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chapter

1**INTRODUCTION****CHAPTER OUTLINE**

- Life happens
- What is social work?
- Psychology
- Factors
- Specialities in psychology
- Finally – the structure of the book

This chapter will be relatively short compared with other chapters. Its purpose is to introduce some basic ideas and concepts in psychology and to outline the structure of the book. Psychology as a discipline will be examined, including its history, its different perspectives and its goals. Social work and its definition will be examined as will the role of psychology in social work. A brief explanation of the different specialities within psychology is given at the end of the chapter. This book is meant to introduce students who have little or

no knowledge to some of the fundamental tenets and concepts in psychology that are relevant to social work and its practice. This chapter is an introductory one, outlining some basic premises and ideas from psychology; its goal is to familiarise you with the field of psychology.

LIFE HAPPENS

Even the monkeys fall out of the trees.

– Old Japanese proverb

I'm very fond of this proverb as it reminds me that 'life' happens! The proverb tells us that sometimes we go off the tracks or get sidelined. Monkeys sometimes fall out of trees even though it is not their 'natural' behaviour; people can be similarly unfortunate or unpredictable. This is what appeals to me every time I think of this proverb; that 'stuff' happens, events can sidetrack us and we can end up in situations we never imagined. It's a good lesson in humility, I think.

Those of us who work in the arena of social work encounter people who are vulnerable, people who need support. Yet how do we support them to ensure the best outcomes possible? I originally stumbled into psychology because I was curious as to how some people were able to overcome extreme adversity and have successful lives, while others were not. Why the different outcomes? There are no easy answers – I

doubt there will ever be answers that are conclusive – but the quest to understand human behaviour is a fascinating one. The question of how we become who we are is not recent; it has exercised the minds of humans since they could reason. Before we look at that and other issues pertinent to the study of psychology, we should address what is meant by social work and the relationship between psychology and social work.

WHAT IS SOCIAL WORK?

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

All social workers need:

- Knowledge
- Skills
- Values

In this book we will be looking at knowledge from a psychological perspective, through choosing theories and concepts relevant to social work, and considering some of the skills required. In terms of values, the following piece outlines what is considered the value base of social work.

Value base of social workers

The value base of social work is clearly defined within the International Federation for Social Workers (IFSW) International Policy on Human Rights (1996):

Social workers serve human development through adherence to the following basic principles:

- i) Every human being has a unique value, which justifies moral consideration for that person.
- ii) Each individual has the right to self-fulfilment, to the extent that it does not encroach upon the same right of others; and has an obligation to contribute to the well-being of society.
- iii) Each society regardless of its form should function to provide the maximum benefits for all its members.
- iv) Social workers have a commitment to principles of social justice.
- v) Social workers have the responsibility to devote objective and disciplined knowledge and skill to work with individuals, groups, communities and societies in their development and resolution of personal–societal conflicts and their consequences.
- vi) Social workers are expected to provide the best possible assistance without discrimination on the basis of gender, age, disability, colour, social class, race, religion, language, political beliefs or sexual orientation.

Lalor and Share (2009) list the following as important areas to social work and care: working in partnership, marginalisation or disadvantage, children and their families and people with disabilities, those who are homeless, those with addiction, older people and recent immigrants.

Psychology is, at its most simplistic, the study of the human mind and behaviour. The link is clear between (applied) psychology, which strives to understand, explain and improve people's lives, and social work, which involves working with people, particularly those who are vulnerable and have 'needs' that require support. So what exactly is the potential role of psychology in social work?

The role of psychology in social work

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000, p. 1) articulate their vision for the role of psychology in shaping people's lives and improving them:

At this juncture, the social and behavioural sciences can play an enormously important role. They can articulate a vision of the good life that is empirically sound while being understandable and attractive. They can show what actions lead to well-being, to positive individuals, and to thriving communities. Psychology should be able to help document what kinds of families result in children who flourish, what work settings support the greatest satisfaction among workers, what policies result in the strongest civic engagement and how people's lives can be most worth living.

