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A STUDY

OF INDIVIDUAL HEALTH BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

IN RELATION TO PROPENSITY FOR SELF-CARE

A Thesis

presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Nursing Studies at Massey University

Elizabeth A. Nevatt
1981
A psychology of entitlement

During the past 10 years, our citizens have adopted an attitude which leading opinion pollsters describe as the "psychology of entitlement". Entitlement, in their terms, has replaced expectation. People used to say, "I expect to be healthy five years from now. I expect to be making $2000 more a year from now. I expect to be taken care of in my old age." The attitude now is: "I am entitled to good health. I am entitled to more reward for what I do. I'm entitled to a salary that adjusts with the cost of living. Someone else is responsible for taking care of me when I am old." This difference in attitude may seem subtle but its influence is wide-ranging.

People now expect more from social institutions. They've put higher standards on their institutions, and at the same time they have shifted responsibilities from the individual to the institution. This is particularly true in the health care field. Instead of saying, "I should take care of my health," people are now saying, "They should take care of my health."

The emerging issues are what the researchers call "me issues".
In this thesis the concepts of Selfcare and of health, which is the goal of selfcare, are explored in relation to the selfcare nursing model. It is a basic premise of the selfcare model that the client be involved to the fullest possible extent in regaining or developing selfcare skills. The proposition offered in this thesis is that individuals differ with respect to their readiness for such involvement and effort in their own health work, and hence in ability to benefit from the application of the model. The study aimed at developing a means of identifying and predicting these differences.

It was hypothesized that the individual's perceptions and beliefs about health (Health Concept), his attributions about the location of blame for illness (Blame for illness), and the extent to which he perceives himself as having control over the contingencies of his behaviour (Locus of Control) would all systematically influence his readiness to engage in selfcare (Propensity for Selfcare).

A Health Questionnaire designed to obtain data on individual health related beliefs and practices was constructed. This was mailed to a randomly drawn sample of non-academic staff from one university. A combination of univariate and multivariate analyses of the 86 completed questionnaires showed the major variables as described above to be significantly interrelated. The pattern of relationships which emerged between responses to other items in the questionnaire cast further light on the complex determinants of health behaviour. Of particular interest was the suggestion that the manner of perceiving health is a crucial factor.
Use of the principal axes method of factor analysis allowed a shortened version of the original questionnaire to be produced. The profile yielded by scores on this instrument not only describes the client in terms of the four major health related variables identified in the study but can also be used to predict readiness to benefit from a selfcare nursing approach.
My special thanks go to my supervisor, Dr. N. Chick, for her constructive advice during the preparation of this thesis. Thanks are also due to Dr. K. McFarland who acted as statistical consultant for the data analysis, and to Dr. D. Esslemont for his assistance with the wording of the Health Questionnaire. For her help with the data collation I thank my friend Colleen. Finally I thank my husband who on occasion has kept us both fed while I have been getting all this together.
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

SELCARE - A MODEL FOR HEALTH CARE

INTRODUCTION

APPROACHES TO SELFCARE

THE IMPETUS FOR SELFCARE

- Increasing costs of health

- Changing disease patterns

- Iatrogenesis

- Dependency as an outcome of professional care

  Professional attitude to selfcare

  Professional identity crisis

  Professional responsiveness to selfcare

  Professional leadership in selfcare

THE PLACE OF THE SELFCARE CONCEPT IN

THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

- Effects of selfcare input on the health care system

- Effects of selfcare input on health care decision making

- Effects on the health care system of considering consumer needs

- Problems for the health care system of consumer participation

- Examples of consumer involvement in health care decision making

CONCLUSION
CHAPTER TWO

HEALTH - THE GOAL OF SELFCARE

HEALTH AS THE ORIENTATION FOR NURSING

DEFINITION OF HEALTH

- Health as the absence of disease
- Health as statistical normality
- Health as the presence of positive signs or achievements
  Health as objective functional ability
  Health as objective wellness behaviour
  Health as subjective experience
  Health as resilience
- The difficulty of defining health
- Other approaches to the definition of health
  Health as a commodity
  Health as a philosophy

BEYOND THE DEFINITIONS: NEW DIRECTIONS

THE USE OF DEFINITIONS AND DIRECTIONS

- A hierarchy of healths
- The nurse as a Health Director

CHAPTER THREE

THE CITIZEN: A SELF-CARING HEALTH PRACTITIONER

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR HEALTH
  Readiness for selfcare

