

Outline & evaluate the Biological/Medical Model and consider its strengths and weaknesses.

The biological model assumes that all mental illnesses have a physiological cause. One assumption of the biological model is genetic inheritance; it assumes that genes have a major effect on the likelihood of developing a mental illness. Illnesses can be inherited by parents and relatives. Kendler et al found that relatives of SZs were 18 times more likely to develop the illness than a matched group. Another assumption is biochemistry, this is chemical imbalances in the brain are involved in certain disorders; neurotransmitters play an important role in behaviour. It has been found that an excess of the neurotransmitter dopamine has been linked to SZ. Finally infection is a common cause for physical illness; Barr et al found a significant link between mothers who had influenza whilst pregnant and their child developing SZ.

As there are physiological causes of abnormality therefore the treatments are physiological these are Drugs, ECT, which involves a small electric shock being sent to the brain causing a small seizure/convulsion and psychosurgery. Where electrodes are inserted into the brain and the infected part of the brain tissue is 'burnt' away.

There are many strengths and weaknesses with this approach, firstly it is a humane approach unlike the cognitive approach, and the patient is not to blame for their illness as it was not their fault, so they don't feel bad. However they take a very passive role in their treatment which is a weakness as they have no control. A further strength of this model is that it has been scientifically tested giving a lot of evidence to back up the theory and treatments e.g. Holland found a 56% concordance rate for a genetic link in Anorexia Nervosa. In addition to the evidence from studies there has been an increase in brain scans and MRI's and post mortems which support the physiological approach of abnormality. There have also been studies carried out on humans and non-human animals which provide further support, however there is a problem with using animals as we cannot be sure that animals have the same reactions as humans and there we need to treat the information gathered from animal experimentation with caution.

A further strength of this model are the treatments which have proven to be successful, ECT and psychosurgery have been found to have a 75% success rate and drugs are seen as highly effective. However Psychosurgery

is irreversible and ECT by some has been considered to be barbaric. Also although drugs treat the symptoms and are easy to administer and cost effective there are problems with side-effects, and issues of addiction and dependency.

Additional weakness is that critics have argued that it a reductionist approach; it focuses on biological/physiological causes of abnormal behaviour and ignores the social, cultural and emotional aspects of behaviour therefore ignoring the complexities of human behaviour.

However the biological approach was one of the first approaches in use and is widely and highly regarded in the west and still continues to influence us today.