UNIT 1 : INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY

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1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To get a basic understanding of psychology.
- To examine the relation between psychology and social work
- To find out the application of psychology in social systems and its relation to health and pro-social behavior.
- To understand the concept of developmental psychology and its relation to social work.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit aims to provide a systematic understanding of the subject matter of psychology and its nature. It gives an overview of psychology as a comprehensive discipline and provides a brief understanding of the biological and social bases of human behaviour and

development. The unit aims to discuss on few fields of psychology and its relationship with other disciplines and professions to enable you to appreciate the value of psychology in daily life, and will help you in understanding yourself and others better.

Psychology can be defined *as the science which explains living organisms' behaviour and how they think, feel or experience*. In short, it is a study of behavior and mind. In other words, Psychology is the systematic and scientific study of mental processes, experiences and behaviour. It uses methods of biological and social sciences to obtain data systematically. It makes sense of these data so that they can be organized as knowledge.



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The term 'psychology' has been derived from the two Greek words 'psyche' and 'logos'. The word 'psyche' in Greek language refers to 'spirit' or 'soul' and the word 'logos' refers to 'discourse' or 'study'. The study of Psychology as an independent discipline began in the year 1879, when Wilhelm Wundt established the first psychological experimental laboratory at the University of Leipzig, Germany.

In this learning module, the scope of psychology is restricted to the brief study of biological and social bases of human behavior and its development along the human life cycle i.e. from birth to death.

1.3 PSYCHOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

Psychology tries to explain the underlying causes of different human actions and behaviour which often vary across persons, objects or situations. The reasons can be attributed to hereditary factors, social factors and personality factors of an individual. Most of our learning occurs through social processes right from childhood where we interact with others in school, playground and at home. This form of learning helps to shape our personality and attitude towards the social world or environment.

Social workers need to know some basic psychological principles to understand and analyze human behaviour in order to bring a desired change in human behaviour. This is necessary to solve problems related to

adjustment with others and the environment, betterment of group morale, motivating people in groups for better group performance and in overall community development. Social work is a profession that requires a variety of emotional and psychological skills in addition to formal academic training. Understanding of human psychology, human developmental stages, a developed sense of empathy, ability to facilitate co-operation both among individuals and groups, active listening skills, critical thinking skills, etc are extremely important for an efficient social worker for which Psychology and Social Work should go hand in hand.

1.4 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social psychology is a branch of psychology that deals with how people behave when they influence others or are being influenced by others. It explores how people are affected by their social environments, and how people think about and influence others. Social psychologists are interested in such topics as attitudes, conformity, interpersonal attraction, helpful behaviour, prejudice, aggression, motivation etc. For example, if a person meets with an accident on the roadside, there will be few people who would not hesitate to come forward and extend their helping hand; this is an example of a helping behaviour. Another example is from group meetings - it is often seen in a group meeting that most group members agree to what the group leader say without expressing any doubt. This sort of behavior shows a high obedience towards authority by humans. These kinds of socially driven human behaviours have been experimentally proved by many social psychologists like Milgram, Kurt Lewin, Albert Bandura and others.

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1.5 PSYCHOLOGY AND ITS APPLICATION TO CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Committing rape, a social act which strikes the headlines of Indian newspapers quite often, is a criminal behaviour which violates socially defined laws. Some crimes are committed directly including violent offenses

such as rape or murder and some crimes are non-violent in nature such as fraud, cheat etc. The role of social psychologists is to understand these social crimes from both person and situation perspective to understand and explain what drives such behaviours. This notion of analysis was developed from Kurt Lewin's famous equation B= f (P, E) which states that behavior is a function of the person (P), the environment (E) and the interaction between the two.

Social psychologists often help to develop techniques for interviewing crime suspects which are systematic and scientific. Psychologists help the jury to understand the nature of the crime, its impact on the victim, the offender and towards society before giving punishment to the offender. Some psychological methods and techniques are used in forensics to determine the probability of committing future crimes by an offender.