Until recently, psychologists concerned themselves only with how people survive and endure adversity. Seligman identifies the emphasis in psychology on the study of psychopathology, when people develop maladaptive behaviours and become 'mentally unwell'. Seligman states that most psychologists have 'scant knowledge of what makes life worth living'. He eloquently identifies the potential that psychology has to benefit the field of social work through improving the lives of others. Throughout this book the role of psychology within social work will become clear, from psychological theory to informed evidence-based interventions. So what is psychology?

PSYCHOLOGY

The historical perspective

Throughout history there have been attempts to understand what makes us human, what shapes our thoughts and behaviour. Religion played an early part in attempting to unravel human behaviour; for example, there was the Christian assertion of 'original sin', the idea that people are born flawed and susceptible to undesirable behaviour. Philosophers added to the debate as the centuries unfolded. John Locke, for instance, suggested that a person was born a 'blank slate' or '*tabula rasa*' and that life experiences shaped the person we became. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in contrast to the Christian view, believed in the innate goodness of humans striving to reach their full potential. Of course, these arguments are best left to theologians and philosophers,

but the study of psychology is really not much different in that, put simply, it attempts to gain understanding of humans, their development and behaviours.

What is psychology?

Psychology is the study of people: how they think, act, react and interact. Psychology is concerned with all aspects of behaviour and the thoughts, feelings and motivations underlying behaviour. In their search for the causes of diverse forms of behaviour, psychologists take into account biological, psychological and environmental factors. Psychology is different from psychiatry, which requires a medical degree and historically concerns itself with mental illness from a biological perspective.

The history of psychology

Within the history of psychology several approaches have been used to gain a greater understanding of human behaviours, beginning in the early 1800s with:

Introspection: As the name indicates this approach relied on 'inspection' where an individual would be asked to report on their feelings and thoughts. William James, considered one of the forefathers of psychology, was an exponent of this method, as was William Wundt.

Psychodynamics: Originating in the late 1800s, this movement is best known through the work of Freud. It placed emphasis upon the 'unconscious' mind, believing that a person had awareness of only a fraction of his thoughts and mental processes. Freud believed that unconscious urges were responsible for behaviour. Techniques such as hypnosis and dream analysis were used to access these unknown recesses of the mind. While many are critical of Freud as we will see in Chapter 4, arguably his belief that early experiences affect later development still remains popular.

Behaviourism: This approach was very popular in America in the 1920s. Those best known for their work in this field are Skinner and Pavlov. Behaviourists believed that, while the inner workings of the mind could not be observed, a person's behaviour could. Their work still has some relevance in the area of learning and behaviour modification.

Humanism: This approach was, it could be argued, a reaction against the behaviourist picture of a human as almost a robot merely responding to outside influence (external stimuli) or the Freudian image of humans driven by their unconscious urges. Humanists such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow promoted the view that within a person is an active desire to reach their full potential, or 'self-actualisation'. Their work has been important in the area of personality, counselling and person-centred practice.

Socio-cultural: No person is an island. We are social creatures and this perspective recognises this and suggests that our thoughts and behaviours are influenced through our interactions with others. Importantly, it highlights how we are embedded in the culture we are raised or live in and, how the views of that culture in turn influence us. In the past, psychology tended to look at the individual to gain

a greater understanding of them, without looking outside of the person to gauge external influences on them. The socio-cultural approach examines how culture is transmitted to the members of a society and investigates the differences and similarities of people from differing cultures.

Social Constructionism: Social constructionism emphasises how contextual, linguistic, and relational factors combine to determine the kinds of human beings that people will become and how their views of the world will develop. Knowledge is negotiated between people within a given context and time frame. Social Constructionism proposes that reality is socially negotiated. This leads to questions such as 'what is mental illness', 'what is disability', 'what is woman', fundamentally every construct or concept is informed or constructed by social knowledge. You may come across the term 'constructivism'; this can cause confusion due to its similarity to 'constructionism'. Perhaps the simplest way of distinguishing constructionism is as a sociological description of knowledge, while constructivism is a psychological description of the cognitive processes and structures at an individual level, how the person perceives their world. In Chapter 10 this concept is discussed in greater depth. Constructionism is pivotal to social work, highlighting the influence of cultural and social norms on attitudes and behaviour, which in turn feed into issues of equality and diversity.

