

The Impact of Short-term Uncertainty on Health Behaviors

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Abstract

During prolonged periods of uncertainty, such as economic crises and pandemics, both positive and negative changes have been observed in individuals' health behaviors. Health-related uncertainty can lead people to avoid healthcare services and make unhealthier choices. For individuals experiencing chronic uncertainty, psychological stress and weakened immune function have been shown to negatively affect both physical and psychological health.

In this study, 77 women and 21 men with an average age of 22.3 (SD = 5.8) participated. Four manipulation texts were created by combining two different uncertainty manipulations and two different time manipulations. After exposure to the manipulation texts, participants completed a scale measuring their attitudes toward health behaviors. Participants exposed to the short-term uncertainty manipulation scored the highest on the physical activity and interpersonal relations dimensions of the health scale. These findings are consistent with previous studies on the impact of uncertainty. In addition to past literature, the results suggest that if positive changes in health behaviors are desired, conveying uncertainty through a short-term narrative may lead to more favorable outcomes.

Keywords: Health behaviors, health protection, uncertainty