

SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN'S CONCEPTS OF HEALTH AND ILLNESS

CHUEH CHANG* FAN-LIN CHEN**

This study presents the development of children's concepts of health and illness based on Piaget's stage theory. Open-ended questions regarding the reasons for and the construction of health and illness were presented to 354 third to sixth grade students in a Taipei elementary school. Additional questions explored students' understandings of disease management and health promotion.

Results indicate 1/ Different concepts are formed over the different grade levels. 2/ Most students see the origin of disease in physiological processes (87.2%). Only 6% mentioned psychological reasons and none of the students saw social factors as potential causes of illness. 3/ A full 91.8% of students stated their reliance on external controls; however, 10.3% of fifth and sixth grade students saw self control as a means to manage sickness. 4/ As to the factors promoting health, 69.8% of students referred to physiological processes, 16% mentioned psychological factors—but none saw social

factors being involved in the construction of health. 5/ Eighty-eight percent of students reported that doing good can promote health. 6/ The older the student, the more elaborate the accounts offered for states of health and illness. 7/ There were no sex differences in the development of health and illness concepts.

We present 4 implications for consideration: 1/ Health workers should understand the development of children's conceptions of illness. 2/ Teaching methods in health education should be concrete and provide more examples. 3/ Parents should be more specific in their descriptions of disease to the end of increasing children's understanding and ability to prevent disease while minimizing potential guilt feelings. 4/ Greater efforts should be made in the future to promote the bio-psycho-social view of illness and health. (*J Natl Public Health Assoc (ROC)*: 1992:11(1):32-43).

Key Words: Parents of Mental Retarded, Eugenic, Family Planning

* Institute of Public Health, National Taiwan University

** Department of Sociology, National Taiwan University