Scientific: The predominant approach within psychology at present is the scientific method, or science of behaviour. This approach is less interested in human behaviour *per se*, focusing instead on *why* that behaviour occurs. Thus, if a child exhibits aggressive behaviour the psychologist would not focus on the behaviour itself but rather would want to know why the child is behaving in such a fashion. Methods of research (methodology) include statistics and experiments.

Recent developments in psychology

Dissatisfaction has been voiced regarding the use of the scientific approach within psychology as critics claim that it cannot capture the complexity of human behaviour. More recent developments have been seen in psychology and social work through the emergence of approaches which challenge the status quo of existing theories. Reactionary approaches include that of community, feminist and critical psychology; let's take a look.

Critical psychology encompasses a range of approaches, challenging and critiquing mainstream psychology's assumptions that help sustain unjust political, economic and societal structures. With social justice at its core, it finds resonance with social work approaches which aim to promote social justice. In Chapter 7 we will discuss the anti- and post-psychiatry movements and their critique of mental health. In Chapter 10 we will examine the arguments of critical psychology. Dennis Fox and Isaac Prilleltensky are the best known advocates of this movement.

Feminist psychology, as in the case of critical psychology, questions the influence of unjust structures in maintaining the status quo, but feminist psychology focuses on the role of gender in subjugating women. This movement originated in the 1960s with the growing reaction against stereotypes and discrimination faced by females. In psychology it is associated with a backlash against Freud's psychoanalytic movement and in particular his concept of penis envy and hysteria (believed to be a disorder of the womb). This inherent discrimination harmed women and excluded them from an equal place within society and caused them to be labelled as 'mad' if they did not conform to societal norms and beliefs about what 'woman' is. Feminist psychology recognises the role of gender stereotypes within psychological beliefs, diagnoses and therapies and attempts to challenge them. In Chapter 5, Carol Gilligan's Critique of Kohlberg's theory of moral development hinges on its exclusion of gender, she further argues that many theorists, including Kohlberg, have ignored women when developing theories explaining human development. Gilligan argues that for gender to either facilitate or hinder, gender must first be recognised in psychological development.

Transcultural psychiatry – psychiatry differs from psychology. Psychiatrists are medically trained doctors and traditionally have a particular interest in the biological aspects of 'mental illness'. Transcultural psychiatry, like critical psychiatry, aims to look outside the individual in understanding different factors that influence a person. Transcultural psychiatry is interested in the role of culture in 'mental illness'; this can range from how cultures perceive mental illness to cultural factors that may affect the individual's mental health.

BLACK PERSPECTIVES

According to Robinson (2007, p. 11) the common experiences of black people form the framework for developing a black perspective which challenges the '... racist and stereotypic, weakness-dominated and inferiority-oriented conclusions about black people. This perspective is interested in the psychological well-being of black people and is critical of oppressive research paradigms and theoretical formulations that have a potentially oppressive effect on black people. Black psychologists (mainly in the US) have presented alternative perspectives on black child development'. Robinson reflects that mainstream psychology has chosen in large part to ignore the research of black academics. Robinson concludes that social workers with an understanding of the black frame of reference are better equipped to develop and offer 'more accurate and comprehensive explanations of black child development'.

CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

As with the Black Perspective, cross-cultural psychology questions the ethnocentrism of mainstream psychology's Euro-American approach. Segall et al. (as cited in

Robinson 2007, p. 12) define cross-cultural psychology as ‘the scientific study of human behaviour and its transmission, taking into account the ways in which the behaviours are shaped and influenced by social and cultural forces’.

