International Journal on Science and Technology (IJSAT)
E-ISSN: 2229-7677 ● Website: www.ijsat.org ● Email: editor@ijsat.org

Psychology As A Scientific Discipline: Understanding Humann Behavior, Mental Health, And Legal Contexts

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Abstract
Psychology, the scientific analysis of behavior and cognition, is critical not only for understanding human behavior and mental processes but also for informing other disciplines like education, medicine, and the law. This academic paper examines psychology as a dynamic field of study that uses empirical research methods and various theoretical frameworks, such as cognitive, behavioral, biological, psychoanalytic, and humanistic psychology. The paper also discusses important sub-disciplines of clinical, social, cognitive and developmental psychology, and how they explain human behavior in various settings. Particularly, the paper underscores the increasing role of psychology in criminal justice and law, where mental health, criminal responsibility, competence to stand trial, trauma-informed insights, the reliability of eyewitness memories, and interrogation techniques play a critical role in legal decision-making. The paper also explores the role of psychological knowledge in rehabilitation, risk prediction and ethical judgement in policing and prisons. Through its fusion of psychology and law, the paper illustrates how insights into mental health and behavior are crucial for achieving more equitable justice, increased well-being, and humane societal practices. In all, the research considers psychology as a scientific and applied field with growing interdisciplinary applications.

Prolusion:
Psychology as a science is a dine- grained study of mortal experience, demeanour, and commerce with the world using verifiable measures in the form of empirical trial, replication and proposition testing. In discrepancy to the definite dualistic notion of the “Science of mind and geste”. “Which instinctively dissects internal countries of mind from external actions – contemporary views re – conceive it as the wisdom of the subject and cube” – Perez-Alvarez, 2018. While this is defined as the object matter in independent positioned and substantiated for, “demeanour” is defined as the expansive and transnational commerce between an existent’s internal noetic state and external artistic terrain.

This ecological, elucidative and socially acquainted approach promotes epistemological diversity (combination of quantitative and qualitative styles) while maintaining scientific practices through replication, ecological review. It offers more refined explanations of internal health ontologies similar as-viewing schizophrenia as an issue of bus-affection(tone-experience) or ADHD as distinct style of praxis,

rather than deficiency - that give better understanding of how human beings manage with torture, acculturation, in their everyday life.

This is because this is empirical background is directly involved in mental health practice in which psychology uses substantiation –grounded methods in assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and forestallment of disorders by synthesizing exploration on cognition, emotion, trauma, social factors and neurobiology.
1.Psychology[1] as a Science: Research Methods and Evidence-Based Understanding-

From a formal perspective, psychology is considered a science. To completely understand psychology, it is essential to comprehend what constitutes science, Science occupies a unique position in terms of methodology and backing.

• What do we mean by science[2]?
While there is no absolute answer, there are certain common characteristics among different scientific fields, such as astronomy, biology and chemistry. These field studies celestial bodies, living organisms and matter independently. All scientists-whether in astronomy, biology and chemistry-follow a participated approach to understanding the natural world. Psychology is a science because it adopts a similar approach to examine one aspect of the natural world: mortal geste.

There is no unvarnished answer, but there are few ubiquitous endeavours which are classified as science -
a) Claims are principally grounded on empirical substantiation.
b) Methodical and clear procedures are followed.
c) Propositions are developed and estimated. Psychology meets these criteria as it employs scientific styles to collect empirical substantiation. The outgrowth of each and every trial turns out to support or to disapprove suppositions and evaluate propositions.

1.2 Scientific methods[3] -
"Psychologists use scientific methods to observe, describe, prognosticate, and explain human behavior and mental processes. These methods include controlled trials, checks, compliances and clinical, trials among others. Psychology aims to understand various aspects of human behaviour, cognition, emotion and development through empirical exploration and substantiation-grounded practices."- Dr Paul Taylor

"Although some areas of psychology are largely scientific, not all of it. So, does that mean only some psychology is scientific?
For case, a cognitive psychologists may use EGG to measure brain exertion. This is a highly scientific method which collects empirical data. A social psychologist, on the other hand, may carry out an observation, that is more open to interpretation." – Dr. Cath Suvllian

[1] https://opentextbc.ca/researchmethods/chapter/understanding-science/

[2] https://content.one.lumenlearning.com/introductiontopsychology/chapter/reading-clinical-or-case-studies/

[3] https://opentextbc.ca/researchmethods/chapter/understanding-science/

Scientific exploration is the essential tool to manoeuvre this complex world successfully. Lacking of this we would solely calculate on the intuition, on others authority and most important blind luck. Some of us feel confident enough to decipher and interact with the whole outside world around us.
Process of Scientific Research[4]-

Using the scientific method one can gain advance scientific Knowledge. Ideas in the form of theories and hypotheses are tested against the real world in the form of empirical observations. These observations lead to more ideas which are being tested against the real world.

Basic Steps of Scientific Method are-
• Observe a natural phenomenon and define a question about it.
• Make a hypothesis, or a potential solution to the question.
• Test the Hypothesis.
• If the Hypothesis is true, find more evidence or find counter-evidence.
• If the Hypothesis is false, create a new Hypothesis or try again.
• Draw a conclusion and repeat - the process is never-ending, and no result is ever considered perfect.

