

HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY





Introduction

- It is understood now that life style has a great impact on health and overall wellbeing of a person. Many of the health problems related to some serious illnesses such as cancer, heart disease etc are due to unhealthy behavior or lifestyle choices an individual makes (e.g smoking or overeating).



Health & Psychology

What is Health?

- The perception of Health also has become changed as health is not just being away from diseases but it is overall positive well being. (Brannon & Feist, 2010).



Health & Psychology

What is Health?

- These concepts led researchers to further focus on healthy behaviors and lifestyle of people, generally. Psychology as a science of behavior has much to contribute to the field of health psychology. It has become a fast growing area within clinical psychology.



What is Health psychology?

- Health psychology deals with the psychological and behavioral processes contributing to overall individual's well being and health.
- Health psychology also called as behavioral medicine. Behavioral medicine is interdisciplinary field including both medicine and psychology.



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- It deals with the subject of health and illness by merging all knowledge of biological, behavioral, social and psychological sciences.
- Health psychology is basically applying the psychological theory to health related practices.

Definition

- “Health psychology can be defined as the aggregate of the specific educational, scientific and professional contributions of the discipline of psychology to the promotion and maintenance of health, the prevention and treatment of illness, and the identification of etiologic and diagnostic correlates of health, illness and related dysfunction”. (Matarazzo, 1980, p. 815)

Modification in definition;

as Health psychology “includes psychology’s contributions to

- the enhancement of health,
- the prevention and treatment of disease,
- the identification of health risk factors,
- improvement of the health care system,
- and the shaping of public opinion with regard to health.” (Brannon & Feist, 2010, p. 13).

History of health psychology

Two major perspectives ;

One is **biomedical tradition**- a reductionist approach, claimed that disease is solely because of biological factors.

Early attempts were not refined enough, for example discovery of the benefits of acupuncture, **Hippocrates** humoral theory of disease and treatment.



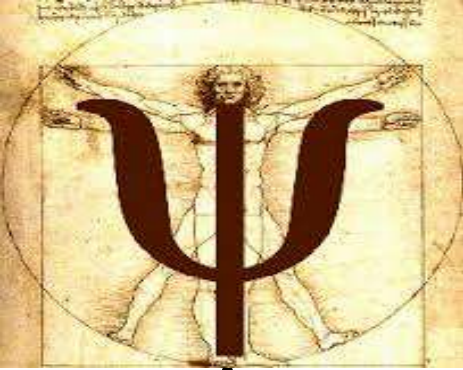
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- Later, scientist developed the germ theory (diseases caused by microorganisms, proposed in the mid-16 century) by focusing on the structure and genes to define and understand illness and disease.
- Limitation of this approach was that this tradition is full with somatic correlates.



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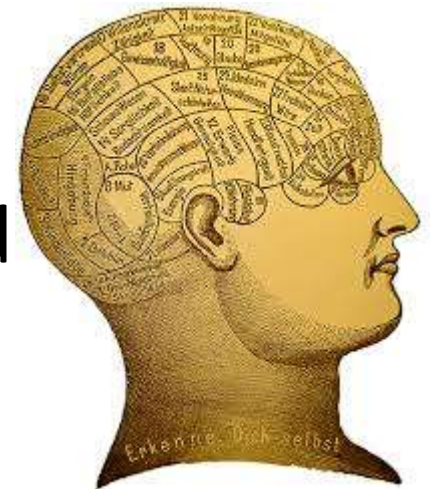
- Critics argued that under the light of this tradition we still don't know the actual etiology of diseases. Though it is still an important phenomenon in understanding illness but it does not give adequate account for illness and disease.

