

LESSON 24

PSYCHOTHERAPY

SUMMARY

Psychologists have tried to understand the causes of abnormal behaviour, and the best way to treat it. There are four major models which deal with psychological disorders and their treatment. These are known as medical, psychodynamic, behavioural and the humanistic. The term psychotherapy is used to describe the process where a trained psychologist helps a disturbed person to behave normally. The psychologist generally uses one of the approaches mentioned above.

Medical Model

According to the medical model, abnormality occurs due to a physical cause, and can be treated with the help of medicines. It examines the role of genetics and imbalances in neurotransmitters. The therapeutic approaches used in the medical model are referred to as somatic therapy. Three somatic therapies which are currently used - chemotherapy, electro convulsive therapy (ECT) and psychosurgery.

ECT - involves administering electric current for short duration through electrodes to the head of the person. Used to treat depression, OCD.

Psychosurgery - involves performing surgery on the brain to alter psychological functioning. Used in extreme psychological disturbance.

Chemotherapy - involves giving medicines. Three main types of medicines are - Neuroleptics (major tranquilizers or antipsychotics) used to treat schizophrenia and mania. Antidepressants are used to treat depression. Anxiolytic drugs (minor tranquilisers) are used in anxiety disorders.

Psychodynamic therapy

Given by Sigmund Freud, this model focuses on mental disorders as caused by internal, psychological factors, which are basically unresolved, unconscious, conflicts. The therapeutic approach is referred to as **Psychoanalysis**. It focuses on understanding the unconscious conflicts which are responsible for a person's mental disorder, and then to make the person consciously aware of it. This allows the person to deal more effectively with his or her problems, without using defense mechanisms. The goal of psychoanalysis is major modification of personality. Some of the techniques involved in psychoanalysis are - free association (patient says whatever comes to their), hypnosis and dream interpretation.

Behavioural Model

In the behavioural model, disorders are viewed as learned maladaptive behaviours. Behaviour therapies use classical conditioning principles, whereas behaviour modification techniques are based on operant conditioning. In behaviour therapy, the

assumption is that if maladaptive behaviour can be acquired through classical conditioning, they can also be unlearned by the same principles. Different techniques in this model are -

Implosion therapy

- The therapist exposes the person to mental images of the feared stimulus in the safety of his room. The person is asked to imagine the most frightening form of contact with the feared object. After a number of trials, the stimulus loses its power to cause anxiety.

Flooding

- Individual is forced to face the situation causing fear or anxiety

Systematic desensitization

- The person is asked to construct a series of scenes or events which gradually lead the person to face the object/situation which causes the fear.

There are a number of therapies based on operant conditioning, but all of them consist of three basic steps as following:

I - Identification of the undesirable or maladaptive behaviours.

II - Identification of the reinforcers that maintain the maladaptive behaviours.

III - Restructuring the environment in such a way that the maladaptive behaviour is no longer reinforced.

One way to eliminate behaviours which are not desirable is to remove the stimuli that maintain them. This is based on the idea that removing the stimuli will extinguish the behaviour that was earlier reinforced by it.

Another method involves use of stimuli which have a negative impact in the form of punishment for voluntary maladaptive behaviour.

Operant conditioning can also be used to increase desirable behaviours by giving positive reinforcement when the desirable behaviour is carried out.

A Social learning approach to psychotherapy has emerged. This model is a link between behaviour and cognitive model of personality. Cognitive approaches view mental disorders as caused by “irrational beliefs” or faulty thinking. This therapy involves cognitive restructuring or changing one’s way of thinking.

Humanistic Psychotherapy

According to the humanistic view of personality, people are fundamentally good and seek growth and work towards better ways of living.

In the humanistic view, psychological disorders are seen as occurring because the external environment blocks us from moving in the direction of personal growth. People around us put pressure by their expectations from us, they do not accept us as we are.

If everyone around us gives us unconditional positive regard there would be hardly any gap between what we are and what we desire to be. This means there would be

little gap between the real self and the ideal self. This leads to greater harmony in our functioning, termed as congruence.

The goal of humanistic therapy is that the therapist by creating an environment of unconditional positive regard allows the client to get in touch with his or her true feelings and inner self. Then the client has to take responsibility and live more in accordance with the strivings of the inner self. This eventually leads to growth and greater life satisfaction.

Evaluate yourself

1. What is psychotherapy?
2. Discuss the psychodynamic and humanistic model of psychotherapy.
3. List the basic steps of behavioural therapy.