

WEEK 1: BACKGROUND AND THEORIES OF ABNORMAL PSYCHOLOGY

What is a Psychological Disorder?

- According to the DSM-5: “A mental disorder is a syndrome characterised by clinically significant disturbance in an individual’s cognition, emotion regulation, or behaviour that reflects a dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Mental disorders are usually associated with significant distress or disability in social, occupational, or other important activities. An expectable or culturally approved response to a common stressor or loss, such as the death of a loved one, is not a mental disorder. Socially deviant behaviour (e.g., political, religious, or sexual) and conflicts that are between the individual and society are not mental disorders unless the deviance or conflict results from a dysfunction in the individual, as described above.”
 - This is to say that people are looked at from a holistic perspective (i.e., that it is important to view the mind as a unit, rather than trying to break it down into its individual parts), in terms of their cognitive abilities and how they are thinking about different things, whether us as therapists can see cognitive errors in ones functioning, one’s ability or inability to regulate their emotions or behaviour; looking at psychological, biological or developmental processes that underlie this functioning, as well as, social functioning/impacts (how the biopsychosocial model influences individuals behaviours). These various areas of functioning are usually associated with significant distress or disability, but not always the case (tricky at times to diagnose [such as personality disorders]). Psychopathology aims to rule out disorders that may be expectable (e.g., not wanting to diagnose someone with feelings of sadness/distress after the death of a loved one with a disorder, unless these emotions continue on longer than what is culturally deemed acceptable).
 - Based on a practitioner’s belief a person should be better functioning by a certain time period (something that can cause a lot of debate).

How to Define Abnormal?

Looking at three main things:

1. **Psychological dysfunction:** some sort of break down in cognitive, emotional or behavioural functioning (this may be in one or multiple of these areas. In terms of what is considered normal and abnormal, problems are considered on a continuum opposed to categorically present or absent).
- **Personal distress or impairment:**
 - Distress is typically an important component when diagnosing a disorder, however, it is not necessarily present. Sometimes the person themselves might not be