Topic 2: The Medical Model as an explanation for Mental Illness

How does the topic link to debates?

**NATURE VS NURTURE**

Medical model supports nature side, as does all biological explanations for mental illness. Large emphasis on genetic vulnerability, ignoring environmental factors. However does look at environmental factors that are linked with biology (oxygen starvation during birth, prenatal exposure to flu, and childhood head injuries – all have been linked to mental illness)

**FREEWILL VS DETERMINISM**

Medical model is very deterministic. Symptoms are seen as determined by brain or biochemical abnormality, which are in turn determined by genetic vulnerability. Very little room for free will – this is weakness of approach

**REDUCTIONISM VS HOLISM**

Medical model is seen as reductionist: the mind is being reduced to the brain, human experience is reduced to biological events. Ignores that we are more than a sum of brain cells and chemicals. However, it is not possible to study the whole of human nature at the same time, so it can be argued the approach needs to be reductionist.

**INDIVIDUAL VS SITUATIONAL**

Biological explanations are thought to support the individual side of the debate - with emphasis on the role of genetics, brain chemistry and abnormal brain structure and function. Specifically focusing on why some individuals experience mental illness and others don’t.

However, mental illness is not just influenced by individual differences. It is associated with a range of situational variables such as stress, poverty etc. These have not been taken into account.

**USEFULNESS OF RESEARCH**

Research into mental illness is very useful. It introduces a range of treatments and allows us to see how effective already existing treatments are. Arroll (2005) compared antidepressants with placebo. He found 56-60% of participants treated with depressants improved, compared to 42-47% given the placebo.

**PSYCHOLOGY AS A SCIENCE**

Biological explanations for mental illness are considered to be scientific. The approach (and explanations) are based firmly on research. Scientific techniques are used to study biological explanations for example, the scanning techniques used to study brain abnormality and the genetic sequences used to find associations between genes and mental illness. The biological treatments have also been tested scientifically.
Exam questions

1. To what extent are explanations of mental illness reductionist? [10] (background)

2. Discuss the nature/nurture debate in relation to the biological explanation of mental illness [10] (background)

3. Suggest how biological treatment can be used to treat one specific disorder. [5] (application)

Mental health Exam structures:

General guidance:

- 1-3 marks = 1 point – Point, Evidence/Example, Explain
- 4-6 marks = 2 points – Point, Evidence/Example, Explain
- 6-9 marks = 3 points - Point, Evidence/Example, Explain
- 10 marks = 4 points - Point, Evidence/Example, Explain

To What Extent Question AND Discussion Questions:

You must argue both sides (It is... and it is not)

1. Point: *Explanations of mental health can/cannot be considered reductionist.*
2. Evidence/Example: *Introduce and explain one (of three) explanations*
3. Explain: *Explain why it is/is not reductionist*
4. Challenge/Extend: *Provide counterargument as to why the explanation needs to be reductionist/it is positive to be reductionist etc*