

## Sample essay plan

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

### Introduction (150 words)

**General introductory remarks:** 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.

**Thesis statement/scope:** This essay will argue that:

- 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
- that the intensity of pain response depends on the brain's interpretation of sensory input.
- 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.

### Body (1000 words)

#### Paragraph 1

**Topic Sentence:** Experience of pain is predominantly a psychological one.

**Support:** 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).

#### Paragraph 2

**Topic Sentence:** Gender socialisation may play a part in an individual's experience of pain

**Support:** those who identify psychologically with traditionally masculine identities refrain from public expression of pain (Garcia et al. 2007).

#### Paragraph 3

**Topic Sentence:** An individual's ability to empathise can contribute to their experience of pain

**Support:** Individuals observing other people's pain may experience similar pain due to triggers in the neural networks (Fitzgibbon et al. 2010).

#### Paragraph 4

**Topic Sentence:** Another factor that can affect perceptions of pain is a person's heritage.

**Support:** 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).

## Conclusion (150 words)

### **Summary of main ideas:**

Pain is psychological.

Things that can contribute to one's experience of pain include:

- Gender
- Empathy
- heritage

### **Concluding remarks/recommendations:**

## References

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