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978-0-521-42618-3 - Psychosocial Processes and Health: A Reader

Edited by Andrew Steptoe and Jane Wardle

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The importance of the relations between psychosocial processes and health has been increasingly recognised over recent years. The development of the field is reflected in the growth of disciplines such as health psychology, psychosocial epidemiology and behavioural medicine. Understanding the links between the social environment, emotion, behaviour and illness is a growing theme in medical and health education. The basic literature is, however, widely dispersed across medical and social science journals.

This book makes available within a single volume some of the most important articles that have been published over the past 30 years. The 31 articles are grouped round six themes: *Life stress, social support and health*; *Psychophysiological processes in disease*; *Personality, behaviour patterns and health*; *Health practices and the modification of health risk behaviour*; *Coping with illness and disability*; and *Behavioural interventions in medicine*. Each is prefaced by a state-of-the-art review of the theme by the editors. These readings will be a most valuable resource for medical, psychology and health sciences teachers, students and clinicians.

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Psychosocial Processes and Health: A Reader

Compiled and edited by

ANDREW STEPTOE

*Department of Psychology,
St George's Hospital Medical School,
University of London*

JANE WARDLE

*Imperial Cancer Research Fund Health Behaviour Unit,
Institute of Psychiatry,
University of London*



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Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1994

First published 1994

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data

Steptoe, Andrew.

Psychosocial processes and health: a reader / compiled and edited
by Andrew Steptoe, Jane Wardle.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 41610 8 (hardback). – ISBN 0 521 42618 9 (pbk.)

1. Clinical health psychology. 2. Social psychology. I. Wardle,
Jane. II. Title

[DNLM: 1. Psychology, Social – collected works. 2. Health –
collected works. 3. Psychophysiology – collected works. HM 251
S837p 1994]

R726.7.S75 1994

155.9'2 – dc20

DNLM/DLC

for Library of Congress 93-49004 CIP

ISBN 0 521 41610 8 hardback

ISBN 0 521 42618 9 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2001

KW

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Preface

The interrelationships between psychosocial processes, behaviour and health have become the subject of increasing interest to clinicians and biomedical and social scientists over recent years. The development of disciplines such as behavioural medicine, psychosocial epidemiology, medical sociology and health psychology reflects the attention that is now being paid to this field. Material on the links between the social environment, emotion, behaviour and illness is being incorporated into the training of medical students and health professionals. Teaching on these topics has also been introduced into the graduate medical curriculum, and undergraduate and clinical psychology courses.

This growth of activity has been accompanied by the publication of specialist journals such as *Health Psychology*, *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, *Stress Medicine*, *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, and *Psychology and Health*. Textbooks for medical students and health psychologists have been introduced, while numerous edited volumes attest to the fertility of this field. However, it is our experience that access to important source material on psychosocial processes and health is limited. Students working within medical institutions may not have access to the relevant social science journals and *vice versa*. Key papers are published across a wide range of journals from general medical periodicals such as the *Lancet* and the *New England Journal of Medicine*, through specialist epidemiology and social science journals, to discipline-specific publications such as the *American Heart Journal* and the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute*.

This set of readings has therefore been devised with the specific purpose of making available within a single book a series of important papers that have been published over the past 30 years in the area of psychosocial processes and health. Some of these papers are classics in the field, in that they were instrumental in bringing particular theoretical orientations into a wider scientific consciousness, or in establishing important empirical findings with significant clinical implications. Other

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papers illustrate themes in research or important research findings that we have found to be of value in kindling the interest of students at many stages of their education. We have chosen to orientate the readings around six broad areas that have proved useful for teaching, namely: *Life stress, social support and health* (Section 1); *Psychophysiological processes in disease* (Section 2); *Personality, behaviour patterns, and health* (Section 3); *Health practices and the modification of health risk behaviour* (Section 4); *Coping with illness and disability* (Section 5); and *Behavioural interventions in medicine* (Section 6). Each set of readings is preceded by an introduction in which we have attempted to place papers in their clinical and scientific context. (Discussion of the readings is indicated by italicizing the names of authors.) The subsequent impact of these papers and more recent relevant scientific research is also discussed. The papers have been reproduced as written, and only their appearance has been altered.

Inevitably, our choice is a personal one, and other compilers might have arrived at a different selection. We are conscious of many omissions, including papers concerned with child health, doctor–patient communication, pain management, the problems surrounding AIDS, social inequalities in health, and many other topics. Nevertheless, we hope that the readings we have chosen will provide useful material for teachers and students alike, and act as a starting point for clinicians and scientists who want to find out about the links between psychosocial processes and health.

A.S.
J.W.