In fact there is a distinct branch in the field of Psychology called Criminal Psychology, which studies the wills, thoughts, intentions, and reactions of criminals and all that partakes in the criminal behaviour.

1.6 PSYCHOLOGY IN RELATION TO HEALH AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Psychology, as the science of behaviour, has much to contribute towards enhancement of health and disease prevention, and towards addressing health disparities. The study of psychology has an important role in the modification of behaviour from a few negative responses such as depression and stress to positive counter responses such as moral and psychological support, understanding of the behaviour and other effective mechanisms which help in the recovery of many physical ailments. It has been found that sound mental health results in sound physical health.

Recent psychological research is focused on psychological well-being of individuals. Psychological well-being is basically about a person's life going well. It is the combination of feeling good and functioning effectively.

Therefore psychological well-being is about an individual's perception of happiness, well-supported and satisfied life, and so on.

Another important area of social psychology deals with the analysis of humane orientation towards others. This has implications in social work as well. In order to help people in society, one should have a pro-social orientation. Pro-social behavior describes a person's helping behavior towards others without any obligations or self-interest. Empathy which is an ability of an individual to understand and share others feelings is intricately linked with pro-social behaviour. Another aspect of pro-social behavior is social-responsibility which is an implicit duty of an individual to act or behave towards others for the benefit of the society at large. These two aspects lead to a better understanding of other's need and encourage an individual's pro-social behavior. The degree of pro-social behavior varies from person to person. For example, volunteering to work for a group of flood affected victims, helping a peer with his assignments, donating some money for the needy, etc. are examples of pro-social behaviour.





Empathy : which is an ability of an individual to understand and share others feelings is intricately linked with pro-social behaviour.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS -1

1. What does Psychology as a discipline cover? How is it related to social work?
2. What is social psychology? How is it related to the development of society?

1.7 SOCIAL INFLUENCE AND SOCIAL COGNITION

Social influence occurs when one's emotions, opinions, or behaviours, are affected by others. It takes many forms and can be seen in conformity, socialization, peer pressure, obedience, leadership, persuasion, etc. It is a well-known fact that more the people in a group, more will be the power of influence of that group. People show obedience and conformity to a person or a group depending on the strength of the person or the group. This strength of influence depends on the person's or the group's status,

power, expertise, number of persons in the group etc. How one perceives others' influence on him or her depends on his or her social cognition.

Henry Tajfel (1969), a famous social psychologist, once said that the greatest advantage of human beings is that they can modify their behaviours in a way in which they perceive or understand the situation. Thus Social Cognition is the study of how people process social information, especially its encoding, storage, retrieval, and application to social situations. According to Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), an individual's behavior is not directly influenced by any external stimulus; rather he or she behaves according to the interpretation of that stimulus. In other words, the person will respond depending how he or she has mentally constructed that reality. For example, on seeing a shadow, a child may feel fear and start crying while an adult person may not feel fear. Therefore the capacity of information processing in mind is also a factor in social cognition which develops gradually from childhood to adolescence.

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1.8 DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Human beings undergo physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual changes as they advance through their life cycle. Human Developmental psychology deals with the study of gradual changes in behaviour and abilities in every stage of human life. It studies the physical, social and psychological changes that occur at different ages and stages over a life span, from conception to old age. The stages can be broadly classified as

1) Prenatal period: period when the major body parts are formed inside a mother's womb.

2) Neonatal period: 3-4 weeks after birth when the baby struggles to make adjustments with the outside world.

3) Infancy: the period when the baby actively tries to interact with the outside world with the help of certain bodily and verbal cues.

4) Childhood: In this phase a child develops skills and abilities, and a personal identity is formed.

5) Adolescence: In this period, a system of values and interests develops in an individual which prepares the ground for taking the responsibilities of adult life.

6) Adulthood: This is when an individual enters adult society, acquires an occupation, has his or her own family.

7) Senescence: when an individual crosses 70 years of age.

