

# The biomedical mode of health

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The biomedical model of health Introduction In health psychology it is seen that health is defined by different models. One such model is the biomedical model of health which revolves around the aspect of a healthy body. The model was introduced in the nineteenth century and has been used widely to diagnose diseases by the doctors. According to the model every disease or disorder is caused by a physical harm. In other words the diseases or disorders are caused by germs or genes which might be changing the internal environment of the body to cause the disease.

Although it has been introduced in the nineteenth century, the roots of the model date back to the 17th century when Cartesian dualism existed. After its introduction the model replaced the previously famous Humoral paradigm in the twentieth century. The discovery of antibiotics proved to be a breakthrough in the approval of the model. However in the late twentieth century some of the sociologists again started questioning the integrity of the biomedical model of health as they considered the social wellbeing of an individual to be as important as the biological well being (Curtis 2002; Taylor 2008; Lovallo 2005; Havelka et al 2009).

**Biomedical Model of Health** The biomedical model of health takes its roots from the Cartesian Dualism which is dated back to the seventeenth century in the times of Descartes. Cartesian Dualism revolved around the aspect that both mind and body are two separate entities irrespective of their functions. In a similar fashion the model considers physical causes to be the main reason for the disease. The model has replaced the previously followed Humoral Paradigm which was formed by the Greeks.

According to this paradigm the diseases in a human body are caused by a certain abnormality in the four basic fluids of the body. In those times the four basic fluids of the body were believed to be blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm. The treatment of this paradigm also revolved around the maintenance of these four basic fluids. One thing that the Humoral paradigm and biomedical model of health have in common is that both of them consider bodily factors to be the cause of the disease (Curtis 2002).

The biomedical model of health revolves around certain factors which have to be present. The model states that for a person to be unhealthy they have to have some sort of biological abnormality. It also states that every disease has some specific cause which has to be diagnosed by the doctor in order to cure the patient. It also involves the process of treatment and states that the human body can be reversed back to the normal condition if the right treatment is served to the diseased person. It states that psychological and social processes do not take part in the disease causing process.

Moreover it also assumes that mind and body are two different entities that have no such relation with each other and lastly the health of the whole society is dependent on the resources that are available to the medical society as a whole (Taylor 2008). The model is largely followed all over the world and its principles are also seen to be the most convincing these days. It is because of this model that researches are being conducted on the biochemical and genetic processes of the body to find out about the different diseases.

Moreover all the doctors being trained these days are trained on the principles of this model as they have to learn about the internal environment

of a human being so that they can treat them. In other words they have to understand the human body so that they can intervene in the process of disease that may be causing harm to the patient (Curtis 2002; Taylor & Field 2007). It has helped to carry out several projects have proved to be a breakthrough in treating various diseases occurring in the society. The Human Genome Project is an example of the advantages of this model.

Human Genome Project was a project launched in the year 1990 by international authorities to find out the sequencing of the human genome along with the identification of the chemical base pairs. Human genomes are the genes which contain information about the hereditary characteristics that an individual would possess. In human beings these are found in the form of genes located on the chromosomes. It is this human genome project which allowed the doctors to learn a lot about the structure of chromosomes, the proteins coded by the genes, and the number of genes in a human being.

It has also made the surgeries safe and effective. Moreover it has also assisted in controlling the diseases occurring all over the world and this can be noticed in the statistics of mortality in the different nations. The diseases which were previously considered to be untreatable can now be treated because of the knowledge acquired after the introduction of this model. As an example the cases of pneumonia and appendicitis can be considered which previously were untreatable. Pneumonia is a disease caused by the bacteria *Pneumococcus* and affects the lungs whereas appendicitis is the inflammation of the appendix.

Pneumonia is a life threatening condition which could not be cured previously but nowadays it can be cured with the help of antibiotics. Appendicitis is also a lethal condition which can be cured with the help of surgery. (Taylor & Field 2007; Havelka et al 2009; Robbins et al 2005).

#### Limitations of the Biomedical Model of Health

The biomedical model of health has its own shortcomings and is termed as reductionist by the opponents. In other words it does not broaden its concept towards the factors other than genes and chemicals for example the factors relating to economic or social environment of the individual.

This however is covered by the holistic approach which takes the whole situation in consideration before taking a step. Similarly another factor that is mentioned is the relation of the model to the physical causes of the diseases concerned. The opponents point out that not all the diseases are related to physical causes but some of them are caused by a multitude of the factors. An example of the heart disease atherosclerosis can be cited here in which the factors of genetics, diet, and lifestyle play a role (Curtis 2002).

It is also criticized to be more related to the aspect of curing rather than preventing the disease. It is believed to be totally ignoring the aspects of social and psychological variants which do have a role in the progression of a disease. The treatment process is also related to these variants and again this model does not take into consideration these variants because of which some treatments do not go successful (Taylor 2008). Lastly, the model emphasizes on the body in particular irrespective of the role that mind plays in the health of an individual.

This aspect of the model can be denied because the research these days show that the mind plays a great role in influencing the body. Some diseases may be caused because the person may be living in unstable economic conditions and these conditions are not taken into consideration by the model. An example can be cited here in the therapies that are recommended for people who are suffering from different diseases. For example the cognitive therapy recommended for patients suffering from cancer. Cognitive therapy is recommended in the treatment of certain cancers as individuals undergoing the treatment suffer from symptoms like pain, memory loss, lack of concentration, irrational behaviour and mood swings. Cognitive therapies can help in relieving all these symptoms as shown by different researches. (Curtis 2002; Scipio et al 2006). Conclusion The biomedical model of health has been questioned by many sociologists as it does not take the aspect of social well being in its definition. Health is a factor which is dependent on all the aspects of life as put down by the sociologists.

Economic and social factors should also be considered when analyzing the health of an individual. These factors also determine the emotions of an individual and hence the person can be sociologically unfit. In other words it is not necessary for a healthy person to be sociologically fit in the current definition of the biomedical model of health. In the latter half of the twentieth century it was realized that the biomedical model of health can be applied to the ones who are diseased biologically but not the ones who are unfit by other means.

This approach therefore led to the adaptation of a new approach known as holistic approach. It is seen that nowadays the biomedical model is adopted

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