Community psychology examines individuals within their social world. Community psychology explores social issues and how they influence individuals, groups and society at large.

Despite all these critiques, the degree to which psychology and psychiatry have embraced a more social justice position is questionable. Arguably, mainstream psychology has been slow to critique assumptions or attitudes that may in fact be maintaining unhealthy or harmful beliefs and practices.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Which approach in psychology do you feel has the most to offer social workers? Do you think aspects of psychology have and can perpetuate beliefs and

assumptions that are detrimental to principles of social justice?

While we have seen the approaches and new directions in psychology change and adapt, the goals of psychology remain constant and reflect arguably a more empirical and scientific direction.

The goals of psychology

1. to *describe* how people and other animals behave
2. to *understand* the causes of these behaviours
3. to *predict* how people and animals will behave under certain conditions
4. to *control* behaviour through knowledge and control of its causes.

Terminology

Terminology can wane and change with each new concept or theory introduced in psychology. It is helpful early on to define and clarify the core terms you will encounter in this book. Terminology can be intimidating; throughout the book an effort is made to explain terms in accessible languagep the following are terms used repeatedly in psychology and social work.

Term	Definition
Theory	Describes, explains or predicts certain phenomenon
Method	Specifies what to do when faced with certain phenomenon
Perspective	A way of viewing or understanding certain experience based on words and principles
Model	A theory or method depicted logically or graphically

Finally, while we are in the mode of defining or outlining basic terms and concepts often found within psychology, we should take this opportunity to overview 'factors' as they frequently appear in the book.

FACTORS

So what is a factor?

A factor at its simplest is something that influences or produces a result or outcome

An individual's health, development and well-being are shaped by a range of factors, such as the individual's characteristics, family characteristics, and the broader social, economic and physical environments which the individual inhabits. In Chapter 4 we will look at the work of Bronfenbrenner and his ecological theory, which is a fantastic framework to understand the layers of influences and their potential interaction in affecting development and outcomes.

Factors can be either 'risk' or 'protective' and can affect all areas of an individual's life throughout the lifecycle. Added to this is our recognition that experiences early in life affect later development: that the early years are a critical and sensitive period that can have massive ramifications throughout the remainder of a child's life.

Risk factors are factors that can have an adverse impact on an individual person or their immediate and distal (distant) environments and that have a potentially negative influence on their development or behaviour. Often where you have one risk factor you are more likely to see others, for example, children born with low birth weight (biological risk) may also be born to mothers with low education levels and who live in poverty (psychosocial risks). This phenomenon is sometimes called 'double jeopardy'. The more risk factors that accumulate; the longer these factors last and the more severe the factor, the greater the impact on the individual and their development.

Offset against this are protective factors that operate in a similar fashion to risk factors in that, to put it simply, the more you have, the better 'protected' you are and the more likely you are to enjoy better outcomes. Intervention programmes all operate by targeting children, families and individuals who are vulnerable for a variety of reasons by putting in place support mechanisms. These programmes are protective in and of themselves and their ideology reflects the need to target at-risk populations by increasing protective factors to offset risk factors and, thus, improve outcomes.

Throughout the book, factors will be discussed together with their relationship to a particular topic or aspect of development. In Chapter 6 factors related to disability are examined. In Chapter 7 those that impact upon mental illness are over-viewed. Within Chapter 8 particular attention is given to psychosocial factors involved

in well-being, including poverty, community and ethnicity. It is difficult to capture the interplay between the myriad of risk and protective factors contained within a complex socio-cultural environment and its interaction with the unique characteristics of an individual. It is hoped that this will become apparent throughout the book.

Social workers work in partnership and collaborate with other professionals and stakeholders. The field of psychology is diverse and wide ranging, as you will see in the book; the different specialities reflect this diversity. The following piece outlines the different specialities within psychology.

