UNIT 8: INTRODUCTION TO PSYCHOLOGY

UNIT STRUCTURE

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8.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- have a basic understanding of psychology.
- discuss the relation between psychology and social work
- describe the application of psychology in social systems and its relation to health and pro-social behavior.
- analyze the concept of developmental psychology and its relation to social work.

8.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit aims to provide a systematic understanding of the subject matter of psychology and its nature. It gives an overview of how psychology is a comprehensive discipline and gives a brief understanding of the

biological and social bases of human behaviour and development. It aims to show few of the fields of psychology and its relationship with other disciplines and professions which would lead to appreciate the value of psychology in daily life and will help 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 simple words, psychology is the systematic and scientific study of mental processes, experiences and behaviour. In its systematic and scientific study 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.



Psychology is the systematic and scientific study of mental processes, experiences and behaviour.

It 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 formal beginning of Psychology as an independent discipline took Place in the year 1878, 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 his birth to death.

8.3 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 the 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 in 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 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. 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 both Psychology and Social Work should go hand in hand.

8.4 SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

It is a branch of psychology that deals with how people behave when they influence others or being influenced by others. It explores how people are affected by their social environments, 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 that it is often seen in a group meeting, most group members agree to what the group leader say without raising any doubt. This sort of behavior shows a high obedience towards authority by humans. These kind of social driven human behaviors were experimentally proved by many social psychologists like Milgram, Kurt Lewin, Albert Bandura and others.

8.5 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 behavior 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 the both person and situation perspective which drive such behaviors. 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 help to develop techniques for interviewing crime suspects which is systematic and scientific. Psychologists help the jury to understand the nature of the crime, its impact on the victim, the offender and towards the society before giving punishment to the offender. Some psychological methods and techniques are used by forensics in determining 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.

8.6 PSYCHOLOGY IN RELATION TO HEALH AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

Psychology, as the science of behaviour, has much to contribute to enhance health promotion and disease prevention and address health disparities. The study of psychology has an important role in the modification of behaviour from few negative responses such as depression and stress to positive counter response such as moral and psychological support, understanding of the behaviour and other effective mechanisms which finally helps in the recovery of many physical symptoms. Thus it has been found that a sound mental health results in a sound physical health.

Recent psychological researches are 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 or develop people in the 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 highly 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 indulge an individual in a pro-social behavior. The degree of pro-social behavior varies from person to person.

For example, Volunteering to work for a group of flood effected victims, helping a peer with his assignments, donating some money for the poor and needy, etc.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What Psychology as a discipline covers? How it is related to social work?

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Q 2: What is social psychology? How it is related to the development of the society?

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8.7 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. Now, how one perceives others' influence on him depends on his social cognition.

Henry Tajfel (1868), a famous social psychologist once said that the greatest advantage of human being 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.

8.8 DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY

Human beings undergo changes pertaining to physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual as they advances through their life cycle. Human Developmental psychology deals with the study of gradual changes in behavior 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

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

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

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

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

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

Adulthood: When an individual enters adult society, acquires a occupation, has his own family

Senescence: when an individual crosses 70 years of age.



Developmental Psychology is the study of the social and psychological changes at every stage of human life.

8.9 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 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 his or her activities. For example, the book or magazines he reads, the profession he want to pursue, his views on the society and its members at large. Therefore social works related to providing educational opportunities and vocational trainings to the slum dwellers, cleaning of the neighborhood, 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.



ACTIVITY

List down 5 things you would like to do for the welfare of the society. Point out the reasons for choosing them.

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Find out 10 things or systems (apart from justice systems) where you think psychology as a discipline can help for better functioning.

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8.10 LET US SUM UP

- 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 to understand and analyze human behavior in order to bring a desired change in human behaviour.
- Social Psychology a branch of psychology that deals with how people behave when they influence others or 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 the society, you should have pro-social orientation. Pro-social behavior describes a person's helping behavior towards others without any obligations or self-interest.
- Human beings undergo changes pertaining to physical, mental, social, emotional and spiritual as they advances through their life cycle. Human Developmental psychology deals with the study of gradual changes in behavior 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 background in which a child has been brought up influences the development of a child.
- Social - class and cultural differences affects various aspects of developmental process.



8.11 FURTHER READING

1. Baron, R. A. (2001). Psychology. Allyn & Bacon.
Thibaut, J. W., & Kelley, H. H. (1858). The social psychology of groups. New York: Wiley.

2. Blackburn, R. (1883). The Psychology of Criminal Conduct: Theory, research and practice. John Wiley & Sons.

3. Baltes, P. B. (1887). Theoretical propositions of life-span developmental psychology: On the dynamics between growth and decline. Developmental psychology, 23(5), 618.

8.12 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

Ans to Q No. 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.

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

Ans to Q No 2: A person or a group can exert influence on the other person or group depending on his or 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 (example a road accident news) depending on the perception or how he has interpreted that stimuli in his mind. 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 influences 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 he reads, the profession he want to pursue, his views on the society and its members at large. Therefore to bring a change in the behavior of a person at his particular life stage, one has to understand how his overall psyche has developed over the years.



8.13 MODEL QUESTIONS

Q 1: How psychology and social work as a discipline is related?

Q 2: How Psychology can help in criminal justice system?

Q 3: How developmental psychology is related to social work and development ?

Q 4: Describe social influence and social cognition

Q 5: What is social cognition? How does an individual or group influence other's behoviour ?