

# Week One

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## **DEFINITION OF ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY ?**

The scientific study of abnormal behaviour (mental disorders) in order to **describe, predict, explain and change** abnormal patterns of functioning.

## **WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL ABNORMALITY?**

Most approaches consider behaviour which meets one or more of the following 4 Ds

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

## **IMPORTANT TERMS**

- 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 disorder
- Course of condition – Chronic v episodic v time limited
- Onset - Acute v insidious. Age of onset
- Prognosis – Anticipated course of disorder
- Etiology – The study of the origins

## **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF NOTION OF ABNORMAL BEHAVIOUR**

### **THREE MAJOR TRADITIONS**

1. Supernatural – Dates back to stone ages.

Possible causes

- Demons ghosts and evil spirits

## 2. Biological – mental illness explained by physical causes

- Ancient Egypt – hysteria to explain disorders in women
- Hippocrates 460-377 BC – mental illness conceptualised as a brain or hereditary disease – Humoral Theory balance of blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm. Melancholic temperament believed to be attributable to imbalance of black bile
- Prior to 20th century mental illness akin to concept of insanity
- Kraepelin - proposed separate discriminantly valid syndromes akin to diagnostic criteria for schizophrenia today

## 3. Psychological – Mental illness explained by psychological processes

### **CURRENT MODELS OF ABNORMALITY**

#### **1. Physiological**

- Causes – Genetics, damage to brain, altered biochemistry. Recent neurobiology movement in psychology
- Goal of Therapy – Remove source
- Treatment – Drugs, ECT, diet and exercise

Brain imaging tells us a lot about the impact of abuse, conflict and poor attachment on brain development.

#### **2. Psychodynamic**

- Cause – Unconscious processes
- Goal of Therapy – Making the unconscious conscious through psychoanalysis. Reliving and recalling emotional trauma leads to insight i.e. Fuller understanding of relationship between current emotions and earlier events
- Treatment – Interpretation of unconscious clues via free association, dream analysis, analysis of blocks or resistance in therapy, analysis of transference
- Criticisms – Exclusion of environmental and cultural factors