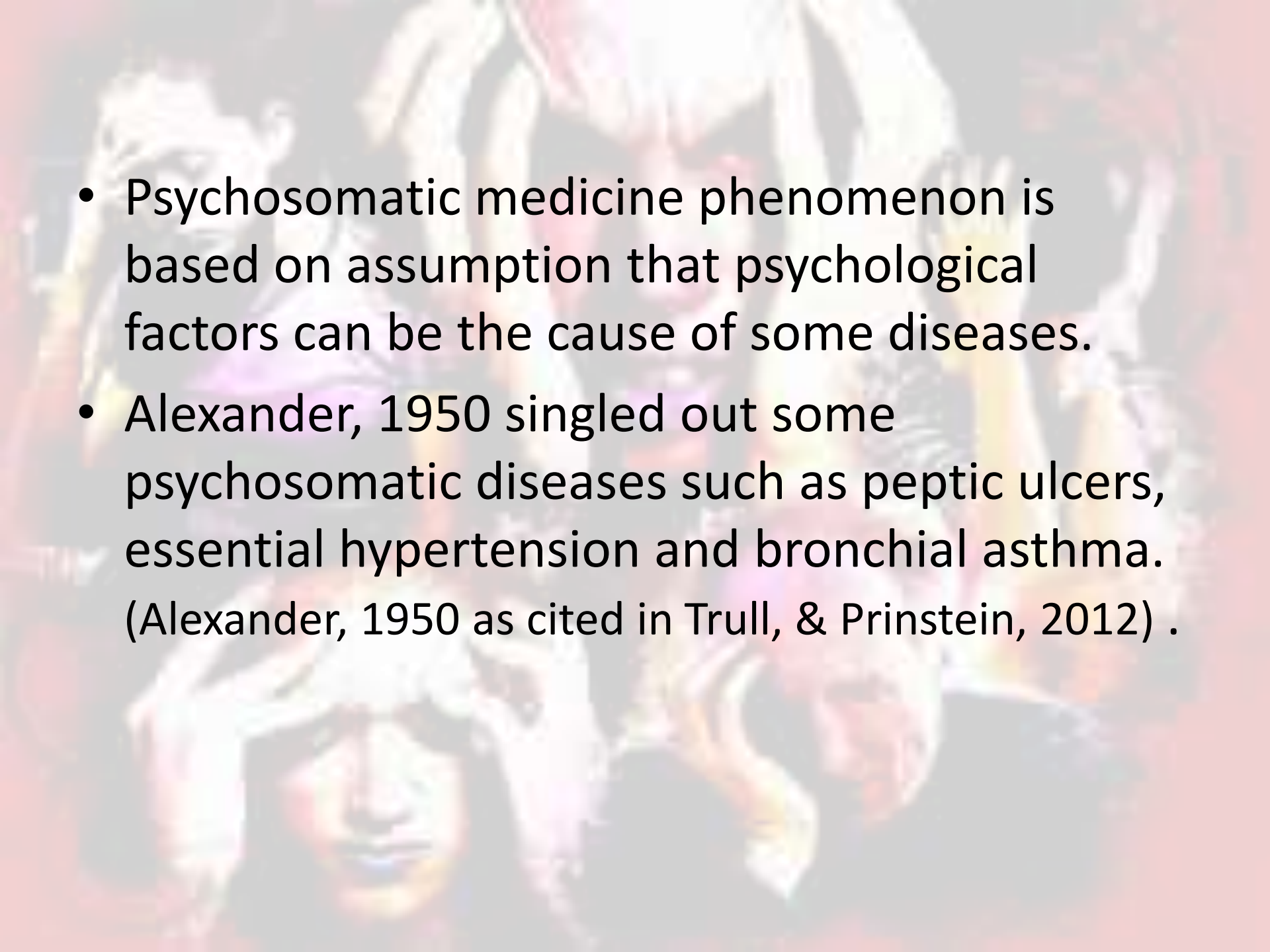


History Of Health Psychology

Second Perspective

- **the psychosocial perspective;** this perspective focused on the psychological and social factors of illness. 1940's this wide phenomenon merged into one field called **“psychosomatic medicine”**.



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- Psychosomatic medicine phenomenon is based on assumption that psychological factors can be the cause of some diseases.
 - Alexander, 1950 singled out some psychosomatic diseases such as peptic ulcers, essential hypertension and bronchial asthma. (Alexander, 1950 as cited in Trull, & Prinstein, 2012) .

- By the 1960's there was a change in perspective as the research line demonstrated that how personality and behaviors cause the disease. For example smoking and overeating correlate to some major diseases.
- During 1960's due to increase in stressful events it was implicated that stressful life events are the risk factors for illness.



Conclusion

- Biopsychosocial model; This model is the mixture of both perspectives as the name implies that diseases are caused by biological, social and psychological factors.

- Biological influence includes biochemical imbalances, or nutritional deficiencies and psychological factors include person's behaviors, emotional and cognitive processes.

This model helps psychologists to understand the root cause of problems and to plan interventions.



Relationships

How lifestyle, behavior,
personality, social support and
stress are linked with health



Stress and illness

- **Stress** a psychological phenomenon results from an interaction with an environmental challenges or stressors. The Physiological effects of stress on the body involve a complex chain (Brannon & Feist, 2010).
- Stress causes the activation of sympathetic nervous system- high heart rate, high blood pressure, increased muscle tension etc.

- Relationship between Illness and stress is **reciprocal** as stress can cause illness or disease and also stress sometimes occurs due to illness itself. For example a person is stressful because he/she has a cancer.

Personality, behavior and health

- Health can also be affected by **behaviors and personality factors** for example particular behavior like smoking, overeating, alcohol consumption and substance abuse are major contribution to various diseases.
- Cognitive behaviors may influence our choices to adapt healthy or unhealthy behaviors. Protection motivation theory (PMT) (**by Dr. R.W. Rogers in 1975**) states that choices are made on the basis of two functions; threat appraisal and coping appraisal.



- The psychophysiological reactivity model suggests that hostile individuals are more vulnerable to coronary heart disease as they experience larger increase in heart rate, blood pressure and stress related hormone. So it is concluded that health and illness can be greatly affected by personality traits and behaviors.



Social support and Health

- Social support is not something that you have a lot of friends but it means you have some true close relations and those relations are actually helpful in promoting healthy behaviors and overall wellbeing. (Miller, Chen & Cole, 2009; Stanton, Revenson, & Tennen, 2007).
- support may act as a buffer against worse health outcomes. (Trull, & Prinstein, 2012).

- So it is concluded that illness can be caused by so many factors altogether. However every illness has its own basis and etiology.
- There are so many diseases that health psychology has to address. Obesity and smoking have come under the observation of psychologist. By using different methods diseases can be understood and can be treated.