

Abnormal Psychology

Introduction

Abnormal psychology focuses on diagnosing, explaining and treating humans suffering from psychological disorders. This option begins with a consideration of normal and abnormal behaviour. An understanding of issues related to diagnosis provides a framework for the subsequent study of disorders and therapeutic approaches. Although there are numerous psychological disorders this option focuses on the following three groups of disorders:

- anxiety (for example, agoraphobia)
- affective (for example, depression)
- eating (for example, bulimia).

By studying one disorder from two of these groups of disorders, students are encouraged to develop an awareness of the range of psychological disorders. This approach embraces the etiology, symptoms and prevalence of each disorder. As a consequence of this understanding, it is possible to administer effective treatments while at the same time having an appreciation of relevant cultural and gender variations. Therapeutic approaches to treating disorders may be broadly organized into three groups:

- Biomedical therapies (for example, drug therapy)
- Individual psychological therapies (for example, systematic desensitization, cognitive restructuring therapy)
- Group psychological therapies (for example, encounter groups, family therapy, community-based therapy).

Therapies from each of these approaches involve the use of specific techniques that need to be applied appropriately. These approaches should reflect a considerable degree of efficacy and ethical appropriateness to the specific disorder.

Learning outcomes

General framework (applicable to all topics in the option)

- To what extent do biological, cognitive and sociocultural factors influence abnormal behaviour?
- Evaluate psychological research (that is, theories and/or studies) relevant to the study of abnormal behaviour.

Concepts and diagnosis

- Examine the concepts of normality and abnormality.
- Discuss validity and reliability of diagnosis.
- Discuss cultural and ethical considerations in diagnosis (*for example, cultural variation, stigmatization*).

Psychological disorders

- Describe symptoms and prevalence of one disorder from two of the following groups:
 - Anxiety disorders
 - Affective disorders
 - Eating disorders.
- Analyse etiologies (in terms of biological, cognitive and/or sociocultural factors) of one disorder from two of the following groups:
 - Anxiety disorders
 - Affective disorders
 - Eating disorders.
- Discuss cultural and gender variations in prevalence of disorders.

Implementing treatment

- Examine biomedical, individual and group approaches to treatment.
- Evaluate the use of biomedical, individual and group approaches to the treatment of one disorder.
- Discuss the use of eclectic approaches to treatment.
- Discuss the relationship between etiology and therapeutic approach in relation to one disorder.