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The Effects of Personality Characteristics and Stress on Physical Illness

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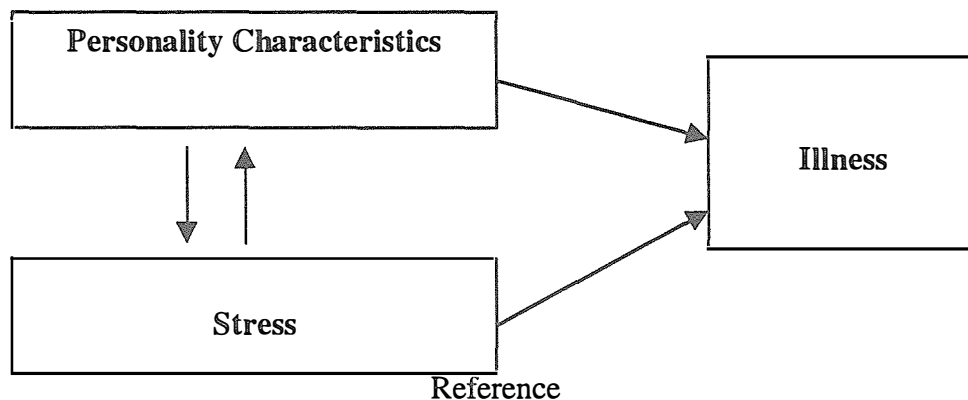
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Poster Presentation 1

THE EFFECTS OF PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS AND
STRESS ON PHYSICAL ILLNESS

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Recent research has indicated that personality characteristics and stress may influence the incidence of physical illness (Dreher, 1995). The majority of studies have examined personality characteristics and stress in acutely and chronically ill populations. However, this phenomenon has not been extensively studied in healthy populations. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among personality characteristics, stress, and physical illness in a sample of undergraduate students. This study tested a moderator model (see below) in which personality characteristics interact with stress to influence the incidence of physical illness using hierarchical multiple regression. Study participants included 55 undergraduate students selected from two classes from a small mid-western university. These two classes were chosen to represent the diversity of majors, gender, and year in school at the university. Personality characteristics were assessed with the measures of hardiness and assertiveness. A series of four surveys assessing hardiness, assertiveness, stress, and physical illness as well as a demographic sheet were distributed to study participants to be completed during class time. The analyses revealed significant correlations between the personality characteristics, hardiness and assertiveness, and stress. The data did not offer empirical support for the moderator model, thus suggesting that personality characteristics do not interact with stress to influence the incidence of physical illness. However this finding should be considered with caution since the measure used to assess physical illness may have limited sensitivity in this population. Future research is indicated using different measures of physical illness with greater sensitivity in healthy populations.



Reference

Dreher, H. (1995). The immune power personality: Seven traits you can develop to stay healthy. New York: Penguin Group.