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Short Communication

Clinical Forensic Psychology: It's Emergence, Significance and Application in India.

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Abstract

Psychology is a study of human behaviour branching out to several specializations namely, social psychology, counselling psychology, industrial psychology, criminal psychology, child psychology etc. Clinical psychology is a specialization of psychology involved in the study and identification of diagnoses, assessment and intervention in individuals suffering from mental disorders. There has been a tremendous rise in deaths, crimes due to mental health illnesses, yet the taboo remains unchanged. People are wary of talking about their mental health concerns or consulting an expert fearing prejudice and labelling. This fear of not being able to socially integrate after a mental health illness, the fear of losing support, and the stereotyping the family members experience, prevents a person from talking about their mental health issues. Characteristic features of certain mental disorders comprise of violent behaviour, manipulative behaviour, impulsive-explosive behaviour, excessive aggression which may be a threat to themselves and the society, at large. There have been research studies linking crimes to mental health illnesses and later studies refuting the claims. Various awareness programmes conducted in the society. Mandatory positions of psychologists at schools, corporates – private and public sectors, small scale-large scale industries and colleges have been a relief, but not enough to eliminate the fear of stigma which is still prevalent. This paper focuses on the importance of clinical psychology and psychological applications in forensic set ups with emergence and significance of Clinical Forensic Psychology.

1. Introduction

Lightner Witmer, an American Psychologist, introduced the term 'Clinical Psychology' in his paper in 1907. The origin of 'Clinical Psychology' can be dated back to 1896 when Witmer first opened a psychological clinic to help children with learning disabilities.

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There were eminent researchers, psychologists and psychiatrists further developing this branch of science continuously to meet the needs of changing society and provide appropriate psychological assistance.

1. Western and eastern influences of Clinical Psychology

Clinical psychology is the study of psychopathology and one of the earliest influences was the work of Sigmund Freud. Freud believed that fixations at an earlier age caused problems in the later stages of life. Carl Rogers, another American psychologist said it was the incongruence between what we want to be and what we are, that led to a pathology. Viktor Frankl, an existential psychologist, maintained that pathology was a result of one's inability to find a meaning or purpose in life. There were various explanations to causes of mental illnesses usually based on the era they belonged to.¹

Eastern influences of Philosophy were prevalent in ancient India. Indian philosophy and its ideas were the foundation for development of psychology as a subject in India. The ideas were based on reflection, experience, and empirical analysis. In India, traditional healers dealt with large number of mentally ill patients. They followed certain rituals, advocating strict dietary habits, moral and ethical rules, and physical exercises. The etiology of mental illnesses among the Indian people was believed to be due to sins or wrong deeds in the past or current life, faulty diet, changes in physical state of the body, curse of the ghosts, spirits, etc., magic or sorcery, social and psychological factors.²

Psychology in India remained detached from its own rich history of knowledge latent in early philosophical texts and was largely dominated by Euro-American theories, models, tests and researches. However, the western influences of psychology were largely incorporated by eminent scholars in the field and developed theories and treatments well suited to the Indian population. Renowned psychologists and psychiatrists of India, being immediate students of the pioneers in the field of psychology, have remarkably laid the groundwork in the emergence of psychology in India. Brojendra Nath Seal, Dr. Narendra Nath Sen Gupta, Girindra Shekhar Bose were few the early pioneers in drafting first syllabus for experimental psychology, to establish the first department of psychology, to found the Indian Psychoanalytic Society, to and to start a publication, the first journal- the Indian Journal of

Psychology. It was only post-independence, that psychology grew outside the university system. The Psychological Research Wing of DRDO was set up in 1949. Gradually, the University Grants Commission (UGC) provided funds to various universities to start psychology departments, resulting in the Indian adaptations of intelligence assessments in Indian languages. There was also a surge in the number of research studies in the areas of epidemiology of mental illness, phenomenology of depressive behaviour, yoga and wellbeing, mental retardation by the 1970s. the psychologists in the mid-1970s realized the need to move away from the replication of western ideas and consider the cultural implications of various theories.¹

2. Diagnosis and Testing of Psychopathology

Clinical Psychology was more developed during the World War I when the practitioners demonstrated the usefulness of psychological assessments. The contributions of several physiologists, neurologists, psychologists, and psychiatrists have led to the development and formulations of various methods to identify and assess an individual of any presence of mental illnesses. Dated back to early 1900s, Alfred Binet, a student of Stanford university developed tests to screen children of intellectual difficulties. Later Group tests, Army Alpha and Army Beta were developed to recruit soldiers. Psychological tests were developed continuously to meet the demands and needs of the society. Thereafter assessments testing various domains were developed. Clinical neuropsychological batteries assess and identifies any deficits in the brain functioning in the realms of cognitive, motor, sensory and emotional functioning.

