

Health Psychology & COVID-19

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Halesworth



Science & COVID-19

- The Government, in dealing with the pandemic, aims to ‘follow the science’.
- Where do they look for ‘the science’?
- SAGE – the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies
- There are 86 members from a wide range of disciplines
- 6 are Health Psychologists and there is a behavioural science sub-group – ‘SPI-B’ - which has 36 members
- 19 of the SPI-B are Psychologists, 7 are Health Psychologists

Health Psychology

- Health Psychology is a recent branch of the discipline, which started in the late 1980s
- However, in my view Health Psychology has inherited tensions and conflicts from a much earlier period which cannot be ignored
- Before looking at recent developments, this legacy will be examined

Summary

- Introduction
- What is Health Psychology?
- Historical Background
- Health Psychology: Areas of Practice
- Health Psychology during the Pandemic
- The Current Context – Is Health Psychology a Microcosm?
- Conclusion

What is Health Psychology?

- Health Psychology is the study of psychological and behavioural processes in health, illness and healthcare
- Health Psychology is a recent development
- Health Psychology follows the '*biopsychosocial*' model

Psychology - Origins

- Psychology started in Germany in the 1870s
- Came to the UK in the early years of the 20th Century
- Charles Samuel Myers founded The Psychological Laboratory in Cambridge in 1909
- C S Myers' contribution during World War 1
 - Shell Shock
 - Health of Munitions Workers

Health & Healthcare in the 1920s

- Both the shell shock and the munitions workers projects considered people not as patients but as normal people in unusual circumstances
- Should we focus on individuals? – or their environment?
- This distinction is not new – Bazalgette and the London sewers
- These matters became of more general concern in the 1920s – *eg* The 'Peckham Experiment'
- Two different approaches emerged 'health' vs 'healthcare'

Two Different Approaches

| Approach | Healthcare | Health |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <i>Rationale</i> | Clinical | Environmental |
| <i>Interventions</i> | Diagnose/Prescribe/Treat | Fix physical/social/cultural environment |
| <i>Primary Research Focus</i> | On Individuals | On populations |

Health Psychology: Four Core Elements

- Promotion & Maintenance of Health
- Prevention & Treatment of Illness
- Aetiological & Diagnostic Correlates of Health & Illness
- Healthcare Systems & Health Policy

Matarazzo (1979)

Promotion & Maintenance of Health

- Understanding/Modifying Health Behaviours
- Mass Communication about Health
- Elucidating Pathways through which population-level factors affect health

Prevention & Treatment of Illness

- Focuses on People at Risk (*eg* High Blood Pressure)
- Addresses Behavioural Changes (*ie* Adherence)

Correlates of Health & Illness

For example:

- 'Vital Exhaustion' (*ie* excessive fatigue) as an antecedent of myocardial infarction
- Patient-controlled analgesia