1.9 DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY IN RELATION TO SOCIAL WORK

Certain prominent environmental and social factors, like education, type of home and neighborhood, race, national and religious background in which a child is brought up, influence the development of a child. These social-class influences play a crucial role in the development of moral qualities and interests in an individual which reflects in his or her activities. For example, the book or magazines she reads, the profession she want to pursue, her views on society and its members at large all influence the development of moral qualities and interests. Therefore, social works such as providing educational opportunities and vocational training to the slum dwellers, cleaning of the neighbourhood, providing guidance to parents on the appropriate nurturing of their kids are some underlying implications of developmental psychology.

In one of the psychological studies on the impact of social class and cultural differences on the various aspects of developmental process, it has been found that middle class mothers are more inclined towards physical punishment, withdrawing privileges as a way to control their children. On the other hand, upper class mothers use praise and rationality in controlling their children.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS -2

1. How can an individual or a group influence another's behaviour ? What is social cognition?
2. How is developmental psychology related to social work?



ACTIVITY

1. List five things you would like to do for the welfare of society. Mention the reasons for choosing them.
2. Find out ten things or systems where you think psychology as a discipline can help for better functioning.

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1.10 LET US SUM UP

- Psychology can be defined as the science which explains the behaviour of living organisms and how they think, feel or experience. In short, it is a study of behaviour and mind.
- Social workers need to know some basic psychological principles to understand and analyze human behaviour in order to bring a desired change in human behaviour.
- Social Psychology is a branch of psychology that deals with how people behave when they influence others or are being influenced by others.

- Psychological well-being is an important aspect in today's world. It is about an individual's perception of happiness, well-supported and satisfied life, and so on.

- In order to help or develop people in society, you should have pro-social orientation. Pro-social behaviour describes a person's helping behaviour towards others without any obligations or self-interest.

- Human beings undergo physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual changes as they advance through their life cycle. Human Developmental psychology deals with the study of gradual changes in behaviour and abilities in every stage of human life.

- Certain prominent environmental and social factors like education, the type of home and neighborhood, the racial, national and religious backgrounds in which a child has been brought up influence the development of a child.

- Social–class and cultural differences affect various aspects of developmental process.



1.11 FURTHER READING

- Baltes, P. B. (1987). Theoretical propositions of life-span developmental psychology: On the dynamics between growth and decline. *Developmental psychology*, *23*(5), 611.

- Baron, R. A. (2001). *Psychology (*5th Edition*)*. Allyn & Bacon.

- Blackburn, R. (1993). The psychology of criminal conduct*: Theory,* research and practice. Oxford, England: John Wiley & Sons.

- Thibaut, J. W., & Kelley, H. H. (1959). The social psychology of groups. New York: Wiley.

1.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Answers to Check your Progress-1

1. Psychology can be defined as the science which explains living organisms' behaviour and how they think, feel or experience. In short, it is a study of behavior and mind.

   Social workers need to know some basic psychological principles or reasons to understand and analyze human behavior in order to bring a desired change in human behaviour. This is necessary in case of solving human problems related to adjustment with others and environment, betterment of group morale, motivating people in group for better group performance and in overall community development.

2. Social Psychology is a branch of psychology that deals with how people behave when they influence others or being influenced by others.

Answers to Check your Progress-2

1. A person or a group can exert influence on the other person or group depending on his or her or their group's status, power, expertise, number of persons in the group etc.

   Social Cognition is the ability of a person to respond to a certain external stimuli (for example, the news of a road accident) depending on the perception or how he or she has interpreted those stimuli in their mind.

2. Certain prominent environmental and social factors, like education, the type of home and neighborhood, the racial, national and religious background in which a child has been brought up, influence the development of a child. These social-class influences play a crucial role in the development of moral qualities and interests in an individual which reflects in the book or magazines she reads, the

profession she want to pursue, her views on society and its members at large. Therefore to bring a change in the behavior of a person at his or her particular life stage, one has to understand how his or her overall psyche has developed over the years.



1.13 MODEL QUESTIONS

1. How are psychology and social work as a discipline related?
2. How can psychology help in criminal justice system?
3. How is developmental psychology related to social work and development?
4. Write the meaning of pro-social behaviour.
5. Explain the relationship between social influence and social cognition

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