

Forensic psychology



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Forensic Psychology There have been several studies carried to find out the extent to which psychosocial factors interact with brain structure and function and what this means for future research in abnormal psychology. According to Kaufman, Plotsky, Nemeroff, and Charney (2000), stress is one of those psychosocial factors that have a heavy impact on the brain's structure and function. The researchers point out that stress in the early development years can affect the development of systems such as the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis. They also point out that understanding this early stress can be highly useful in providing insights into the treatment and pathophysiology of depression and other forms of abnormal psychology. According to Durand and Barlow (2005) psychosocial factors that affect the brain function and structure include social learning in both the conditioning and cognitive processes. These processes normally affect implicit memory as well as blind sight. This means that an individual may develop mental disorders due to the kind of psychosocial experiences that he has been through.

What this means for future research is that researchers have to look into prior experiences that an individual has been through before making any diagnostic conclusions (Kaufman, et. al, 2000). Researchers have to put into considerations the differences in each case before making decisions. This might help in curbing the stigma associated with mental illness labeling.

Approaches to developing a Diagnostic Scheme

1. Categorical

The categorical approach is based on the idea that an individual is or is not a member of a specific discrete grouping. This approach assumes that all levels of human behavior are divided into normal and pathological

categories. It also assumes that these behavioral classes discrete, homogeneous and non-overlapping. In this approach, the diagnosis is normally a yes or no decision. The main advantage of this approach is its effectiveness in research and understanding. A disadvantage of this approach is its clear use of inclusion and exclusion standards. In this approach, a person either has a disorder or he does not (Brown and Barlow, 2005).

2. Dimensional

The dimensional approach classifies an individual's behavior according to specific dimensions. According to Krueger, Skodol and Livesley (2006), many professional working in the personality disorders field are increasingly turning to the dimensional approach in developing diagnostic schemes for mental disorders. One of the advantages of this approach is its effectiveness in predicting functional impairment as compared to other approaches such as the categorical one (Brown and Barlow, 2005). This means that they are effective for capturing an individual's functioning. A person's behavior can therefore be classified using different degrees of his traits. The configuration of these behavioral traits represents that individual's strengths and weaknesses. The main disadvantage of this approach is that it does not offer very clear guidelines for the researcher (Brown and Barlow, 2005).

3. Prototypical

The prototypical approach is concerned with the conceptual entity that depicts a certain combination of characteristics that may occur together in a standard or less than perfect manner. In this approach, there is no member of a prototype who has all the characteristics associated with that prototype. However, the behavior of an individual normally has enough symptoms to

define that category in particular. This approach is more efficient than the categorical one in determining the causative factors of certain irregular behaviors. The disadvantage associated with this approach is its vagueness as there are no exclusionary disorders. All of them share some similarities and co-morbidities (Durand and Barlow, 2005).

In my opinion the categorical approach only increases the stigma of mental illness labels since it does not offer room for understanding the causes of abnormal psychology. If one portrays behavior that is contrary to the norm, he is instantly called abnormal. The prototypical approach is somewhere in between the categorical and dimensional approach. Although there is a less likelihood of mental illness labels, the approach is still insufficient in addressing the issue of understanding of psychological disorders. I think that the dimensional approach is the best for decreasing the stigma of mental illness labels as it does not categorize individuals in any particular classification.

References

- Brown, T. and Barlow, D. H. (2005). Dimensional Versus categorical classification of mental disorders. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, Vol. 114, no. 4, pp. 551-556
- Durand, V. M. and Barlow, D. H. (2005). *Essentials of Abnormal Psychology*. Florence, KY: Cengage learning, Inc.
- Kaufman, J., Plotsky, P. M., Nemeroff, C. B and Charney D. S. (2000). Effects of early adverse experiences on brain structure and function: Clinical implications. *Journal of Biological Psychiatry*, Vol. 48, No. 8, pp. 778-790