AREAS OF SELFCARE

- Personally initiated selfcare
  Universal selfcare behaviours
  Health-deviation selfcare behaviours
    Self medication
    Adjustments in selfcare behaviours
  Involvement in health-related political decision making
  Self Help group membership
  Summary

- Professionally assisted selfcare
  Emergence of the selfcare concept in Nursing Theory
Knowledge seeking and application 97
Health maintenance 97
Disease prevention 97
Self help group 98
Resource seeking 98
Resource using, specifying own needs 98
Care of self in illness 99
Audit and control of treatment program 99
Lay-professional collaboration 99
Participation in health decision making 100
Perception of Locus of Control 100
Location of Blame for illness 101
Description of respondent 102
Socio-economic status 103
Marital status, Age, Sex 105
- Variable List 105
- Scoring of Questionnaire 105
ADMINISTRATION OF QUESTIONNAIRE 107
- Pilot study 107
- Subjects 108
Distribution of Questionnaires 108
- Return of the Questionnaires 110
STATISTICAL PROCEDURES 110
- Univariate procedures 110
Means and standard deviations 110
Contingency Tables analysis 111
Chi Square test 111
Bivariate correlation 112
- Multivariate procedures 112
Multiple stepwise regression analysis 112
Factor Analysis 112

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS 113
HYPOTHESIS RESULTS 113
- Hypothesis 1 113
- Hypothesis 2 117
DESCRIPTIVE RESULTS 119
- Further Questionnaire results: major variables 119
  Locus of Control and other variables 119
    Locus of Control & Consumer 119
    Locus of Control & Socio-economic status 119
    Locus of Control & Coincidence (matching health options) 121
    Locus of Control & Salience of health 121
Selfcare and other variables 121
Selfcare & Own Health
Selfcare & Discrepancy
(satisfaction with own health)
Location of Blame for illness & other variables 121
Synergic (multicausality) & Prevent
(preventive responsibility)
Synergic (multicausality) & Age 123
Self (related Blame) & Salience of health
Self (related Blame) & Coincidence
(matching health options) 123
Major variables and Salience of health 124
- Further Questionnaire results: other variables 124
Marital status & Own health
Marital status & Discrepancy
(satisfaction with own health)
Own Health & Discrepancy
Own Health & Salience of health 126
- Profile derived from Core variables 126
Want Health
Want Health & Own Health
Want Health & Coincidence
(matching health options) 128
Want Health & Discrepancy
(satisfaction with own health)
Want Health & Selfcare 131
Describe Health
Describe Health & Locus of Control
Describe Health & Own Health
- Factor Analysis and Construction of MiniQ 131
Health Concept 132
Locus of Control 132
Selfcare 132
Summary 136
- MiniQ (refined Questionnaire) results 136

CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION 139
ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN THE FOUR MAJOR VARIABLES USED IN THE HYPOTHESES
- Locus of Control & Selfcare 139
- Locus of Control & Health Concept 140
- Locus of Control & Blame for illness
- Selfcare & Health Concept
- Health Concept & Blame for illness
- Selfcare & Blame for illness
Summary of Major variable results

PREDICTION OF SELF CARE

INTERPRETATION OF DESCRIPTIVE FINDINGS
- Who defines health as what
- Who has what sort of health
- Behaviours of the person who wants better health
- Effects of the value placed on health upon other perceptions and behaviours
- Respondent profiles
  Selfcare
  Locus of Control
  Synergic: combinational cause of illness
  Avoid distress: reason for wanting health

MINIQ: THE REFINED QUESTIONNAIRE
- Criteria for high and low categories of major variables
- MiniQ scoring guide
- The Health Grid

USE OF THE MINIQ AND HEALTH GRID IN NURSING PRACTICE
- Readiness for a selfcare approach to health care
- Motivation for a selfcare approach to health
- The contribution of nursing care to the advancement of client selfcare
  on the basis of orientation on Locus of Control