SPECIALITIES IN PSYCHOLOGY

Clinical psychology is the application of psychological theories, models and research to a range of psychological, psychiatric, mental health and developmental problems. Clinical psychologists provide a variety of services, including assessment, therapy and consultancy services. They work primarily, but not exclusively, in child and/or adult and learning disability services where emotional, behavioural, psychiatric or developmental difficulties are addressed.

Counselling psychology, as a psychological speciality, facilitates personal and interpersonal functioning across the life span with a focus on emotional, social, vocational, educational, health-related and developmental concerns. Therefore, counselling psychologists can be found working in such diverse areas as schools and colleges, industrial workplaces and health services. Counselling psychology encompasses a broad range of practices that help people improve their well-being, alleviate distress and maladjustment, resolve crises and increase their ability to live more highly functioning lives. Counselling psychologists work with people who have experienced a range of emotional and psychological difficulties. These include problems of identity and bereavement, relationship problems, sexual abuse, emotional abuse and neglect.

Educational psychologists deal with the psychological and educational development of people in the education system. This may include students of any age, their parents or guardians and the people who work with them. Their work can involve both assessment and intervention within the education setting. They are also likely to be involved in training and research on related issues.

Forensic psychologists work in a variety of areas, including prisons, probation services, special secure hospitals, rehabilitation units and in private practice. Responsibilities include the assessment of offenders prior to sentencing, management of offenders during sentence and in the community upon release, risk assessment and sex offender treatment programmes. Forensic psychologists also act as expert witnesses and give evidence in court.

Health psychology involves an examination of the way in which biological, psychological and social factors affect health and illness. Health psychologists are concerned with studying the relationship between psychological factors (for example,

proneness to hostility), social/psychological factors (for example, psychological stress) and illness (for example, heart disease). Areas of practice include health-risk behaviours and developing better ways of helping people to change their behaviours. Health psychologists are also involved in helping individuals to improve their health or to cope with chronic illness or unpleasant medical procedures.

Neuropsychology is the scientific study of brain-behaviour relationships, and the clinical application of that knowledge to human problems. A clinical neuropsychologist is a professional psychologist who applies principles of assessment and intervention based upon the scientific study of human behaviour as it relates to normal and abnormal functioning of the central nervous system.

Occupational (also known as Organisational) psychology involves the study of human behaviour in the workplace. Organisational psychologists recognise the importance of relationships between individuals, organisations and society. Occupational psychology helps organisations to get the best from their workforce and improve the job satisfaction of individual employees. It deals with issues and problems involving people at work by serving as advisors in a variety of organisations.

FINALLY – THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

Before we look at the structure of the book, I would recommend those with no knowledge of psychology to read Chapter 4, which overviews the major theories in psychology and Chapter 5, which is a very comprehensive outline of **Human Growth and Development**, explaining the individual's journey from conception through the life span from the different domains (areas) of development, including physical, cognitive and socioemotional and the different age-related and developmental milestones one may typically see.

Structure of the book

While this is first and foremost a psychology textbook, it has been tailored to focus on material and topics of direct relevance to social work. As psychology and social work are vast and diverse fields, it is not possible to be exhaustive, it is intended to demonstrate the relevance of psychology to social work through explaining psychology and demonstrating how it links to social work.

Chapter 2 The brain and behaviour

Chapter 2 focuses on the brain. With increasing advances in medicine and longevity we are likely to meet people who have brain injury or disease. Exploring the brain and its role in behaviour early in the book will acclimatise you to the more 'biological' aspects within psychology and highlights this area's growing importance. Knowledge of neurology is a helpful addition to the social worker's knowledge base and this chapter will

explain brain structures and function, providing examples of how this knowledge is relevant to social work, including case studies.

Chapter 3 Communication and relationships in social work

The centrality of skills is reflected in the inclusion of a Chapter on 'Communication and Relationships in Social Work'. It will aim to introduce 'communication' into this discourse as it is so fundamental within social work; this will be done within the rubric of psychology, for example, communication and social work from an attachment perspective.

