

How Healthy Habits are Influenced Through Lifestyle

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This is a paper written by a PSY 211 student. It is generally strong, but not without flaws. The instructions were not the same as for any present assignment.

Abstract

Healthy living is a personal choice. This study's purpose is to examine how healthy habits are affected by, exercise, age, happiness, and conscientiousness. The participants that completed this study were volunteer oriented and were exposed to this survey through a class of Psychological Statistic students that attended a small Midwestern university. The results of this study indicated that all of the variables had a significant impact of healthy habits except age, which supported the hypotheses. One implication of these findings is that they could help future researchers depict why exercise, age, happiness, and conscientiousness tend to increase overall health behaviors. This would allow a better understanding of how and why people stay healthy with different personality traits.

How healthy habits are influenced through lifestyle

Gro H. Brundtland once said “Health is the core of human development”. Many aspects of our life are responsible for making health a basis of individuality. Currently there is increased focus the way humans live their lives since the general public is becoming unhealthier as each day passes. Because health is a matter that affects human’s everyday, the public must be aware of what factors will have the best affect on improving health.

There has been some research conducted which explains why exercise, age, conscientiousness, and happiness have a direct effect on peoples healthy habits. At first thought, exercise seems like it would be the only one of these aspects that might affect healthy habits; however, research shows that other variables also play a key role as well.

Healthy habits can be formed from traits that people demonstrate, one trait in particular is the tendency to exercise. In a recent study, Piko and Keresztes, (2006) found that regular physical activity was an excellent promotion of the practice of good health. Not only will exercise provide individuals with excellent physical health, but it also provides for a well-rounded healthy lifestyle as well. “For example, adolescents who are engaged in regular physical activity are less likely to smoke, watch television, become overweight, and more likely to eat a healthy diet”(Piko and Keresztes, 2006, p.136). Here it shows that actual physical activity not only keeps a health appearance but also influences healthy choices on a daily routine.

Conscientiousness- - the tendency to work hard, practice self-discipline, avoid procrastination, keep organized, and strive to achieve--is another aspect suspected to

influence healthy habits. Conscientiousness is a trait that has been associated with completing work and other projects prior to deadlines. Interestingly, past research has shown that conscientiousness plays a role in the development of healthy habits. McCann (2005), on the basis of Friedman's (1993, 1995) findings, conducted research that hypothesized conscientiousness having a positive correlation with longevity of the lives of the United States Presidents. In McCann's research, he showed that there was a strong positive correlation between how conscientious the Presidents were and the age that they died. Thus the more conscientious the Presidents were, the longer they lived a healthy life. This correlation would make sense because the people who were conscientious in getting tasks accomplished would live a less stressful life, thus generally reducing the amount of emotional wear and tear on their bodies. Less stress will make the public on average in a better mood as well.

A happy person is a healthy one. Typically when people become happy, it is because something has just impacted their life to change their mood, such as humor. This is one of the other variables that is expected to have a significant impact of healthy habits. Scholl and Ragan (2003) conducted a study which demonstrated the effects of how the MIRTH approach would help patients in health clinics. MIRTH is a therapeutic and rehabilitative clinic for patients over 65, and in this program they implement humor into the patient's recovery program to improve their happiness (Scholl & Ragan, 2003, p. 321). Making people laugh is a happy and positive emotion which aids in health. "Humor allows individuals to convey their thoughts and feelings in a nonthreatening and productive manner, thereby facilitating open, positive communication, promoting

immediacy and closeness between patients and providers”(Scholl and Ragan, 2003, p.321). Thus, happiness might also relate to healthy habits.

The last variable that was a part of this study is the affect of age and healthy habits. Age was examined in this study because it was thought that as people get older, they tend to slow down their activity which could hinder their health. Healthy habits can be just as observed in young children all the way up to adulthood. Among the other variables, this should have the least significant impact on health habits. How old a person will be expected to be irrelevant to how healthy their habits are because the other variables being tested can be present in people of all ages.

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationships that exercise, age, conscientiousness, and happiness have on health habits. People who tend to excel in these categories are expected to exhibit high levels of healthy habits.

Hypotheses

Hypotheses 1

H₀. Healthy habits will not be associated with the amount of exercise that an individual participates in.

H₁. Healthy habits will be associated with the amount of exercise that and individual participates in.