1.3 Basic Principles of the Scientific Method-
Two key concepts in the scientific approach are theory and hypothesis. A theory is a well-developed set of ideas that proposes an explanation for observed phenomena that can be used to make predictions about future observations. A Hypothesis is a testable prediction that is arrived at logically from theory. It is often worded as an if-then statement (e.g., if I study all night, I will get a passing grade in the test.)

Other components of scientific method[5] are-
a) Verifiability- An experiment should be done in such a manner that it should be replicable by another researcher. To achieve verifiability, researchers should confirm one thing that documents should contain the methods and clearly explain how their experiments are structured and what are the certain results and why are those results.

b) Predictability- A scientific theory implies that the theory should enable us to make predictions about future events. The precision of these predictions is a measure of the strength of the theory.

c) Falsifiability- It defines whether a Hypothesis can be disproved. For a hypothesis to be falsifiable, it should be definitely logical to make an observation or have to perform a physical experiment that would show that there is no support for the hypothesis.,

Indeed when a hypothesis cannot be proven false, that does not necessarily mean it is not valid. In future if testing performed it may disapprove the hypothesis., This doesn't prove that a hypothesis has to be proven false, it's just that it can be tested.

[4] https://opentext.wsu.edu/psych105/chapter/approaches-to-research/

[5] https://opentext.wsu.edu/psych105/chapter/approaches-to-research/

d) Fairness- All the data which is present in the hypothesis should be considered when assessing a hypothesis. A experimenter cannot pick or choose what should be kept and what should have to get discarded or prioritize exclusively on data which supports or contradicts a particular hypothesis. All data must be reckoned for, even if they invalidate the hypothesis.

1.4 Surveys, questionnaires and psychometric tools[6] -

Q) What are research measurement tools?
This method was use to gather information and check its fidelity and cogency of data. These instruments are made specially to measure various kinds of emotions or psychological experiences that a human being faces like - "internal experiences, observable behaviours or the responses to the tasks and their psychometric properties as well as patterns."

Q) What are Psychological scores in the representation of some characteristics of an individual?
These scores are created by psychologists to measure conditions or factors such as "self-esteem" or "depression" in the same way we use to measure one's height. Researchers or psychologists rely on these scores or parameters to carefully capture the constructs indirectly using these modern and carefully designed tools. These are the main and very important reasons that make a researchers rely on these critical tools.

Experimental tools[7]
In experimental research, the main aim is to understand the main cause-and-effect on the relationships; thus, the condition develops of a precise demand and sensitive instrument. The common tools mostly include - lab equipment such as "psychological sensors, eye-tracking devices, and computer-based tasks that capture real-time responses". It also includes standardized tests, which include "intelligence assessments or personality scales and the behavioural coding systems whose work is mostly to categorize all the actions, impulses that are being used during the tests". These tools delicate and highly reliable; moreover, they are sensitive enough to capture a subtle-variations in behaviour and psychological responses.

Survey and self-report instruments
In this type of survey, participants report their own thoughts, feelings, and actions, such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Surveys are the most widely used data collection tools in psychology, particularly for measuring attitudes, opinions, and internal experiences cannot be directly observed. However, their effectiveness depends entirely on their design. There are few factors that undermine the quality of the data collected: question wording, confusing layouts, or inadequate response options.

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychometrics

[7] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychometrics

Observational Instruments[8]

Observational methods involve the systematic observation and documentation of naturalistic behaviour and controlled settings, which are particularly used in developing psychology and behavioural research. These tools are basically made to range from structured checklists that have code-specific behaviour to open the research and have end field notes. The fields in which this type of instrument is used are EEG and FMRI which are used to provide objective indicators of psychological processes that are increasingly used when researchers need biological data alongside behavioural data.

- Reliability and validity: the twin pillars of measurement tool –

Q) The precision of a research instruments is to prove the consistency of the measurements that does give similar results when used repeatedly under stable conditions?

There are few types of reliable methods for the research such as –

- Test-retest reliability, (results being consistent all over the time)
- Inter-rater reliability, (results being constant among the observers)
- Internal consistency, (results being constant across all the items but within the same scale).

The most commonly used statistical index for the internal consistency is "Cronbach's Alpha" which used to indicate how well the items on a scale are being co-related.

Q) Validity on the other hand, demands for accuracy- does the tool actually measure what it claims to measure?

Validity refers to the point to which the evidence and a theory, acts as a support system which a measurer intends to use, and the process of validation is the most important fundamental consideration, for developing and evaluating the measurement tool.

The stakes are real, the practices which are being takes place in psychological research are very poor and are quite widespread. The estimate scale would be 280 for assessing depression severity which have been developed, this happens because there being overlap which is too low, different scales leads to different conclusions in clinical trials, which turns out to be a significant problem for a field which is trying to build a cumulative science.

1.5 Ethics and Responsible Research-[9]

Ethics in psychology holds a great importance. The ethics pays a vital role while conducting the studies, supervising interns, whether it is relying on the researches to shape the treatment plans, that helps in understanding the ethical principles of research that is turns out most important for the upcoming therapists. There are few ethical core principles which have to be followed in Research psychology –

[8] https://opentextbc.ca/researchmethods/chapter/reliability-and-validity-of-measurement/

[9] https://www.simplypsychology.org/ethics.html

I. Informed Consent:[10] Participants who are being the part of the study had to understand the study's purpose, potential risks and the right time to withdraw from it.
II. Confidentiality: Research must have to keep the participants' identities and all the personal data completely confidential and private, especially the sensitive populations or topics.
III. Debriefing: When the study is completed, it's the dusty of the institution or the particular researcher to provide complete explanation of the whole research to the participants, with the specific psychological report if necessary.
IV. Protection from the harm: Researchers must focus on the mental health, emotional as well as physical health of the participants throughout the whole study and should do their best to protect from the harm.
V. Right to Withdraw[11]: The participants are free to remain being the volunteer for the study or the point of time they feel to withdraw from the study can withdraw without any pressure or penalty.
VI. Integrity and Transparency: One thing all the researchers must have to avoid is data manipulation, deception and the conflicts of interest, and ensuring the integrity of the study.

