

# Abnormal Psychology

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## Lecture 1 - Introduction

### What is psychological abnormality?

Abnormality is measured on a continuum.

One approach looks at whether behaviour meets one or more of the 4 D's

- Deviance: Different, extreme, unusual
- Distress: Unpleasant and upsetting
- Dysfunction: Causes interference with life
- Danger: Poses risk of harm to self or others

When assessing psychological abnormality it is also important to consider

- Subjective interpretation: Person feels disturbed – match with diagnostic criteria
- Objective tests: depends on score of tests
- All criteria have difficulties
- Hence no single valid definition of abnormality

### Culture

- Both normality and abnormality are concepts defined by society and can be culturally specific.
- Culture refers to systems of knowledge, concepts, rules and practices that are learned and transmitted across generations.
- Szasz argues that due to the influence of culture, the whole concept of mental illness is invalid.
- The DSM V incorporates culture in a way that has not been done in the past.
- The cultural formulation interview is a set of 16 questions, which clinicians can use to assess the impact of culture on an individual's clinical presentation. Including experience of membership in diverse social groups, aspects of background that may affect perspective, and influence of family, friends and community on a person's illness experience.

### Definitions

Prevalence – How many people in a population have the condition?

Incidence – How many cases occur in a given period of time?

Sex Ratio – Percentage of men to women with the disorder.

Course of condition – Chronic v episodic v time limited

Onset – Acute or insidious; Age of onset

Prognosis – Anticipated course of disorder

Aetiology – The study of origins

### Historical Development of Notion of Abnormal Behaviour

1. Supernatural
  - a. Dates back to the stone age
  - b. Possibly caused by:
    - i. Demons, ghosts, evil spirits

- ii. Old testament: mental illness punishment from God
- iii. Imbalance of yin/yang
- iv. Paracelsus suggested moon and stars effected mental health (lunatic)

## 2. Biological

- a. Mental illness explained by physical causes
- b. Ancient Egypt – hysteria used to explain disorders in women
- c. Hippocrates – mental illness conceptualised as a brain or hereditary disease – Humeral theory (balance of blood, black bile, yellow bile, and phlegm). Melancholic temperament believed to be the result of an imbalance of black bile.
- d. Prior to 20<sup>th</sup> Centaury mental illness were thought of as insanity.