thresholds in the trigeminal region. *The Journal of Pain*, 8(4), 363-369.

Myers, D. G. & Dewall, C. N. (2015). *Psychology* (11th edn). New York: Worth Publishers.

Peterson, C., Beck, K., & Rowell, G. (1992). *Psychology: An introduction for nurses and   
 allied health professionals*. Sydney: Prentice Hall.

Ritchie, C., Dunn, L. B., Paul, S. M., Cooper, B. A., Skerman, H., Merriman, J. D., Aouizerat,   
 B., Alexander, K., Yates, P., Cataldo, J., & Miaskowski, C. (2014). Differences in the   
 symptom experience of older oncology outpatients. *Journal of Pain and Symptom   
 Management*, *47*(4), 697-709.

\* **Note**: Please note that the references in this sample are not complete as this is only a sample essay. You may have to incorporate more references in your essay.