Contemporary Case Studies:[12]

Case 1) The Stanford Prison Experiment:
This experiment was conducted by Philip Zimbardo in 1971, which was simulated in a prison environment using the college students as guards and prisoners. The study got very quickly spiraled out of control, among the participants who started experiencing severe psychological distress and started engaging in abusive behaviours. This particular case high lights the risk of harm and the influence of power dynamics.

Case 2) Willingness to Electric Shocks:
This experiment took place in the years of 1960s which was being conducted by Stanley Milgram's in which he took the permission to electrocute the participants which would be instructed by the authority figure. Meanwhile the shocks weren't real they were meant to believe that the shocks are going to be real hence causing no harm to the participants This study showed and raised serious questions about the use of deception and the emotional stress which was placed in the participants.

Case 3) Emotional Contagion case[13]:
This particular study was being conducted by the Facebook in the year of 2014 "manipulated users", "newsfeeds" which are used to spread information and on the other hand act as the access to spread of emotional states online. But this experiment or study faced backlash for its lack of informed consent and the potential mental health risks associated with altering users' online experiences without their knowledge.
The above mention cases directly influenced to draw some of modern ethical guidelines:

[10] https://www.apa.org/ethics/code

[11] https://psychology.town/applied-positive-psychology/importance-of-ethical-guidelines-in-psychological-research/

[12] https://psychology.town/social/ethical-considerations-social-psychology-research/

[13] https://opentext.wsu.edu/carriecuttler/chapter/putting-ethics-into-practice/

I. Institutional Review Borads (IBRs): These committees are formed for reviewing and approving the research proposals to ensure they meet ethical standards.
II. APA Ethical Principles: The American Psychological Association's guidelines are for conducting a responsible and protective research for participant's rights and their well – being.
III. Informed consent Procedures: Detailed process for ensuring participants fully understand the nature of risk, and all the benefits of a study for which they agreed to participate.

2. Major Branches of Psychology:[14]

2.1) Behavioral Psychcology:

Behavioral psychology is not only a sub division of psychology instead it is an approach towards the study of environment-behavioral relationships. Basically there are two challenges that occur while specifying the features of behavioral psychology. The first challenge talks "that no single characteristic that distinguishes behavioral psychology from other areas of psychology .And the second challenge talks about "that there are two related but separate traditions within behavioral psychology, each has its own characteristics: Laboratory research of basic mechanism and process in humans and other animals (in terms of experimental analysis of behavior) and the research is being directly implied on people and animal's lives(which is being termed as "applied behavior analysis, behavior therapy, or behavior modification").

A unique characteristic of behavioral psychology is its historical nature of the explanation of behavioral patterns. Rather than moving in space, from outside to inside the organisms in search of inner cognitive or neuropsychological process that are responsible for the behavior, the behavioral approach moves in time, from present to past behavior-enviroment interactions in search of ways to explain how current behavior emerged as a result of the integration of the effects of recurrent causes, each with a perhaps small effect, operating over a long time. The behavioral explanation is comparable to the historical explanation of an adaptive biological traits (e.g., the eye of a vertebrate) in terms of the effects of natural selection acting over long periods of time.

The correct behavioral explanation comes with the immediate payoff of how to arrange for the type of behavior-enviroment interactions that will increase desirable and prevent or decrease undesirable forms of behavior. For example., the "Good Behavioral Game (GBG)" is a very simple behavioral strategy that employs group contingencies to reduce classroom disruptions and increase academic and prosocial student behavior. In its simplest form, the teacher and student determine the rules that would make the classroom a good place to learn, more pleasant and enjoyable: and the rules or "fouls" that would make the environment unsuitable. The game is played at prearranged times (e.g., math class, reading class.) Students are grouped in two or more teams, and the team with the lowest number of fouls or any team with a number of fouls for certain criterion, wins the game (the latter rule is a group version of a schedule of reinforcement called different reinforcement of low rates of behaviour).

[14] https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/behavioral-psychology

2.2) Developmental Psychology:[15]

A simple definition of developmental psychology would be this: developmental psychology is the study of changing psychological phenomena at any point in the life span. This rather innocuous version, however, includes a number of terms that need clarification, if not definition. Indeed, all of the main terms of the definition (i.e., developmental, study, psychological phenomena, change, and life span) might be differently interpreted, if not hotly debated, by prominent developmental researches. As such, the field of developmental psychology could reasonably be characterized as comparing multiple clusters of developmental psychologies. While there are similarities in assumptions, interests and themes, there are also differences – sometimes quite large differences – among these clusters.

a. Concept of Development

Development is defined by certain characteristics, such as universality, irreversibility, and qualitative change. Maturation theories emphasise positive growth in early development, while context theories stress cultural-biological interactions that determine developmental pathways over the lifespan.

