

What is the influence of humour style and sense of humour on health anxiety and physical symptoms?

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Abstract

Recent data suggests approximately 10.6 million individuals (ONS, 2023) experience more than one physical or mental health condition. Health anxiety, with population prevalence of approximately 4.5%, has been identified as one factor driving an increase in cyberchondria, whereby individuals excessively search online for medical information. Individuals with higher health anxiety may be driven to seek help for what are considered normal physical sensations but perceived as symptoms, generating worry and concern. This can place additional physical and financial strain on healthcare services. This highlights a need for innovative and cost-effective approaches to help with prevention and management of such conditions.

Previous research has suggested that use of humour may play a role in influencing physical and mental health, such as anxiety, with studies finding people who engage with humour report fewer physical symptoms (Richards & Kruger, 2017). However, more research is needed to determine whether these findings are sufficiently robust to integrate humour in interventions for mental and physical health conditions. The current study aims to investigate the extent of which humour affects health anxiety and physical symptoms.

This current study is a correlational survey-based design assessing the role of humour style, sense of humour and general affect as predictors of health anxiety, cyberchondria and somatic symptoms. The study used six questionnaires, the Humour Styles Questionnaire (HSQ), Sense of Humour Questionnaire-6 (SHQ-6), General Anxiety Disorder-7 (GAD-7), Cyberchondria Severity Scale-12 (CSS-12), Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-15) and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS).

Multiple regression analyses will be presented that assess the extent to which humour style, sense of humour and mood predict health anxiety, cyberchondria and physical symptoms. Potential implications from findings may highlight that particular humour styles and degree of sense of humour are factors that could be used in targeting reduction in health anxiety, cyberchondria and physical symptoms.

Keywords

Humour, Health anxiety, Physical symptoms