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES
# List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 - 1</td>
<td>Orientations to Health. Three emphases as given by Baumann (1961), Herzlich (1973), Twaddle and Hessler (1977), Wu (1973), Mechanic (1972) and Dunn (1959).</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 1</td>
<td>Percentage of respondents choosing each of the three health orientations</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 2</td>
<td>Variable List</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5a</td>
<td>Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficients obtained between the four major variables</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 1</td>
<td>Contingency table for Locus of Control and Selfcare scores</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 2</td>
<td>Contingency table for Health Concept and Locus of Control scores</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 3</td>
<td>Contingency table for Environment and internal Locus of Control scores</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 4</td>
<td>Contingency table for Locus of Control scores and Consumer counts</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 5</td>
<td>Contingency table for Locus of Control scores and Socio-economic counts</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 6</td>
<td>Contingency table for Coincidence and internal, external Locus of Control scores</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 7</td>
<td>Contingency table for Salience and internal, external Locus of Control scores</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 8</td>
<td>Contingency table for Selfcare scores and Own Health counts</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 9</td>
<td>Contingency table for Discrepancy counts and Selfcare scores</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 10</td>
<td>Contingency table for Prevent and Synergic scores</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 11</td>
<td>Contingency table for Synergic scores and Age counts</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 12</td>
<td>Contingency table for Salience counts and Selfcare scores</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 13</td>
<td>Contingency table for Self scores and Coincidence counts</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 - 14 Relationship between health state and marital status 125
5 - 15 Contingency table for Marital status and Discrepancy counts 125
5 - 16 Relationship between Own health and Discrepancy counts 125
5 - 17 Relationship between Own health and Salience 125
5 - 18 Contingency table for Own health and Want health counts 129
5 - 19 Contingency table for Own health and Want health counts 129
5 - 20 Contingency table for Coincident and Want health counts 129
5 - 21 Contingency table for Discrepancy and Want health counts 130
5 - 22 Contingency table for Selfcare scores and Want health (to avoid distress) counts 130
5 - 23 Contingency table for Locus of Control scores and Describe health (Fun) counts 130
5 - 23a Contingency table for Own health and Describe health (Fun) counts 130
5 - 24 Factor loadings of Health Concept items obtained by carimax rotation, Principal Factor Analysis 132
5 - 25 Factor loadings of Locus of Control items obtained by varimax rotation, Principal Factor Analysis 134
5 - 26 Factor loadings of Selfcare items obtained by varimax rotation, Principal Factor Analysis 135
5 - 27 Correlation matrix for the four major variables, MiniQ data 138
6 - 1 Forced choice options for the Location of Blame question, MiniQ 149
6 - 2 Numbers, means, SDs; ranges of scores for the high and low categories of the variables Health Concept, Locus of Control and Selfcare, MiniQ. 150
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 - 1</td>
<td>A diagrammatic representation of the components of selfcare</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 1</td>
<td>Relationships between perfect health, normal health, illhealth and death</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 2</td>
<td>The health-illness continuum. Subjective and functional aspects and their relation to disease</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 3</td>
<td>Relationships between high level wellness, normal health, sickness, illness, disease and death</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - 4</td>
<td>High level wellness as the terminus of the health - death continuum</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 1</td>
<td>Relationships between selfcare practice and health</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 2</td>
<td>Snoopy locates the blame for illness</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 - 3</td>
<td>Expected positive relationships between the four major variables</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 - 1</td>
<td>Return rate of questionnaires</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 1</td>
<td>Relationships between questionnaire variables</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 2</td>
<td>Relationships between the Core variables</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Want Health and Describe Health, and other variables</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 1</td>
<td>Percentages of respondents who defined health by each of the given options</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 2</td>
<td>Scoring guide for MiniQ: Relationships between major variables, and between major variables and core variables. Questionnaire relationships augmented from MiniQ data analysis</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 3</td>
<td>The Health Grid</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 4</td>
<td>MiniQ scoring guide completed with results from Questionnaire code number 87</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 - 5</td>
<td>Profile of results from Questionnaire code number 87</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A  Health Questionnaire
Appendix B  Scoring Convention
Appendix C  Scoring Code
Appendix Di  Covering letter
   Dii  Reminder letter
   Diii  Appreciation note
Appendix E  Responses to Question 10
Appendix F  Improved scoring format for ranks
Appendix Gi  Interval data file: Questionnaire
   Gii  Crosstabulation data file: Questionnaire
   Giii  Factor Analysis data file: Questionnaire
   Giv  Interval data file: MiniQ
Appendix H  Comparison Tables 1 and 2
Appendix Ii  MiniQ
   Iiii  MiniQ Scoring Code
Appendix J  Wallston et al., 1976
              Health Locus of Control Scale
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Over the past twenty years a social revolution in personal health care has taken place. This revolution is evident in the social selfcare movement which has as its ethos personal responsibility in health care. The aim of this movement is personal autonomy and the means by which health is secured is personal effort. The three primary components of the social selfcare movement are universal selfcare, involvement in personal and community health-related decision making, and health deviation selfcare. In selfcare the care of the self may be administered either personally or by others, for example by family, friends, or by health professionals such as nurses.