b. Developmental Research

Studying human development involves methods from biological sciences, psychology and social sciences. Methods include experimental, quasi-experimental or qualitative designs to describe, explain or change developmental processes. Importantly, all designs include developmental time, usually in cross-sectional (ages compared in a single time period) or longitudinal (repeated measures of individuals over time) designs.

c. Psychological Events and Change

In short, any psychological event (such as cognition, personality, motor skills, brain activity, etc.) can be a topic of interest if it changes. Although past controversies (e.g., learning vs. Piagetian theory) limited "valid" change, today most psychological phenomena are acceptable for research as long as the measures make theoretical sense.

d. Period of Change

Development is a lifelong process. While early research focused on infancy and childhood (15% of human lifespan), contemporary psychology is increasingly interested in adolescence (10%) and the long period of adulthood (75%). Life-span science aims to integrate these focused studies to generate a holistic view of human development from cradle to grave.

2.3) **Cognitive Psychology**:[16]

Swiss theorist Jean Piag[17]et argued that children learn through the active construction of knowledge as they interact with their physical and social milieu. Piaget argued that the adult's role in assisting the child's learning was to provide the necessary materials. In his interviews with children, which provided

[15] https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/developmental-psychology

[16] https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/pecp21

[17] *Piaget's theory of cognitive development*

empirical foundation for his theories, he employed a type of Socratic questioning technique. He proposed that one of the major sources of development was through the child's creation of contradictions through their interaction with their physical and social environments. The child's response to these contradictions resulted in more harmonious and complex forms of interaction through a process he termed "equilibration".[18]

Piaget believed that cognitive development proceeded through a series of stages brought about by equilibration. Within each stage there are steps that the child must learn in order to progress. He argued that the stages are not independent of each other, but build on each stage to create a learning progression. He identified the four stages: sensorimotor [19], pre-operational, concrete operational and formal operational. While he did not think that these stages happened at any specific age, numerous studies have indicated that they should occur at certain age.

2.4) Social Psychology:[20]

Social influence continues to be a prominent topic in social psychology, examining the way people change their beliefs and attitudes in response to conflicting opinions from majority and minority groups. This area of study has both theoretical and applied implications, particularly related to climate change, dehumanization and persuasion.

[21]Case 1: Climate change and the Context Comparison Model (CCM)
Seyranian et al. brought the Context Comparison Model to the environment. Their findings suggest that the source of a message is important depending on whether the task is subjective or objective:
Subjective Attitudes: Ingroup sources (especially ingroup minorities) were most effective in changing the subjective attitude towards climate change.

Objective Factuality: Out-group sources, particularly the out-group majority, were more convincing in changing beliefs about the science behind climate change.

[22]Case 2: Extreme Messages and Emotional Reactions
Avery and Butera investigated "degrowth" messages, which are radical suggestions that question the economic world order. They discovered that these counter-cultural messages sometimes evoke emotions such as anger and fear that are focused on control. These responses serve as an immunization strategy, enabling people (especially men) to reject change and maintain their belief in the status quo.

[18] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10559643/

[19] https://www.socialpsychology.org/journals.htm

[20] https://www.tandfonline.com/journals/vsoc20

[21] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Developmental_psychology

[22] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10598460/

[23]Case 3: Dehumanization as an Immunization Strategy:

Quiamzade and Lalot studied the use of animalistic dehumanization of minorities (Roma beggars) as a means of social influence. They discovered that by depicting a group as "animal-like", a negative bias is developed. This "vaccinates" the audience against exposure to later positive appeals on behalf of the group, preventing future positive action on behalf of the group.

[24]Case 4: Order of Information:

Linne et al. examined the order of arguments. They found that the timing of information determines whether a person will assimilate to (agree with) or contrast (disagree with) an idea. In particular, two-sided messages are most effective when strong, contrasting arguments are presented immediately following clear contradictory points.

Case 5: Future Agenda for Minority Influence:

Prislin calls for a greater emphasis on social change, rather than the cognitive changes that occur in individuals. The new agenda highlights three motivations for minority influence:
Social Validation: A sense of correctness.
Social Acceptance: A need for connectedness.
Social Control: Control over resources.

2.5) **Clinical Psychology[25]:**
The father of experimental psychology, Wilhelm Wundt, was very productive, supervising 186 doctorate theses. One of these, Lightner Witmer, coined the term "clinical psychology" and established the first clinic in 1896 at the University of Pennsylvania. Witmer's clinic provided therapy for children with school difficulties, and worked with physicians and social workers.

At the same time, three medically-trained Harvard professors - William James, Morton Prince and Hugo Münsterberg - were offering psychotherapy, treating adults suffering from "psychoneuroses" with hypnosis. But when one of his patients came to a hypnotic session with a pistol, the President of Harvard recommended Münsterberg cease hypnotising.

But psychotherapy was not the main area of work for early 20th century clinical psychologists. Psychiatrists and neurologists (including Freud) were strongly against non-medical practitioners practising psychotherapy - they claimed it was the domain of medicine, so the work of clinical psychologists was restricted to designing and administering "mental tests" of intelligence and personality. The Golden Age[26]: WWII and the Boulder Model.