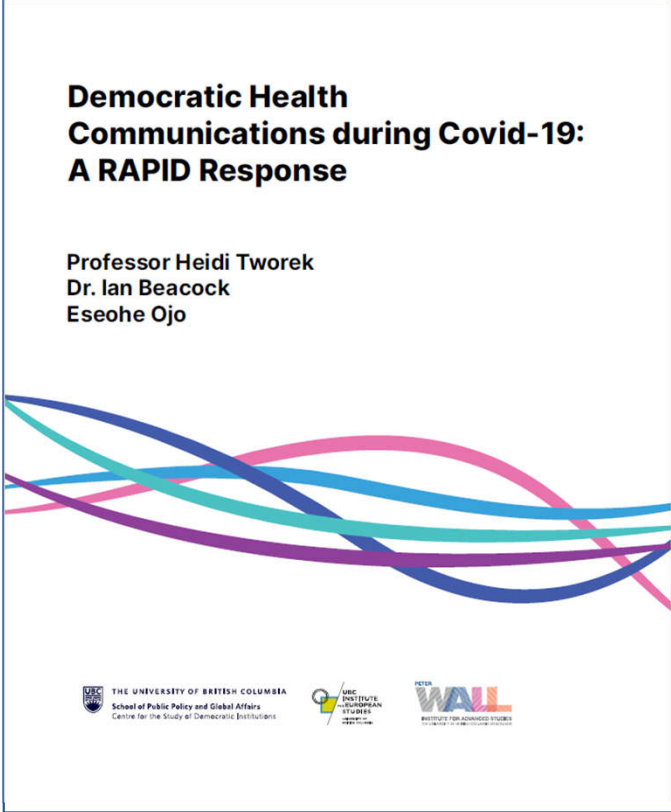
Healthcare Systems & Health Policy

- Analysis & Improvement of the Healthcare System & Health Policy Formation

Health Psychology During the Pandemic

- Small-scale focussed experiments
 - *eg* Waller *et al* (2020) Should tests be called 'immunity tests' ? – or 'antibody' tests?
- Mass Communications
 - Adherence – short-term & long-term
 - Trust
- Theoretically Based
 - *eg* Social Identity Theory

Tworek *et al* (2020)



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Tworek *et al* (2020)

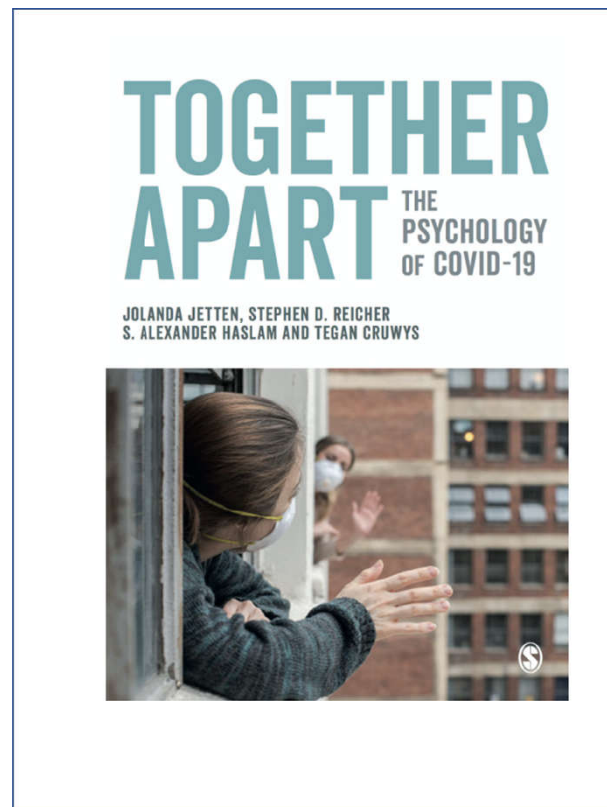
- In-depth studies of nine jurisdictions and two provinces on five continents
- Senegal, South Korea, Taiwan, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, New Zealand & Canada (including British Columbia & Ontario)
- Compared these with United Kingdom & United States
- Multidisciplinary Study

'RAPID' Principles

- **R**ely on Autonomy, Not Orders
- **A**ttend to Values, Emotions and Stories
- **P**ull in Citizens and Civil Society
- **I**nstitutionalize Communications
- **D**escribe it Democratically

Tworek et al (2020)

Jetten *et al* (2020a)



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Ten Lessons for Dealing with a Pandemic

- In a pandemic, people don't panic
- Common experience leads to the formation of shared identity
- Shared identity is fragile and needs to be nurtured by good leadership
- Shared identity is as important between Government and public as between different sections of the public
- Shared identity is at the root of adherence to pandemic restrictions

Jetten et al (2020b)

Ten Lessons for Dealing with a Pandemic

- Shared identity is at the root of mutual support amongst the public
- Shared identity preserves mental and physical health during a pandemic
- Without good leadership, a pandemic can undermine shared identity and exacerbate social divisions
- Division plus repression can turn social cohesion into social disorder
- Trust the people!