In Orem's (1971) selfcare model for nursing practice the nurse shares in the client's selfcare responsibility and involves the client in health care decision making until such time as the client can resume full responsibility for health on his own behalf. The parameters of the social selfcare model within which the client's selfcare agency can be exercised are broader than those of Orem's nursing selfcare model. In terms of the social selfcare model not only will the client make decisions about personal selfcare but he may also be involved in health-related decision making at the political level. An essential element of social selfcare is that of learning about and/or using resources which can contribute not only to the regaining of health but also to its qualitative and quantitative advancement.

The client may not want to selfcare to the extent that is implicit in either the selfcare nursing model or the social selfcare model, nor may he feel able to cope with demands and expectations which are new to him. This raises the question of the appropriateness and usefulness of the selfcare model of nursing for all clients regardless of their perceptions of both sick-role behaviour and of nursing practice. Smith, Buck, Colligan, Kerndt and Sollie (1980) have demonstrated different perceptions of nursing care by the clients and the nurses in a geriatric selfcare situation,
(with the clients having a better concept of selfcare than the nurses). From a nursing perspective it would be useful to find out if there is some way to assess a client's readiness to benefit from the selfcare approach, either for his nursing care or for his personal health work.

Cromwell, Butterfield, Brayfield and Curry (1977) in their discussion on the management of coronary patients suggest that a clinical judgement may be made regarding the client's perception of agency to achieve outcomes. This judgement is made by discussing with the client what it is that he thinks is in control of his life. The person who perceives that he himself has control over life outcomes is described (using Rotter's 1966 terms) as being internal locus of control, or ILC. Such a person will tend to blame himself for failure to achieve goal directed efforts and will tend to take action to achieve a desired goal. On the other hand a person who is external on locus of control (i.e., ELC) perceives life outcomes to be due more to fate or chance than to personal effort. Locus of control can then be an indicator of client readiness to exercise selfcare agency and also a nursing indicator for differential treatment of ILC and ELC clients.

It is proposed that Cromwell et. al.'s suggestion that selfcare agency be assessed by locus of control orientation can be augmented. Locus of control and preventive health behaviour (i.e., selfcare behaviour) have been found to be associated (e.g., Langlie, 1977). Therefore the current selfcare propensity of a particular client could also be an indicator of readiness for a broader selfcare approach to health care. Preventive health behaviour is also associated with the value that a particular person places on his personal health (Wallston, Wallston, Kaplan and Maides, 1975). Furthermore, selfcare practices are influenced by the manner in which the cause of illness is perceived (Stone, 1979). Therefore not only locus of control but also selfcare propensity, perception of health, and the location of attributed blame for illness could be indicators of readiness for a selfcare approach to health care.
If this is found to be so then it should be possible not only to measure the client's readiness for a selfcare nursing approach but also to assess both the extent to which the nurse can involve the client in personal decision making and responsibility, and the speed with which such a (self-care) program should be negotiated and conducted.

The scope of the social selfcare model is maintenance and advancement of health by the individual. The goal of selfcare nursing is the regaining or sustaining of health by the agency of both nurse and client. The problem is how health, which is the goal of selfcare, is perceived by the person and under what conditions that person would be likely to make use of the selfcare orientation in his or her own health work.

In the following chapters the concepts of selfcare and health are outlined and the individual's role as a selfcaring health practitioner is discussed. The construction of a questionnaire designed to elicit information relating to health beliefs and practices is described. Data derived from the administration of this questionnaire were used to test hypothesized relationships between selected variables designated as health related. Further analysis of these data yielded additional information regarding the complexity of individual health behaviour.

In the last phase of the study, some modification of the initial questionnaire was undertaken. This resulted in a potentially more powerful instrument for use in the assessment of individual readiness for a selfcare approach to health care. Practical implications associated with the use of this shorter tool are outlined in the concluding section of the thesis.

To sum up, this present study has a fourfold purpose:

(i) To provide a description of individual health beliefs and practices,

(ii) To investigate relationships between these beliefs
and practices and other selected variables,

(iii) To evaluate the proposition that selfcare propensity, one of the major variables, is predictable from scores on the other three major variables (Health concept, Locus of Control and Blame for illness), and,

(iv) To refine the Health Questionnaire used for data collection in the present study.