[2323] https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/developmental-psychology

[24] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10598460/

[25] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11303935/

[26] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10863681/

Everything got changed with the beginning of World War II. The magnitude of mental health problems was so great that in the late 1940s, 60% of men in Veterans Administration (VA) hospitals suffered from the impact of war. There weren't enough psychiatrists to deal with the "tsunami" of patients; the Veterans Administration (VA) asked the American Psychological Association (APA) to train clinical psychologists to be psychotherapists. The Boulder Model (or scientist-practitioner model) was created in 1947. Clinical psychologists were "hybrids": they would become researchers and be trained in psychotherapy as well as psychiatrists. This was a time of great federal government investment, and a rapid expansion of programs. Now almost 50% of clinical psychologists in the U.S. are in private practice.

The "Dirty Dozen" and the Psy.D.
Some people didn't agree with the scientist-practitioner model. A group of clinicians known as "the Dirty Dozen" sparked a revolution in clinical psychology with the "professionalisation" of psychology. They argued the APA-accredited programs were biased towards research.

The Dirty Dozen were successful in infiltrating the APA hierarchy, and allowed psychologists to be reimbursed by insurance companies. They also developed the Vail Model (practitioner-scholar model), thus the Psy.D. The Psy.D. is a clinical degree without a research dissertation. But detractors believe practice without science leads to a decline in "epistemic authority".

Emergence of Clinical Science:
Some critics were not satisfied with the Boulder Model for the opposite reason: it didn't include enough science. In his 1991 article, "A Manifesto for a Science of Clinical Psychology", Richard McFall argued for there to be only one clinical psychology: the science of clinical psychology. He said that patients should receive "the best" evidence-based treatment, which was not always the case because there were lots of untested or even unethical practices in the field.

This led to the establishment in 1994 of the Academy of Psychological Clinical Science (APCS). Disillusioned with APA's accreditation process, which is largely based on a "checklist" approach, in 2007 the Academy launched the Psychological Clinical Science Accreditation System (PCSAS). PCSAS is not about inputs: are the graduates generating knowledge and behaving like scientists? The majority of the top American programs now hold PCSAS accreditation.

The Challenge of Public Mental Health
While the evidence-based treatments (EBTs) work, they have little impact on public health. This is due to a number of gaps:
The Dissemination Gap: Students aren't sufficiently trained in new EBTs.
The Mastery Gap: Students don't have enough time to learn many different disorder-specific manuals. David Barlow's Unified Protocol is one attempt to resolve this problem with a "transdiagnostic" method for treating several disorders, including depression and anxiety.
The Access Gap: Specialised psychotherapy is expensive and few therapists accept insurance, so therapies are inaccessible to low-income patients.
Case Study: Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT)
The IAPT program was developed in England by David M. Clark and Richard Layard. They convinced the government to pay for their proven CBT program because it would save time and money by getting

people back to work. They have trained over 10,500 nondoctoral therapists to offer CBT with the supervision of doctoral therapists since 2008. They have delivered more than 560,000 cases a year and have cured 50% of them.

Case Study: Rogers Behavioral Health
Bradley C. Riemann has adopted a similar model in the USA. He has trained paraprofessionals (B.A. or B.S.) to provide intensive exposure and response prevention because few experts (PhDs) are available. They are supervised by experts, and must learn OCD science. They are as good as Ph.D.s, and many more patients can be treated with the latest treatment.

3. **Applied Psychology in Society and Everyday Life:**
3.1) Teaching and Learning:[27]

Psychology is much more than just a lab and clinic science. It is an applied science that improves human performance in various life areas. Its use in education, therapy, at work, in relationships, in society, and in the law show how psychology increases well-being and effectiveness in individuals and organisations.

1. Psychological science in education and teaching (Educational Psychology)
Educational psychology is the study of psychological principles of learning and teaching. It explores how people learn, how they grow and develop, and how they differ in intelligence, motivation, self-control and learning styles. Drawing on cognitive psychology, it considers memory, conceptual knowledge and individual differences to inform teaching and learning practices. This discipline is built on theories such as operant conditioning, functionalism, structuralism, constructivism, humanistic psychology, Gestalt psychology and information processing. Educational psychologists use empirical approaches to improve learning for all learners.

Educational psychology has historically done much to improve education in the early 20th century by calling for special education programs for children who could not keep up with their peers. It further helped reduce educational inequalities for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Contemporary educational[28] psychologists work alongside teachers, psychiatrists, social workers, speech therapists and counsellors. They use behavioral, cognitive, and social
theories to make classrooms accessible, tackle learning problems and promote students' emotional and academic development. In the end, they enhance teaching, curriculum and motivation in schools and universities.

3.2) Psychology in health and clinical practice (clinical psychology):
[29] Clinical psychology applies psychological science and practice to understand, prevent and treat psychological dysfunction and promote personal well-being. It is considered to have started in 1896 when

[27] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12068028/

[28] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10053219/

[29] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11303935/

Lightner Witmer opened the first psychological clinic at the University of Pennsylvania.Clinical psychologists provide comprehensive mental and behavioral health care to individuals, couples, families and groups. They have training in psychotherapy and use four predominant models: psychodynamic, humanistic, cognitive-behavioral and systems/family therapy.

The practice is based on a number of evidence-based approaches:
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a goal-oriented, structured treatment that assists clients in changing their negative thinking and unhealthy behaviours. It is very effective for treating anxiety (such as panic disorder, phobias, and general anxiety), PTSD and depression because it targets cognitive distortions, particularly those associated with trauma.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), an offshoot of CBT, was first used to treat borderline personality disorder. It teaches patients mindfulness, emotion regulation, distress tolerance and interpersonal effectiveness skills. DBT is effective for individuals with extreme emotion dysregulation and self-destructive behaviours.

