



24

PSYCHOTHERAPY

*I*n the previous lesson, you were told about psychological disorders. 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.

In this lesson some important approaches for treatment of abnormal behaviour, referred to as psychotherapy, are described. 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.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- explain the purpose of psychotherapy;
- describe the major models for psychotherapy; and
- explain the relative merits and demerits of each of these models for psychotherapy.

24.1 MEDICAL MODEL

According to the medical model, abnormality occurs due to a physical cause, and is a kind of illness, which can be treated with the help of medicines. This approach

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 are chemotherapy, electro convulsive therapy (ECT) and psychosurgery.

ECT involves administering electric current for short duration through electrodes to the head of the person suffering from psychological disorder. For example, in unilateral ECT, two electrodes are attached to the temple region and a current of approx 200 milliamps at 110 volts, is passed from one electrode to another for 0.5 – 4 seconds. ECT is used to treat depression, bipolar disorder (mania-depression), and obsessive compulsive disorders.

Psychosurgery involves performing surgery on the brain to alter psychological functioning. It is used only as a last resort in extreme psychological disturbance like in aggressive schizophrenics.

The most common and effective somatic approach is chemotherapy which involves giving medicines to the person with disorders. There are three main types of medicines. Neuroleptics (major tranquilizers or antipsychotics) are mainly used to treat schizophrenia and mania. Antidepressants are used to treat several disorders including depression. Anxiolytic drugs (minor tranquilisers) are mainly used in anxiety disorders.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 24.1

Fill in the blanks below:

1. The therapeutic approaches used in the medical model are called _____ therapy.
2. The three major somatic therapies currently used are _____, _____ and _____.
3. _____ are mainly used to treat schizophrenia
4. For treatment of depression, _____ are used.
5. Anxiolytic drugs are mainly used in _____ disorders.

24.2 PSYCHODYNAMIC THERAPY

As you read earlier Sigmund Freud's psychodynamic model looks at mental disorders as caused by internal, psychological factors, which are basically





unresolved, unconscious, childhood conflicts. Therapy in this model is referred to as psychoanalysis. The purpose of psychoanalysis is to understand 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.

The approach most widely used in psycho-analysis is a technique called free association. The basic procedure is that the patient says whatever comes to mind, since this bypasses the ego's role of censoring or blocking threatening unconscious impulses. The ultimate goal of psychoanalysis is major modification of personality to enable people to deal with problems in a realistic way, without using defense mechanisms. Sometimes, hypnosis and dream interpretation are also used to help the therapeutic process.

24.3 BEHAVIOURAL MODEL

As you learnt in the earlier lesson, in the behavioural model, disorders are viewed as learned maladaptive behaviours. Watson was the first person to suggest that mental disorders such as phobias (extreme fear of certain objects, people or situations e.g. rats or snakes etc.) can be explained in terms of the mechanisms of conditioning. The behaviour therapies use classical conditioning principles, whereas behaviour modification techniques are based on operant conditioning (You were told about the types of conditioning in lesson 6).

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. Three approaches based on behaviour therapy are—implosion therapy, flooding, and systematic desensitisation (SD). Implosion therapy and flooding are based on the concept that if the stimulus causing a fear response (e.g. snakes) is repeatedly presented without the unpleasant experience that accompanies it, it loses its power to evoke a fear response.

In implosion therapy, the therapist again and again 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 (e.g. snakes) loses its power to cause anxiety.

In flooding the individual is forced to face the situation causing fear or anxiety. For example a person afraid of heights, may be forced to stay on the roof of a tall building. With some persons, this approach is effective and removes the fear of the situation. Implosion therapy and flooding have limited effectiveness. A better procedure is called systematic de-sensitization.



In 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. For example, a person who has a fear of dead bodies may be asked to imagine an ambulance and then focus on relaxation. Then he may be asked to go close to a cremation ground and finally (through a number of intermediate steps) the person may be asked to come close to a dead body, and at the same time, focus on relaxation.

As mentioned above apart from the approaches based on classical conditioning there are certain therapies based on operant conditioning called behaviour modification. There are a number of therapies based on operant conditioning, but all of them consists of three basic steps. The first objective is identification of the undesirable or maladaptive behaviours. The second step involves identification of the reinforcers that maintain the maladaptive behaviours. The last step involves 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. For example, if we want a child to study everyday we could reinforce study by allowing to watch a T.V programme of his choice, every time he studies, say, at best for one hour.

In recent years, 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. Therapy involves cognitive restructuring or changing one’s way of thinking. For example, if a person believes that a black cat crossing in front of them will cause problems, he may be made to experience it many times till (s) he realized that there is no link between cat and negative events, and thus changes their thinking.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 24.2

Fill in the blanks below:

- (i) The approach most widely used in psychoanalysis is a technique called free _____.



- (ii) The purpose of psychoanalysis is to understand the _____ conflicts which are responsible for a person's abnormal behaviour.
- (iii) Other approaches used in psychoanalysis are _____ and _____ interpretation.
- (iv) The behavioural model of therapy uses classical conditioning principles is called _____, _____.
- (v) Three approaches based on behaviour therapy are _____, _____ and _____.
- (vi) Behaviour modification approaches are based on _____ conditioning.

24.4 HUMANISTIC PSYCHOTHERAPY

According to the humanistic view of personality, people are fundamentally good and seek growth and work towards better ways of living. All people have a need for self-respect and to shape their life according to free choice. Humans are special because they have a free will and a natural need to do all they are capable of. The need to actualize one's potential is called the basic human drive towards self-actualization.

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.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

Write the answers of the following questions:

1. Describe the basic goal and process of psychoanalysis.

2. Outline the differences in the approach used in implosion therapy, flooding and systematic de-sensitization.
3. Briefly describe the three somatic therapies currently used – chemotherapy, electro convulsive therapy and psychosurgery.
4. What is the basic approach used in humanistic psychotherapy.



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- Medical model relies largely on medicines and sometimes use electric shock and surgery to treat psychological disorders.
- Psychoanalysis is psychotherapy which uncovers unconscious conflicts in the mind of a person from earlier life experiences, and helps the person in consciously accepting them.
- Behaviour therapy is based on the principles of classical and operant conditioning.
- Humanistic therapy helps a person to get in touch with their deeper needs and desires and then take responsibility to live more in accordance with one's inner or true nature

