

Personality and mortality risk across the life span: the importance of conscientiousness as a biopsychosocial attribute.

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OBJECTIVE: This study addressed whether personality in childhood and personality in adulthood are independent predictors of mortality risk and the extent to which behavioral and other psychosocial factors can explain observed relationships between personality and mortality risk. **DESIGN:** This was a prospective longitudinal cohort study of 1,253 male and female Californians over 7 decades (1930-2000). Proportional hazards regressions were the principal analyses. **MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES:** Mortality risk (in the form of relative hazards) was the primary outcome. Additional tests of mediators and moderators ascertained whether associations between personality and mortality risk remained significant when psychosocial and behavioral variables were statistically controlled. **RESULTS:** The findings, including a new 14-year additional follow-up in old age, revealed that **conscientiousness, measured independently in childhood and adulthood, predicted mortality risk across the full life span.** The link from childhood remained robust when adult conscientiousness and certain behavioral variables were controlled. Psychosocial and behavioral variables partly explained the adult conscientiousness-longevity association. **CONCLUSION:** The findings demonstrate the utility and complexity of modern personality concepts in understanding health and point to conscientiousness as a key underexplored area for future biopsychosocial studies. Copyright 2007 APA.

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