Jetten et al (2020b)

The Context Revisited

- World Health Organization - founded 1946 – “Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”.
- Public Health England – set up by the Health & Social Care Act (2012) – independent of the NHS

Public Health England: Role

‘PHE exists to protect and improve the public’s health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities’

‘We do this through world-class science, advocacy, partnerships, knowledge and intelligence, and the delivery of specialist public health services.’

*Public Health England
Strategic Plan for the next four years:
Better outcomes by 2020*

- PHE was set up in the belief that unless health & wellbeing were improved, the NHS would be overwhelmed

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Public Health England: Role

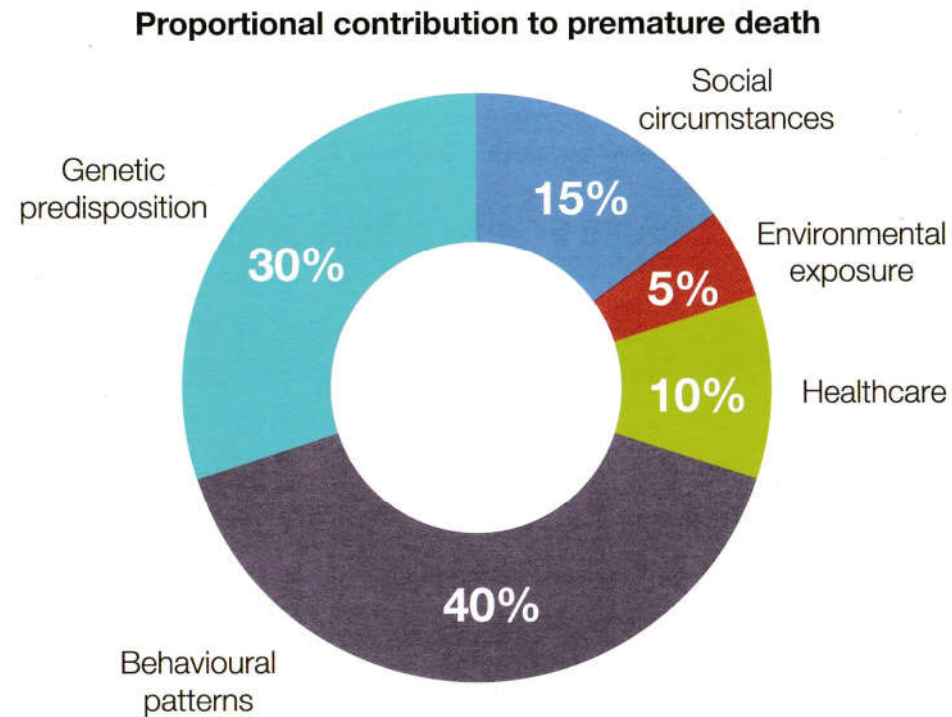


PHE Strategic Plan (2016)

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Causes of Premature Death



PHE Strategic Plan (2016)

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Susan Michie – Health Psychologist, UCL

Susan Michie

@SusanMichie

· 11h

Not surprising given we know how the virus transmits from person to person...& the fact that the effect didn't last predicted from basic behavioural psychology.

Quote Tweet

Christabel Cooper

@ChristabelCoops

· 11h

So what this article is (very politely) suggesting is that Eat Out not only didn't alter longer term consumption patterns, but also by encouraging people to crowd into restaurants on 3 days of the week, may have contributed to this second wave of Covid cases. Neutral face twitter.com/SusanMichie/st...

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Robert West – Health Psychologist, UCL

Robert West

@robertjwest

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Sep 23

Boris Johnson said he was proud of the way his government has handled the crisis. Is there anything at all that would make him ashamed? No need to answer that ...

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Conclusion

- Health Psychology is able to provide valuable support to Government regarding the pandemic
- This support presents practical recommendations
- It is also consistent with psychological theory
- Countries which have been more successful than the UK in handling the pandemic broadly adhere to these recommendations
- The Government has consistently ignored this advice...

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