Hypotheses 2

H₀. Age will not affect how healthy you habits are.

H₁. Age will affect how healthy you habits are.

Hypotheses 3

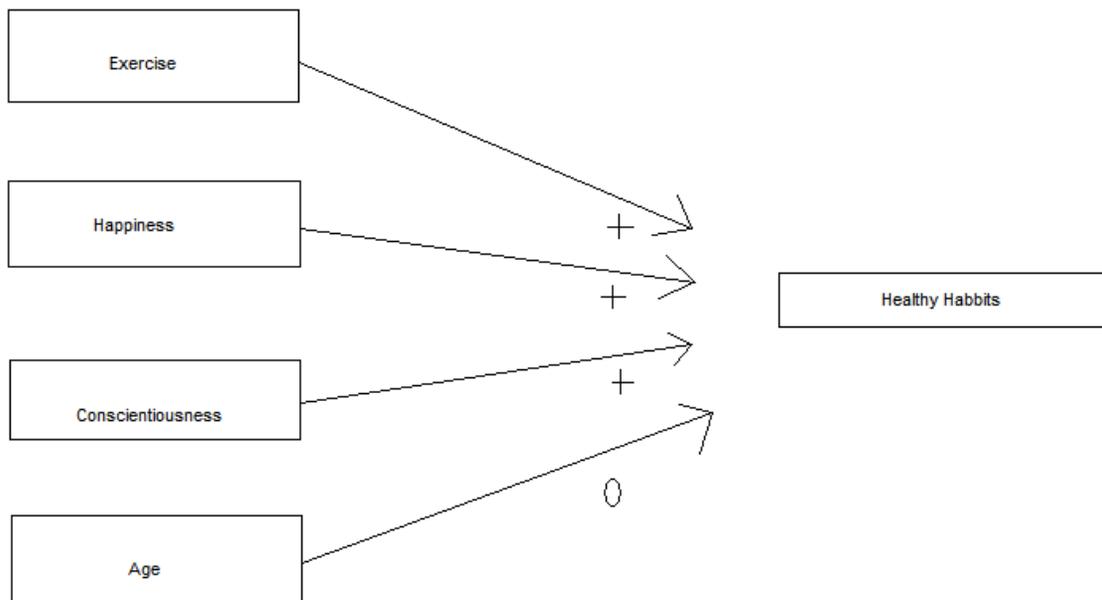
H₀. Conscientiousness will not have an affect on healthy habits.

H₁. Conscientiousness will have an affect on healthy habits.

Hypotheses 4

H₀. Happiness will not have an affect on healthy habits.

H₁. Happiness will have an affect on healthy habits.

**Method****Participants and Procedures**

Participants were friends and family ($n = 358$) of students in Michael Hoerger's fall 2007 PSY 211 Psychological Statistics course at Central Michigan University. Of the participants, 32 (9%) failed to complete the entire survey, and their data were dropped from the analyses, leaving a final sample of $n = 326$ participants. Being friends and family, the participants were from the hometowns of the students that created the survey. The survey was constructed by students in the PSY 211 class. Each of the 50 students

wrote five items on topics of personal interest, and the instructor whittled the item pool down to an 87-item survey, which participants completed online. For this set of analyses, only the following variables were analyzed: exercise, age, conscientiousness, happiness, and healthy habits.

Healthy Habits. This variable is the cultural dependent variable of the study. Healthy habits are designed to measure on a rating scale of 1 (unimportant) to 7 (important) how important exercise and a balanced diet are in a person's life right now.

Exercise. Exercise includes a broad range of physical activities, such as playing sports, lifting weights, running, swimming and more. This variable used a ranking system to indicate how many days a week people exercise with a rating of 0 (none) to 7 (everyday).

Age. This variable measured participant's age in years. The ages ranged from 18 as a minimum to 80 years of age as a maximum.

Conscientiousness. This is the tendency to work hard, practice self-discipline, avoids procrastination, keep organized, and strive to achieve. This area measured how conscientious participants were as related to another person their own age. The scores would range from 1 (below average) to 7 (above average).

Happiness. This variable assessed how happy participants were compared to others. The scores for this variable ranged from 1 (unhappy) to 7 (happy) with higher scores meaning people were happier.

Results

First, a Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between healthy habits and exercise. The test indicated that exercise had a significant positive

correlation as well as a large effect with healthy habits ($r = .63, p < .01$). That is, people who exercised more had healthier habits.

