

L - 6 – Psychology

Defining Abnormality

What do we mean by abnormal behavior ? By what criteria do distinguish it from normal behavior ? in this age of rapid technological advance , you might think that there would be some objective test – a blood test or brain scan – that could determine whether an individual has a mental disorder , There is no such test currently , however , instead , we must rely on signs and symptoms , and objective criteria for deciding when these symptoms constitute abnormality , A number of different types of criteria for defining abnormality have been proposed .

1 – Deviation from cultural norm : - Every culture has certain standards or norms , for acceptable behavior , and behavior that deviates markedly from those norms is considered abnormal , Proponents of a cultural relativist perspective argue that we should each culture's definitions of abnormality for members of that culture , by doing so , we do not impose one culture's standards for behavior on another , opponents of this position point to a number of dangers , however (Szasz , 1971) throughout history , societies have labeled individuals as abnormal to justify controlling or silencing them .

Another problem is that the concept of abnormality changes over time within the same society , more than forty years ago , most Americans have considered men wearing earring as abnormal , today such behaviors tend to be viewed as difference in the lifestyle rather than as signs of abnormality . Thus , Ideas of normality and abnormality differ from one society to another and over time within the same society .

2 - Deviation from statistical norms : -

The word abnormal means away from the norm . many characteristics such as height , weight and intelligence cover a range of values when measured over the entire population ,most people for example , fall within the middle range of height and a few are abnormally tall or abnormally short , one definition of abnormality therefore is based on deviation from statistical norms , abnormal behavior is statistically infrequent or deviant from the norm , but according to this definition , a person who is extremely intelligent or extremely happy would be classified as abnormal , thus in defining abnormal behavior , we must consider more than statistical frequency .

3 – Maladaptiveness : - many social scientists believe that the most important criterion is how the behavior affects the well- being of the individual or the social group . so behavior is abnormal if it is maladaptive - that is , it has adverse effects on the individual or on the society .

some kinds of deviant behavior interfere with the welfare of individual : -

a - A man who is so fearful of crowds that he cannot ride a bus to work .

b - Alcoholics who drink so heavily that they cannot hold a job .

c - a woman who attempts suicide .

Other forms of deviant behavior are harmful to society : -

a – An adolescent who has aggressive outbursts .

b – A paranoid individual who plot to assassinate a national leaders .

so according to this criterion all these behavior would be considered abnormal .

4 – Personal distress : -

A fourth criterion considers abnormality in term of the individual subjective feeling of distress - their feeling of anxiety , depression or agitation or experiences such as insomnia , loss of appetite , or numerous aches and pains , Most people who are diagnosed with mental disorder feel miserable . Sometimes personal distress may be the only symptom of abnormality and the individual's behavior may appear normal to the casual observer .

In most instances , all four criteria - Social deviation , statistical frequency , Maladaptiveness of behavior and personal distress – are considered in diagnosing abnormality .

Normality : -

WHO considers health to be a state of complete physical , mental ,and social well-being. Mental well-being presumes the absence of mental disorder .

Mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by clinically significant disturbance in an individual 's cognition , emotion regulation , or behavior that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological , biological or developmental processes underlying mental function , mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social , occupational or other important activities .

Normality : - is a patterns of behavior or personality traits that are typical or that conform to some standard of proper and acceptable ways of behaving and being .

mental health is defined as : - the successful performance of mental function in terms of thought , mood , and behavior that result in productive activities , fulfilling relationship with others and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity .

So normality is characteristic traits that the normal person possesses and indicate emotional well-being , So the characteristics of normality are : -

1 - Appropriate perception of reality : - normal individual are fairly realistic in appraising their reactions and capabilities and in interpreting what is going on in the world around them . they do not consistently misperceive what others say and do and they do not consistently overrate their abilities and tackle more than they can accomplish , nor do they underestimate their abilities and shy away from their difficult tasks .

2 – Ability to exercise voluntary control over behavior : = normal individuals feel fairly confident about their ability to control their behavior , occasionally they may act impulsively , but they are able to restrain their sexual and aggressive urges when necessary , they may fail to conform to social norms but in such instances their decisions are

voluntary rather than the result of uncontrolled impulses .

3 - Self – esteem and acceptance : - well –adjusted people have some appreciation of their own worth and feel accepted by those around them , they are comfortable with other people and are able to react spontaneously in social situation , at the time , they do not feel obligated to subjugate their opinions to those of the group .

Feeling of worthlessness , alienation, and lack of acceptance are prevalent among individuals who are diagnosed as abnormal .

4 – Ability to form affectionate relationships : - normal individual are able to form close and satisfying relationships with other people . they are sensitive to the feelings of others and do not make excessive demands on others to gratify their own needs .

Often the mentally disturbed people are so concerned with protecting their own security that they become extremely self- centered , preoccupied with their own feelings and strivings , they seek affection but are unable to reciprocate .

5 - Productivity : - Well-adjusted people are able to change their abilities into productive activity ,, they are enthusiastic about life and do not need to drive themselves to meet the demands of the day . Chronic lack of energy and excessive susceptibility to fatigue are often symptoms of psychological tension resulting from unresolved problems .

Functional perspective of normality ; - The theoretical and clinical concepts of normality seem to fall into four functional perspectives : -

1 – Normality as a health : - it is basically the traditional medical psychiatric approach to health and illness , most physician equate normality with health and view health as an almost universal phenomenon , so , behavior is assumed to be within normal limits when no manifest psychopathology is present , this correlate with the traditional model of doctor who attempts to free the patient from grossly observable signs and symptoms , to the physician , the lack of signs and symptoms indicates health , this perspective described by John Romano who view a healthy person as one who is reasonably free of undue pain , discomfort and disability .

2 Normality as Utopia ; this perspective conceives normality as the harmonious and optimal blending of the diverse element of mental apparatus that culminates in optimal functioning such a definition emerges when psychiatrist or psychoanalysts talk about the ideal person , when they grapple with a complex problem, or when they discuss their criteria for a successful treatment . This approach can be traced back to Sigmund Freud , who when discussing normality stated " A normal ego is like normality in general , an ideal fiction .

3 – Normality as Average : - this commonly used in normative studies of behavior , is based on a mathematical principle of the bell- shaped curved . this approach consider the middle range normal and both extreme deviant . this normative approach based on this statistical principle describes each individual in terms of general assessment and total score , Variability is described only within the context of groups , not within the context of the individual .

4 – Normality as a process : - this stresses that normal behavior is the end result of interacting system , based on this definition , temporal changes are essential to complete a definition of normality . in other words , the normality – as – process perspective stresses changes or processes rather than a cross- sectional definition of normality .

Investigators who subscribe to this approach can be found in all behavioral and social sciences . A typical example of the concepts in this perspective is Erik Erikson 's conceptualization of the epigenesis of personality development and the seven developmental stages essential in the attainment of mature adult functioning .