

STRUCTURE AND VALIDITY OF THE WELL-PEOPLE PHYSICAL HEALTH SCALE

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Although the World Health Organization adopted a comprehensive definition of health that emphasized positive well-being in 1946, the trend of defining health in negative terms has remained pervasive in organizational research and the practice of medicine. As a result, most existing self-report scales for physical health focus on negative aspects of health, such as physical functioning difficulties and symptoms, which may be appropriate for clinical populations, but can lead to ceiling effects when examining the physical health of non-clinical samples. In this study we provide further evidence for the validity of a new index of physical health, the Well-People Physical Health Scale (WPPHS) as a measure of health rather than illness, suitable for use in surveys of relatively healthy working populations.

There were 291 respondents to an online survey assessing the health of people in the workforce. We assessed the ability of the scale to distinguish between people who can expect different levels of physical health. As hypothesized, participants with a chronic health condition had a significantly lower mean WPPHS score relative to participants without a chronic health condition. Similarly, the scale was able to reliably discriminate between those with an acute medical condition and those with no acute condition. We found that people who always ate a balanced diet scored higher on WPPHS relative to those who did not always eat so carefully. Contrary to expectations, however, non-smokers did not report better health except for having a higher level of personal fitness relative to smokers. It is possible that fitness is the first component of physical health that is affected by smoking and over time decrements in physical health are noticeable in other components such as resistance and resilience to disease.

In sum, the Well People Physical Health Scale, in its early development, appears to be a valid and reliable measure of physical health especially when all four components (mobility, fitness, resistance and resilience to disease, digestive health) are included in the overall scale. Additional research should replicate these results and provide additional support for the validity and reliability of the index, providing a new tool for Occupational Health Psychologists that will enable them to examine physical health in a way that includes both positive and negative elements. The inclusion of positive aspects of physical health makes the scale especially appropriate for working populations and represents the full continuum of physical health as proposed by the World Health Organization and by researchers in Occupational Health Psychology.

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