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Institutionalization: A Theory of Human Behavior and the Social Environment

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Abstract

Institutionalism is the syndrome first recognized and described in inpatient psychiatric facilities, which is now used to describe a set of maladaptive behaviors that are evoked by the pressures of living in any institutional setting. This article traces the development of the theory of institutionalization, which predicts and explains an individual's response to that particular type of environment. The article makes note of key contributors and contributions, and of empirical studies that have advanced the theory. Underlying perspectives and assumptions are identified and earlier theoretical models are reviewed and critiqued. An updated model of the theory, which includes individual vulnerabilities, objective conditions of the institutional placement, and the resident's perceptions of the environment, is presented. New directions in the field of institutional care and implications for social workers, particularly for those working in nursing home and prison settings, are discussed, along with recommendations for next steps for theory progression.

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