Psychodynamic psychotherapy explores unconscious processes such as repression and denial that contribute to our thoughts, feelings and behaviour. Therapists use the therapeutic relationship to understand and resolve past events and relationship patterns to understand present issues.

Humanistic therapy focuses on growth, actualisation and the subjective. It provides a safe, non-directive space for clients with low self-esteem, depression, anxiety, and identity issues to explore emotions and achieve their potential.

A more recent mindfulness-based form of CBT, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), teaches acceptance of negative feelings. Clients practise defusion from unhelpful thoughts, and engage in behaviours consistent with their values. Clinical psychology is a combination of rigorous science and empathy, providing individualised, evidence-based treatments designed to help people with psychological difficulties to achieve their goals and enhance their lives.

3.3) Psychology at Work and in Organisations (Industrial-Organizational Psychology)

[30] Industrial-Organizational (I-O) psychology is also known as occupational psychology and uses psychological principles and techniques to improve workplace performance and health. It aims to improve the performance and well-being of both the organisation and individuals. I-O psychologists work on many aspects of work, such as: employee selection and placement, training and development, performance appraisal, leadership, organizational culture and change. They also examine work-related attitudes, behaviours, emotions, motivation, stress, burnout, and the integration of work and family, including career development, joblessness, and retirement.

They enhance work performance by developing recruitment and selection strategies, 360-degree performance appraisal, and stress reduction programs. This research uses both quantitative and qualitative

[30] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10911318/

methods. Quantitative methods include correlation, multiple regression, ANOVA[31], logistic regression, structural equation modeling (SEM) and hierarchical linear modeling (HLM). Qualitative methods include interviews, focus groups, case studies, ethnographic studies, and Flanagan's critical incident technique. Using psychological science, I-O psychology helps to produce healthier, more efficient, and more humane workplaces for the benefit of both employees and employers.

3.4) Psychology and Relationships and Society[32]

Psychology plays a significant role in how people develop, sustain and manage relationships and interact with the world around them. Relationship Psychology is based on Attachment Theory, first proposed by John Bowlby and further refined by Mary Ainsworth. This theory states that early attachment to parent forms patterns of relating to others throughout life. These bonds relieve stress and offer comfort. The four main attachment styles, secure, anxious, avoidant, and disorganized, are formed in early life and play a key role in adult romantic relationships, with implications for trust, intimacy, fear of abandonment and co-dependence. Those with secure attachment tend to have more fulfilling, stable and enduring relationships. Successful relationships are not only about biological bonding, they also require skills like communication, empathy, respect and emotional regulation. We know that responsive parenting during infancy is the foundation for such skills and that adult intimate relationships reflect infant-caregiver interactions.

Social Psychology is the study of how people think, feel and behave in social settings. It examines influential social processes such as conformity (due to the need to belong or to be right), obedience to authority, prejudice, altruism and group processes. Historically, social psychologists have shown that being in the presence of others can improve performance on simple tasks (social facilitation), but worsen it on complex tasks; and that people can engage in social loafing when their efforts are anonymous. Social psychology also sheds light on crowd dynamics, culture, political and collective processes, and decision-making. It highlights the great influence of social factors on human behaviour, and is crucial to improving the functioning of societies.[33]

3.5) Psychology in the Courtroom and Criminal Justice System (Forensic Psychology)

[34]Forensic psychology is the application of psychological knowledge and research methods to legal systems and to a variety of legal issues. It draws on psychological and legal perspectives to help the courts, police, lawyers and prisons. It was formally defined as a speciality by the American Psychological Association in 2001 but dates back to the 1870s, when research into eyewitness memory and its fallibility began.

[31] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12061880/

[32] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11961986/

[33] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9532433/

[34] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7937609/

[35]Forensic psychologists play essential roles in the courtroom, including assessing competency to stand trial, mental state at the time of the crime, and risk of recidivism (re-offending). They also assist law enforcement agencies by providing insights into interrogation methods that can lead to false confessions and the accuracy of eyewitness memory, which can be influenced by time and other factors. Forensic psychologists also help rehabilitate offenders through the development of intervention programs to decrease recidivism. They employ reliable instruments to assess whether people would benefit more from treatment than prison. Their work on trauma, false confessions and eyewitness memory has led to significant changes in evidence gathering, policing and justice, ensuring a more fair and effective system of laws.

4. **Contemporary Issues and Emerging Trends in Psychology[36]**

The world is changing at an incredible pace in terms of society, technology and culture. There are a number of key issues and trends that are shaping the priorities, research and applications of psychology.

4 .1) Rising Mental Health Awareness and Issues[37]

Mental health has emerged as a major concern in the 21st century, with hundreds of millions of people globally affected, regardless of age, gender or socioeconomic status. Historically, there was a veil of silence, stigma and shame around mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. Their sufferers were seen as inferior and immoral, making it difficult for them to seek treatment. This has changed over time with more reporting in the media, public health initiatives and celebrities sharing their experiences of mental health problems. The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically sped up this process, resulting in many experiencing grief, loneliness, financial loss and emotional distress. It revealed a stark lack of mental health services and disparities in access to mental health care. In response, there is a need for more mental health professionals, embedding psychological services into primary health care, and scalable solutions like teletherapy, online self-help programs, and peer support. Socio-emotional skills are being embedded in schools, employers are prioritising the mental health of their employees, and some countries have developed policies to ensure mental health care parity. But it's not enough to simply increase awareness. There are still many barriers to access, such as long wait times, affordability, cultural responsiveness and distance. The challenge for psychology and public health is to turn attention into action by ensuring enough resources, infrastructure and policy are in place to provide affordable, equitable and effective mental health care for all.

