Personality and Health Risk Information Avoidance

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Personality and Health Risk Information Avoidance
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Introduction

Information avoidance refers to the intentional act of avoiding information that is perceived as threatening, like health information:
- HIV test results (Hightow et al., 2003)
- Cancer predisposition (Keogh et al., 2004)

Review paper describes why, when, and who engages in information avoidance (Sweeny, Melnyk, Miller, & Shepperd, 2010):

Why does information avoidance occur?
- A change in beliefs
- Undesired action
- Unpleasant emotions

When does information avoidance occur?
- Control over the consequences
- Resources to cope
- Expectations about the content

Who engages in information avoidance?
- Coping style
- Uncertainty orientation
- Age, Gender Socioeconomic Status, Education

Less is known about additional individual differences associated with information avoidance.

Research Question: Are certain personality traits related to who is more likely or less likely to engage in health risk information avoidance?

The Current Study

Proposed Hypotheses
- More likely to engage in information avoidance:
  - High neuroticism
  - Low self-esteem
  - High optimism

- Less likely to engage in information avoidance:
  - High openness
  - High conscientiousness
  - High uncertainty intolerance
  - High self-efficacy

Participants
- Approximately 100 undergraduate students, participate in exchange for course credit

Procedure
- Participants complete personality measures:
  - Big 5 Personality (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism; John and Srivastava, 1999)
  - Tolerance for Uncertainty (Sexton and Dugas, 2009)
  - Self-Efficacy (Bandura, 1994)
  - Self-Esteem (Rosenberg, 1965)
  - Optimism (Life Orientation Test, Weinstein, 1980)

- Read about ostensibly (fictitious) disease:
  - Complete measure of disease risk
  - Provide saliva sample to assess for disease risk
  - Given choice to receive disease risk results

Implications

Contributes to knowledge of factors that can reduce information avoidance:
- Affirmation (Howell and Shepperd, 2012)
- Contemplation (Howell and Shepperd, 2013)

Be able to further identify who is more likely to engage in avoidance behavior

Implement affirmation or contemplation strategies before diagnosis, and by personality type(s)

More people getting the services and support they need to remain healthy

References


