

The stress-disequilibrium theory: chronic disease development, low social control, and physiological de-regulation

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KEY WORDS

Stress; chronic disease; social control

SUMMARY

The Stress – Disequilibrium Theory is based on a new generalized analytic three-level model based on thermodynamics to describe the process of physiological risk development. This approach explains how low social control could cause chronic disease through chronic de-regulation of our highly integrated physiological systems. Could low external social control lead to low internal physiological control: i.e. compromised self-regulation – and then disease? The theory implicitly explores the evidence for the physiological causes of chronic diseases, including cardiovascular diseases, at a high level (i.e. a non-reductionist level) and in a unifying manner – to provide a potentially easier linkage to the broad social policy consequences implied by the global economy. Evidence from our own recent Heart Rate Variability monitoring and job strain research (5) is presented which assesses the effect of low control on autonomic regulation on the heart. The theory is consistent with the Demand/Control Model, and could be considered its underlying theoretical explanation.