

PUBLIC HEALTH

Habit of Sickness

Those with frequent bouts of illness or accident found to differ from well people in adaptation to life and in how they feel about themselves and their niche.

► THE REASON some people are always getting sick or having serious accidents is that they have trouble meeting the demands of their life situation.

The person who is almost never sick a day in his grown-up life is the one who has adapted to his particular life situation.

These conclusions of a study of more than three thousand telephone operators, linemen and installers were reported by Drs. Lawrence E. Hinkle Jr., and Norman Plummer of New York Hospital-Cornell University Medical Center, New York, at the meeting of the American Public Health Association in Buffalo.

The men and women in the study, employees of the New York Telephone Company, were similar in age, cultural background, social and economic status and physical condition when first observed, that is when first employed. They all lived and worked in New York and their working conditions, nutrition, exposure to infection and so on were about the same.

But some of the men and some of the women had frequent and recurrent illnesses throughout their adult lives, whereas others had few or no illnesses. About one-third of them accounted for three-fourths of the episodes of illness and four-fifths of the days of disability of the entire group.

The average woman in the "well" group had been disabled about one month out of about 29 years of working life. The average woman in the "ill" group had been disabled, that is, out sick, more than three years during about 26 years.

Among the men, the average "well" man had 19.4 days of sickness absence during 26.9 years of service and the average "ill" man had 581.10 days of sickness absence during 28.8 years of service.

The "ill" men and women not only had more sickness but more serious sicknesses. Their ailments were not limited to one part or organ. For example, a woman who was sick a lot did not just have frequent attacks of influenza or gallbladder trouble. She had these and also a breast tumor, an ovarian tumor, colitis, arthritis, stomach and intestinal trouble, decayed teeth, numerous sprains and injuries and high blood pressure.

Heredity and innate constitution cannot be ruled out as factors in making one group of people more susceptible to more sickness than another of the same age, sex, social conditions, and the like.

But the chief difference, the Cornell doctors think, is in the way people adapt themselves to their lives and how they feel about themselves and their place in the world.

Of the women, the always sick ones were

in general "married women, widows or divorcees, whose intention in life had been to be housewives and the mothers of families that were supported in happiness by a working husband," the doctor reported.

"The most healthy women, by contrast, were women whose ambition did not go much beyond the rather simple repetitive tasks demanded by their jobs. They were, in general, single women with little drive toward marriage, and few outside responsibilities, who found this particular niche in life quite comfortable to them.

"The ill workmen were likewise men who were under pressure from their life situations. Some of them were men who had wished to be in quite different occupations, but who felt that they had been 'trapped' in their present jobs by the economic depression of the 1930's, which began shortly after they were hired. Others were men with ill wives and children, or uncongenial marriages. Still others were ambitious, driving individuals, frustrated by lack of advancement.

"The healthy workmen on the other hand were mostly craftsmen who took pleasure

in the work they did, and had selected their occupation for that reason. They were men whose ambitions were satisfied, they were congenially married, and the members of their families were healthy."

Science News Letter, October 23, 1954

PUBLIC HEALTH

College Students Found To Neglect Their Health

► ALL STUDY and no attention to diet or exercise can make Joe College a sick boy.

So say Drs. Edward B. Johns and Wilford C. Sutton, school health educators at the University of California at Los Angeles, and Lloyd E. Webster, director of health education for the Los Angeles County Schools.

In a survey of 648 students at three California colleges conducted by Dr. Sutton, it was found that only 19% of the students had what could be termed good diets.

Only 76% ate breakfast daily and, as a group, they averaged the equivalent of two candy bars a week and three glasses of soda pop. A few habitually consumed as many as 28 candy bars per week and 21 glasses of pop.

The survey also revealed that only 49% of the undergraduates exercised regularly and properly and only 33% were following correct dental health practices.

Results of the survey are contained in a new book by the three educators, "Health for Effective Living," published by McGraw-Hill.

Science News Letter, October 23, 1954



SNIPERSCOPE—This greatly improved version of the World War II model makes use of infrared light to permit a soldier to find his target in the dark without visible light. It is shown here mounted on an M-1 rifle. The improved version has a longer range, more rugged construction, and a more accurate aiming device than its older counterpart.