4.2.) [38]Social Media, Technology and Human Behaviour

Technology has revolutionised human experience, social connectivity, relationships and identity. Billions of people now rely on social media in their lives. These sites are designed to increase user engagement by intermittent reinforcement schedules (likes, comments, notifications) that release dopamine, similar to

[35] https://www.forensicscijournal.com/journals/jfsr/jfsr-aid1085.php

[36] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11790661/

[37] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10126977/

[38] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11594359/

gambling. Feeds are tailored to show content that triggers strong negative emotions - anger, envy, fear - to keep users engaged and maximize ad revenue. Excessive social media use, particularly during adolescence and young adulthood, is associated with increased depression, anxiety, loneliness and low self-worth. According to social comparison theory, exposure to "best parts" images on social media trigger a sense of inferiority, particularly related to body image and eating disorders in young women. Further consequences include cyberbullying, which can occur at any time and place, and "doomscrolling"[39], which causes feelings of anxiety and hopelessness. Prolonged screen use also leads to attention deficit, decreased deep-reading abilities, diminished face-to-face communication skills, and blue light-induced insomnia. Cyberpsychology investigates these effects, such as internet and gaming addiction, virtual reality, digital companions and digital bereavement. But technology has its positive effects, including delivering mental health services to remote or disadvantaged communities, creating communities for marginalised groups, and giving voice to previously unheard voices.

Rather than shunning technology, psychology must understand its impacts and apply this knowledge to understand and improve its use. This knowledge will guide the design of technology, media literacy programs, psychological therapies and policy settings to safeguard mental health in the digital era.

4.3) Cultural Psychology and the Importance of Diversity[40]

Historically, psychology has been concerned with universal phenomena. But the subjects of most studies have been Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) people, who account for only 15% of humanity. This has constrained the theories of psychology. By claiming that culture is not a minor variable but a central player in how we perceive, regulate emotions, form self-concept, express mental illness and seek help, cultural psychology challenges this paradigm. In collectivist societies (found in East Asia, Africa, Latin America and South Asia) the self is constructed relationally in terms of roles and community membership, rather than personal accomplishments.

How mental health problems present also varies. In non-Western cultures, depression often manifests through physical (pain, fatigue) rather than emotional symptoms, making it less likely to be diagnosed by Western psychiatrists. And diversity is crucial within the field. A lack of representation of African-American, Indigenous, Latinos, Asians and other social justice groups in psychology leads to theoretical and practical gaps. Finally, psychology needs to tackle the impact of systemic determinants of mental health such as racism, poverty, homelessness, and community violence. These are not just social determinants but powerful psychological determinants, and psychologists need to engage in social justice and change efforts.

4.4) Trauma and Resilience[41]

Trauma research has rapidly changed in recent decades. The inclusion of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in DSM-III (1980) legitimated the distress of veterans, rape survivors, and survivors of disasters.

[39] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12108867/

[40] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6018386/

[41] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11487322/

But the initial model primarily concerned single-event trauma. Later, complex trauma was coined to describe repeated, sustained exposure to stress, particularly in childhood within the caregiver-child relationship. This results in more profound changes in identity, emotion regulation, relationships, and safety.

Neuroscience has deepened our understanding of trauma through evidence of how prolonged stress changes the brain: overactivation of amygdala (threat processing), under activation of the prefrontal cortex (self-regulation) and deactivation of the hippocampus (integration of memory). This supports somatic approaches like EMDR, Trauma-Focused CBT and Somatic Experiencing. Another critical topic is intergenerational trauma, in which trauma effects are passed down from generation to generation via parenting, family stories, and potentially epigenetics. This is supported by research on Holocaust survivors, colonised groups and victims of child abuse.

But to trauma studies are added those on resilience. Resilience is now recognised as a complex process with individual, relationship, community and societal factors. Protective factors include safe relationships, a sense of agency, resourcefulness, cultural resources, and community support. The phenomenon of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun) illustrates how some trauma survivors report positive changes following trauma, including a greater appreciation for life, enhanced connections, new opportunities, increased personal strength, and enhanced existential or spiritual meaning. This occurs in the midst of suffering.

4.5) Psychology and Artificial Intelligence[42]

Artificial Intelligence is increasingly being applied in psychology. In psychiatry, AI is already used to predict early signs of depression, cognitive impairment or suicide from text analysis, sometimes as well as psychiatrists. AI chatbots (such as Woebot) offer low-barrier support for mild anxiety and depression, particularly for those who may not be able to access other forms of therapy. But there are major drawbacks. Psychotherapy is highly dependent on the therapeutic relationship with a human and empathy, which AI cannot fully capture. Potential harms include diagnostic error, privacy breaches and algorithmic bias that can negatively impact minority groups.

Beyond therapy, psychology explores emotional bonding with AI companions and the loss of identity, meaning and purpose through AI-accelerated job losses. Algorithms that sustain engagement also promote fake news and a loss of consensus. Ultimately, AI poses questions about the unique nature of human consciousness, emotion and meaning, and the role of technology in contributing to human flourishing.