Second, a Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between healthy habits and age. The test indicated that there was no significant correlation between healthy habits and age ($r = .007, ns$). That is the age of people had no effect on their healthy habits.

Next, a Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between healthy habits and conscientiousness. The test indicated that conscientiousness had a significant positive correlation as well as a modest effect with healthy habits ($r = .25, p < .01$). That is, people who are more conscientious had healthier habits.

Then, a Pearson correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between healthy habits and happiness. The test indicated that happiness had a significant positive correlation as well as a slight effect with healthy habits ($r = .19, p < .01$). That is people who are happier have more healthy habits.

Finally a multiple regression study was conducted with exercise ($r = .60, p < .01$), conscientiousness ($r = .11, p < .01$), and happiness ($r = .15, p < .01$). To examine the overall contribution of the three significant predictors (exercise, conscientiousness, and happiness) in accounting for healthy habits, multiple regression was used. The results of the multiple regression analysis indicate that these three predictors accounted for a large proportion of the variance healthy habits, $R^2 = .44, p < .01$. Thus exercise, conscientiousness, and happiness account for 44% of the differences in healthy habits.

Discussion

The results of this replicate past research conducted which shows a relationship between healthy habits, exercise, conscientiousness, and happiness. This is also a branch of the previous research yielding similar results. The results supported the hypotheses that healthy habits are related to the amount of exercise a person has. These results are also linked to the past study done by Piko and Keresztes (2006). This result is as hypothesized. People who exercise more will tend to be more self conscious of how they look and what they eat which or at the basis of healthy habits. In addition, age was found to not affect how many healthy habits people uphold. This result backs up the hypotheses of age having no significant affect on healthy habits.

On the other hand the study yielded results that show positive significant correlation between conscientiousness and healthy habits, thus supporting the hypotheses of conscientiousness affecting healthy habits. This was also a result of a past study (McCann 2005). This type of affect was also hypothesized. Conscientiousness can be caring about physical and mental health as well as completing tasks, thus reflecting more healthy habits. Finally, this study also found that the relationship between healthy habits and happiness also supported the hypothesis that states that happiness will have an affect on healthy habits. Not only were the results found in this particular study but also in a past study conducted by Scholl and Ragan (2003), possibly because if a person is happier, it may be reflected by physical and mental health.

There are least two major strengths of this study. First this study tends to bring a basic approach to its participants. This is helpful because the study is able to retain the credible information while not intimidating the participants because this study collects

the information through the use of a survey. This study was also comprehensive because of the fact that it compared healthy habits to four other variables: exercise, age, conscientiousness, and happiness. These other variables that were compared also are thought of when people consider how to change the health habits. People will be able to use this study to better their own personal lives because this takes basic elements for a healthy life and shows that people who score at the higher ends of these will tend to have healthier lives.

However this study does present some drawbacks. The study was purely represented with correlational tests which mean that the relationship between variables may not be casual. For example, exercise can cause healthy habits but people do not have to be physically active to exhibit multiple healthy habits. It is possible to retain a normal weight with little or no exercise in certain cases. In this instance, metabolism may play a larger role than other variables. Also, this study only looked at four variables that impact healthy habits, when in reality there are countless other variables that may or may not have been tested that can have an impact on healthy habits.

This study also has certain implications that can be applied in life from this study. In this study, healthy habits were measured by how much exercise and how well and balanced of a diet people had. Personal trainers could present their clients with this type of survey and based on these scores they would get an idea of how the client could take to the programs that they will provide as well as who most likely will have the greatest improvement.

Further research on this topic might help to explain what other variables may lead to healthy habits other than the ones that were studied previously. It is obvious that these

four variables that were examined are not the only ones that can predict healthy habits. These variables were ones that were slightly predictable in nature but further research could show that unexpected variables may have a significant impact as well.

The public must work in order to develop and maintain healthy habits. It is not a personality trait that comes easy to most. It seems that Americans are more focused on trying to improve ones health after they let the years of abuse take its toll on the body. There needs to be a greater emphasis on keeping the body healthy throughout their life and not just when they realize it is too late. To build healthy habits, one needs a strong sense of exercise and dietary choices, however future research may show that more factors may be involved. This may contribute to a better understanding of a healthy life.

References

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