

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Researchers in the fields of psychology and rehabilitation have described characteristic attitudes and behaviors of individuals who contracted poliomyelitis in childhood. As adults, polio survivors are typically hard driving, competitive, perfectionist, and determined to overcome any obstacles they might encounter. This has served many of them well in achieving lives that left a significant imprint on the world. However, in the 1970's many polio survivors began to experience new symptoms of weakness, fatigue, and pain that was later named Post Polio Syndrome (PPS). Having never considered themselves disabled, the new symptoms created psychological difficulties as the survivors began to address the reality of disability. The purpose of this study is to compare the dimensions of personality of polio survivors with PPS with those who have no childhood onset disabilities and examine how those dimensions correlate with age and the stages of adjustment to disability. **Design:** A descriptive study that uses a cross-sectional design. Participants were recruited into two age and gender equivalent groups, one with and one without polio-related disability. **Measurement:** The PPS group was given a demographic survey, the Temperament and Character Inventory (TCI) developed by Robert Cloninger, and the Patient Self-Assessment of Stage of Adjustment to PPS by Lisa Hollingsworth. The group with no physical disabilities was given the demographic survey and the TCI only. **Results:** There was no statistical significance found between the two groups on any of the three character traits. There was a statistical difference between the mean scores of the two groups on two of the four temperament traits: Novelty Seeking and Persistence. No significant association was found between the age groups of the polio participants. Three of the four temperament traits and one of the

character traits correlated with the Hollingsworth Stages of Adjustment to Disability. In other analysis performed on the data, hospitalization and length of hospitalization had a significant association with the Hollingsworth stages and to one of the character traits.

Conclusions: The temperament and character profiles of the two groups were essentially identical. There were significant differences between the groups on two of the temperament traits. The findings of this study seem to indicate that Polio Personality may be a misnomer. However, that is not to say that this group was not psychologically impacted by the trauma of lengthy hospitalization, social rejection, and coping with physical disability. But, based on this study, they appear to have emerged with highly developed characters that in general, have served them well in their process of adjustment to the “new disability” of Post Polio Syndrome.