5. Ethical Considerations in Psychology and Law[43]

5.1) Voluntary and Informed Participation

The person who needs to be evaluated or in therapy has the right to know what they are signing up for in clinical and legal cases and the psychologists have to explain what their evaluation is for, how it will be used and by whom. There should be no coercion into being involved and this is particularly difficult in

[42] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12665507/

[43] https://www.simplypsychology.org/informed-consent-in-psychology.html

forensic settings where a defendant or prisoner may feel they have little choice in the matter. Voluntary participation is when the person knows what they are saying and doing and not because they feel under pressure to do it.

5.2) Confidentiality and Privacy [44]

A key reason why people talk freely to psychologists is because they believe what they say will be confidential. It's a valuable trust and protected by ethical code of conduct. But when it comes to forensic cases, confidentiality is a tricky issue. A court psychologist is not necessarily meeting the client's needs as they are an objective observer. The client must be made aware that whatever they say may end up in court. This unpalatable truth is another ethical consideration.

5.3) Do No Harm and Provide Psychological Safety[45]

Psychologists abide by this simple rule "do no harm". This is very straightforward but it is a constant evaluation. Asking a person to talk about their trauma when conducting a psychological assessment and writing a report that results in a longer sentence are just two examples of tangible harms a psychologist may cause. For instance, a psychological report can alter the course of a person's life in legal proceedings. This is not a decision to be taken lightly and ethical psychologists always consider whether their actions are in the best interest of the person or not.

5.4) Competence and Science [46]

A risk is a psychologist who is not qualified to work with a particular client because a child psychologist should not diagnose antisocial personality disorder in a defendant. A psychologist should not work outside their speciality, should keep up-to-date with research and draw conclusions using scientifically accurate methods. In a legal setting, an opinion given as expert testimony is given a lot of weight which is why it should be based on evidence not speculation.

5.5) Fairness, Impartiality and Objectivity [47]

All psychologists bring with them their background, biases, prejudices and the good ones acknowledge that. In the legal context, bias can be due to cultural differences, racial stereotypes or simply because one party is paying for the assessment. A report inadvertently supporting the prosecution or excusing a cultural expression as a disorder can result in unfair consequences. Being objective does not mean being a robot but being open to others' ideas, critically examining your own beliefs and also not overstating your findings.

[44] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5514178/

[45] https://psychology.town/psychodiagnostics/key-ethical-principles-psychological-assessments/

[46] https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1068316X.2022.2114476

[47] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11617973/

5.6) Ethical Use of Psychological Tests and Report [48]

[49]Psychological tests are tools and like any tool, they can be used inappropriately. Tests should be used for the purpose they were designed for, be administered and interpreted by a trained psychologist and used with the population that they are validated for. For example, applying a test developed for one group of people to another group can result in not only inaccurate, but damaging results. Reports should be clear, accurate and non-embellished because once they enter the court system, they take on a life of their own.

5.7) Human Rights and Rehabilitation Justice [50]

Ultimately, ethics in psychology and law comes down to a question 'Are we treating people like people?' Psychology should not be used to remove a person's humanity and dignity or to justify torture. Rather, it should make the justice system more humane by encouraging rehabilitation rather than punishment, acknowledging the role of mental illness and trauma in criminal conduct and pushing for "humane" prison conditions. A psychologically aware justice system should have faith in people's ability to change and support them in doing so.

6. Conclusion

Psychology is a comprehensive and evolving discipline that explains human behavior and mental processes through scientific research, theoretical frameworks and real world applications. Rather than relying on assumptions or surface level judgments, psychology deeply studies certain factors that shape how individuals think, feel, learn and respond to their environments. Through its major branches such as cognitive, behavioral, clinical, social, developmental and biological psychology, it provides multiple perspectives for understanding both normal human functioning and psychological distress.

Finally, this research paper has highlighted psychology's scientific foundation, showing how evidence-based research methods allow the discipline to produce reliable knowledge and practical interventions. Theoretical approaches such as behaviorism, cognitive psychology, psychoanalytic theory, humanistic psychology, biological perspectives and sociocultural frameworks demonstrate that human behavior cannot be explained through one single lens. Instead, psychology offers a multi-dimensional understanding that supports both academic study and real-life problem solving.

Most importantly, the paper emphasized the increasing relevance of psychology in legal and criminal justice contexts. Legal systems often require judgments related to intention, competence, credibility, trauma and rehabilitation-areas that cannot be fully understood without psychological insight. Forensic psychology strengthens justice by supporting mental competence assessments, clarifying criminal responsibility, improving trauma-informed legal procedures and addressing the psychological limitations of eyewitness testimony and interrogation practices. By promoting rehabilitation, ethical practice, and evidence based evaluation, psychology contributes to justice systems that balance accountability with fairness and human dignity.

[48] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6818304/

[49] https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10486642/

[50] https://www.hrw.org/news/2009/09/22/mental-illness-human-rights-and-us-prisons

Due to rise of challenges in mental health concerns, digital behavior patterns, cultural diversity, trauma exposure and artificial intelligence psychology remains essential for both individuals and institutions. This discipline's future lies in its ability to adapt, maintain ethical responsibility and expand interdisciplinary collaboration. Ultimately, psychology is not only a field of study but is also a necessary framework for building healthier minds, stronger communities and more humane systems of education, healthcare and justice.

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