PSYC 1111-01 Introduction to Health Psychology

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Written Assignment Unit 7

**Introduction**

This paper explores the differences in illness and symptoms between males and females, as well as the disparities in health outcomes. In particular, it examines potential explanations for why females, on average, live longer than males and how these factors are related to differences in life expectancy. Additionally, the paper identifies the most compelling explanation and discusses the reasons behind it.

**1. Biological Factors**

The differences in health between genders are partly due to biological factors. Estrogen, a hormone more prevalent in females, improves lipid profiles and provides protection against cardiovascular disease. Additionally, the higher neonatal death rate among male babies compared to female babies indicates that females are generally more robust (Ogden, 2019). Evolutionarily, women may need to be stronger to survive childbirth, and while maternal mortality historically shortened women's lifespans, modern medicine has significantly reduced this risk. However, these biological factors alone cannot fully explain the difference in life expectancy between men and women, as the gap changes over time and varies significantly across different regions, suggesting that psychological and social factors also play a significant role (Ogden, 2019).

**2. Health Behaviors**

Gender differences in health behaviors also impact health outcomes. Research indicates that men are more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviors compared to women. For example, men tend to consume more meat, fat, and salt while eating less fiber, fruits, and vegetables than women. They also have higher rates of smoking, alcohol consumption, and drug use. Men show less motivation to make lifestyle changes and many older men believe it is "too late" to change. Furthermore, following divorce or widowhood, men's diets tend to deteriorate more than women's, and they increase their use of alcohol and drugs. However, the one health-related behavior that men consistently engage in more than women is physical activity (Ogden, 2019).

**3. Risk-Taking Behaviors**

Men are more likely to engage in risky behaviors, which also affect health outcomes. For instance, men are not only more likely to smoke, drink alcohol, and use drugs than women, but they also tend to do so excessively. Men typically have more sexual partners and participate more in high-risk sports and leisure activities such as rugby, snowboarding, skydiving, bungee jumping, and rally driving. These risky behaviors result in higher rates of accidental injury and death among men (Ogden, 2019).

**4. Help-Seeking Behavior**

Maintaining health requires the appropriate use of healthcare services, yet research shows that men generally use these services less frequently than women. Men delay seeking help and recognizing symptoms, and they are less likely to undergo screening tests or general health checks. Psychological processes such as symptom perception, illness cognitions, and the perceived costs and benefits of visiting the doctor explain why men might use healthcare services less frequently. These factors contribute to delayed help-seeking, which can impact life expectancy and mortality causes if men wait until their illness has progressed significantly before seeking medical care (Ogden, 2019).

**Conclusion**

Among these explanations, the combination of health behaviors and help-seeking behaviors seems the most likely to account for the differences in life expectancy between males and females. Men's propensity to engage in unhealthy and risky behaviors, coupled with their reluctance to seek medical help, significantly impacts their overall health and life expectancy. While biological factors are important, the substantial variations in life expectancy suggest that behavioral and social factors are critically influential. Therefore, efforts to change these behaviors and social norms are necessary to close the health and longevity gap between genders.

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**References**

1. Ogden. (2019). *The Psychology of Health and Illness.*