Chapter 4 Approaches to psychology

We return to all things psychological in Chapter 4, which seeks to explain some of the major theories within psychology, Teater (2010, p. 6), confirms, 'at the foundation of current social work theory and practice is psychosocial theory', highlighting the importance of theory to the social worker. An emphasis continues in illustrating the relevance of psychological theories to social work, for example, an explanation of Maslow's theory is accompanied with its use in an addiction programme, or learning theory's role in behaviour modification. Hopefully, the applied aspect of this book will enable readers to see the theories from a practice-orientated perspective.

Chapter 5 Human growth and development

Human Growth and Development is tackled in Chapter 5, a large chapter reflecting the range of the life span. Here we will journey from conception onwards and consider the domains of physical, social-emotional and cognitive development. Use of case studies, examples and other tools are used to offer a more applied perspective. Knowledge of the life span is fundamental to those of us who work with people; it not only provides a knowledge base to operate from but allows us insight into the multifactorial nature of human development and the many influences that can shape it.

Here we begin to move from a more general discussion to specific exploration of topics of relevance to social work and its practice, including topics such as disability, abuse, trauma and mental health.

Chapter 6 Disabilities

Disability, its definitions and models are discussed and what we think of disability is challenged. Describing disability will explore the language used in discussing disability – its nuances and how language can have a 'disabling' effect upon an individual. We will then move towards a practical overview of the different categories of disability as they exist, causes, characteristics and some of the interventions engaged in the treatment of different conditions and disorders. Different influences will be explored, including

the role of culture and ethnicity, and an ecological approach to understanding disability will be discussed.

Chapter 7 Mental health

Mental health plays a pivotal role in social work knowledge and practice. This chapter examines how we define mental health and the models and classification used within this field. The role of biological, psychological and social factors will be discussed. Interventions and treatments will be considered, an overview of the main theorists used in therapeutic approaches will be outlined, as will the efficacy of counselling. An 'In focus' section at the end will explore addiction in depth, highlighting the prominent role it occupies within social work practice.

Chapter 8 Well-being and environmental stressors

While the focus of the previous chapter was narrow, dealing with the classification of mental disorders, this chapter explores, in greater depth, well-being and environmental stressors, psychosocial resilience and adversity, and the factors, characteristics and interplay that occur, to include groups vulnerable to mental health problems. Issues such as poverty and how it impacts on development and functioning are explored.

Chapter 9 Abuse and trauma

In this chapter you are introduced to the key aspects of abuse and trauma with the emphasis on the psychological aspects rather than legislation, policy or practice pertaining to social work. We begin with a discussion on the question of intentionality and its role in defining abuse, the different categories of abuse, their characteristics and associated factors will be overviewed. Groups vulnerable to abuse will be examined, such as the increased risk of abuse faced by those with mental illness. Further, an 'In focus' piece on the abuse of disabled children illustrates the varied mechanisms involved. Societal and cultural influences in abuse and its perpetuation are discussed. The final section of this chapter gives greater focus to the perspective of those victimised; topics such as the search for meaning and post-traumatic stress disorder are explored.

Chapter 10 Social psychology – $B = f(P,E)$

Lewin's famous equation $B = f(P,E)$, that behaviour is a function of the person in the environment, captures the concept that our behaviour reflects, and is a function of, environment. Chapter 10 considers the field of social psychology and how behaviour is a function of the 'person-in-environment'. Sociological perspectives consider the role of society and its effects. Social psychology is often seen as a crossover between psychology and sociology, an interdisciplinary bridge between the two. This chapter examines how people influence our behaviour (social influence), how we think about and

perceive our social world (social thinking and social perception) and how we behave towards other people (social relations).

To conclude!

I hope this book will serve as a guide to walk you through some of the most fundamental aspects of human development that have relevance to social work. This book is intended to offer a foundation for further exploration of the topics touched on. Life is akin to a voyage; it can be said that it's not so much the destination that is important as the journey there – I wish you a fruitful one!

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