3. Mental illness and crime

According to World Health Organization, 'mental health is a state of well-being in which everyone realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to the society. Various prominent scholars in this field of clinical psychology have discussed the causing factors to mental disorders which hampers their social and occupational functioning as an individual.

Research studies have implied a link between violence and mental disorder. It is the common belief in the society that person with mental illness is more prone aggressive or violent acts. And further many times the criminal justice system treats the person

with mental illness as criminal and used to get arrested, charged, and jailed.³ On other side, many researchers' data suggest that the person with mental illness is more likely to be a victim of violent criminal activity than the perpetrator.⁴

Many researchers refuted these claims and have stated that the characteristics symptoms, such as hostility and delusions, of certain mental disorders in combination with substance abuse are likely to linked to high probability of violence. Over the years, considering the statistics of crime in India,

According to the Risk Assessment study (1990s), sponsored by the Research Network on mental Health and the Law of the MacArthur Foundation and the National Institute of Mental Health, after studying around 1000 patients (both male and female) suffering from acute mental disorders (except mental retardation), researchers have classified the risk factors for violence into four categories namely, Personal/dispositional factors: age, gender, control of anger impulsiveness, personality etc, Developmental/historical factors: history of child abuse, work history, history of violence, hospitalization, history for mental disorder, Contextual factors: environmental stress, social support, weapons accessibility, lack of support from family or friends etc., Clinical factors: signs and symptoms, such as, delusions and hallucinations, substance abuse etc.⁵

4. Significance of psychology applications in forensic setting

A large body of data in an article by Ghiasi et al., 'Psychiatry and mental illness,' suggests that the people suffering from mental illnesses are more likely to be a victim of violent crimes than a perpetrator.⁶ And this ambiguity arises as a result of incorrect labelling of all perpetrators as individuals with mental illness. The article discusses how the society's view of behaviour and conduct problems as symptoms of a psychological disorder leads to false public perception. Hence it is vital that the clinicians apply diagnoses only when characteristic traits are present, to prevent perpetrators from using the cover of psychiatric diagnoses to evade any punishment.

In today's scenario, the test of sanity of the victim, witness and suspect is equally essential in carrying out the judicial procedures for a fair trial. No individual should be falsely implicated and those with conflict with the law should not be left uncorrected. Mental health is on a continuum, the derailment of

which is unpredictable. An individual since birth undergoes significant changes in life. They may or may not be well equipped to deal with the stressors of life. Moreover, our environment in which an individual dwells, the people around them, the interaction they create impact significantly an individual's development. Individuals' common sense, beliefs, ideologies, philosophies, decisions are largely dependent on the environment, the culture, and the society they belong to. Society, very quickly, will not hesitate to label someone rigid, a rebel, or disobedient if they fail to fit in the societal expectations. These underlying feelings of frustrations, emotions, unfulfilled aspirations, and desires are sometimes manifested in different forms later in life, depending upon their ways of responding and reacting.

Psychological tests like the projective tests and personality methods are used to either rule out the diagnoses or identify the signs of psychopathology, if any. There has been a comprehensible debate till date in criminality being linked to mental illness, whether crimes are committed by people born with a guilty mind or is it due to a mental illness. However, due to very few research studies in assessing the brains of psychopaths, sociopaths, gruesome offenders or understanding any organic differences, there is not any concrete cause or etiology of such behaviour.

An emerging super-specialization of clinical psychology or applied psychology is 'Forensic Psychology'. **Forensic psychology** deals with the development and application of scientific knowledge and principles to aid in solving legal problems in criminal, civil, contractual, or other judicial proceedings.⁷ Clinical Forensic Psychologist may conduct clinical assessment and evaluation of person's state of mind for legal purposes. This will be helpful in criminal proceedings, parole hearings, family or civil court proceedings.⁸

5. Summary

The psychological forensic lie-detection methods that have been popularly used are polygraph, narco-analysis tests, suspect detection etc., with varying degrees of reliability.⁹ These methods are not used as sole evidence and not admissible at the court. They are used, instead, as corroborative evidence during the investigation processes. There is a combination of clinical psychological methods and forensic psychological

methods, that in conjunction, provide a pool of information facilitating in the investigative processes and aids in the formulation of rehabilitative and preventive interventions.

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