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Can We Get Sick If We Want To?

Can we get sick if we want to? This intriguing question is the title of a recent paper by CBR member **Lakshmi Raman** of the **Department of Psychology**, which appeared in the November 2009 issue of the **British Journal of Psychology (Volume 100, Pages 729-751)**. Raman's study examined children's and adult's recognition of intentionality in the origins of illness. For instance, she found that "both preschoolers and adults reasoned that the intentions of the recipient would play a significant role in the probability of contracting an illness but only adults reasoned that the recipient having knowledge of the transmitter's intentions would have an impact on illness. Moreover, preschoolers (but not adults) judged that biological contaminants such as germs would interact with the intentionality of the recipient to increase the chances of contracting an illness whereas adults reasoned that psychological states can have a direct influence on the manifestation of illness." This study is a part of Raman's larger goal of understanding how children and adults think about the causes of illness and disease. She recently obtained a grant from the National Institutes of Health to study "Beliefs About the Role of Nutrition on Mind-Body Interactions" Her aim is to identify if children and adults think that biological processes can be influenced by psychological factors and vice-versa. This issue is important, because people's beliefs about the role of nutrition on biological and psychological processes will dictate their dietary, lifestyle and medical treatment choices. This knowledge is therefore essential for devising effective health intervention programs to promote healthy lifestyle choices.

SUMMARY

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