

Abnormal psychology

Abnormal psychology focuses on the diagnosis, explanation, and treatment of abnormal behaviour.

Each of the three topics should draw on what has been learned in the biological, cognitive and sociocultural approaches to behaviour where appropriate. In addition, students should have the opportunity to explore the different approaches taken in research and should be made aware of the ethical considerations and the sensitivity required in a discussion of this subject. There is no clear definition of what constitutes normal behaviour and, by the same token, what constitutes abnormal behaviour. Concepts of normal and abnormal change over time and are influenced by such factors as clinical biases, social norms, gender, culture and socio-economic status. An appreciation of this is fundamental to this option. It is an important consideration in diagnosis and in decisions on the treatment of disorders as well as when considering the factors that cause abnormal behaviour.

In discussing the topics students may look at several disorders or focus on a single disorder. Both are acceptable approaches to the content and have the same potential to score well in assessment. The disorders chosen to explain and develop the topics should come from the following categories:

- anxiety disorders
- depressive disorders
- obsessive compulsive disorder
- trauma and stress related disorders
- eating disorders.

Factors influencing diagnosis

- Normality versus abnormality
- Classification systems
- The role of clinical biases in diagnosis
- Validity and reliability of diagnosis

Etiology of abnormal psychology

- Explanations for disorders
- Prevalence rates and disorders

Treatment of disorders

- Biological treatments
- Psychological treatments
- The role of culture in treatment
- Assessing the effectiveness of treatment(s)