

Govt. College for Girls, Ludhiana
Department of Psychology

BA III Semester 5

UNIT-I

Nature and Criteria of abnormality

Dr. Rajiv Kumar Sehgal

Associate Professor and Head

▪ **Abnormality is significant deviation from commonly accepted patterns of behaviour, emotions or thoughts and which significantly interferes with an individual's adaptation to important life demands and often causes distress in the individual or in others.**

▪ **Common features of abnormality**

The four Ds”:

- **Deviance,**
- **Distress,**
- **Dysfunction,**
- **Danger.**

Some experts also add one more i.e. Duration

Four Ds:

Deviant : *different, extreme, unusual, bizarre*

Distressing : *unpleasant and upsetting,*

Dysfunctional : *interfering with the person's ability to conduct daily activities in a constructive way*

Dangerous: *posing a risk to the person as well as others*

Duration : The above mentioned features must persist for a longer period of time.

David Rosenhan & Martin Seligman (1989)

mentioned **seven criteria** which might be used to label behaviour as “abnormal”:

- 1. *Suffering***
- 2. *Maladaptiveness***
- 3. *Statistical Deviancy***
- 4. *Violation of the Standards of Society***
- 5. *Social Discomfort***
- 6. *Irrationality and Unpredictability***
- 7. *Dangerousness***

1. Suffering

- If people suffer or experience psychological pain we consider this as indicative of abnormality.
- Although suffering is an element of abnormality in many cases, it is neither a sufficient condition nor even a necessary condition for us to consider something as abnormal.



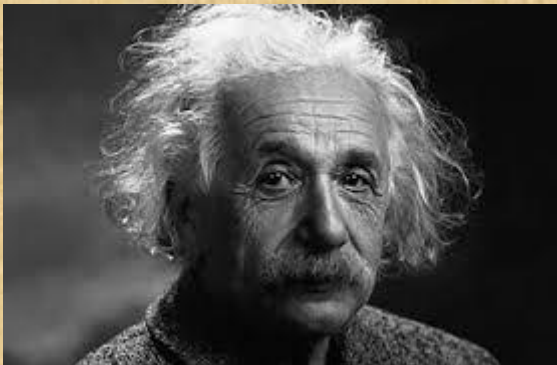
2. Maladaptiveness:

- Maladaptive behavior interferes with our well-being and with our ability to enjoy our work and our relationships.
- However, not all disorders involve maladaptive behavior.
- A contract killer takes someone's life in return for payment. Is this behavior maladaptive? Not for him, because it is the way he makes his living. We consider his behaviour abnormal, however, because it is maladaptive for and toward society.



3. *Statistical Deviancy*:

- The word *abnormal* literally means “away from the normal.”
- **Genius** is statistically rare. However, we do not consider people with such uncommon talents to be abnormal in any way.
- The **common cold** is certainly very common, but it is regarded as an illness.
- **Intellectual disability** (which is statistically rare and represents a deviation from normal) is considered to reflect abnormality.
- If something is statistically rare and undesirable (intellectual disability), we are more likely to consider it abnormal than something that is statistically rare and highly desirable (such as genius)
- In defining abnormality we make **value judgments**.



4. Violation of the Standards of Society:

- When people fail to follow the conventional social and moral rules of their cultural group we may consider their behavior abnormal.
- However social norms change over time.
- Moreover, social norms differ between cultures. What is considered 'normal' in one culture may actually be 'abnormal' in another.



5. *Social Discomfort:*

➤ When someone violates a social rule, those around him or her may experience a sense of discomfort or unease.

6. *Irrationality and Unpredictability:*

➤ Although a little unconventionality may add some spice to life, there is a point at which we are likely to consider a given unconventional behavior abnormal.

➤ A man who responds to voices that do not exist in objective reality is behaving irrationally.



7. Dangerousness:

- Someone who is a danger to him- or herself or to another person must be psychologically abnormal.
- Is a soldier in battle that is killing enemies mentally ill?
- What about someone who is an extremely bad driver?
- Both of these people may be a danger to others. Yet we would not consider them to be mentally ill.
- Conversely, we cannot assume that someone diagnosed with a mental disorder must be dangerous. Although mentally ill people do commit serious crimes, serious crimes are also committed every day by people who have no signs of mental disorder.



CULTURE	Different cultures and subcultures have different social norms Hearing voices may be normal in a culture that believes in spirits but is abnormal in another culture that sees it as mental disorder
HISTORY	What is abnormal at one time might become normal later, even in the same culture Homosexuality used to be viewed as a mental illness it was in the DSM-I) but it is now accepted by most people in Western culture
SITUATION	Behaviour that is normal in one place and context may be abnormal in a different situation Nudity is normal in the bath, changing rooms and on nudist beaches, but not in the supermarket
AGE & GENDER	We have different expectations of men and women and of old people and young people Cross-dressing is viewed by many people as abnormal and adults who don't "grow out of" behaviour associated with children (like thumb-sucking or bed-wetting) are seen as abnormal

- The distinction between normal and abnormal is not so much a difference between two independent types of behaviours as it is a matter of the degree.
- Mental disorder is best thought of as a continuum that varies between mental health, mental illness.
- One clinical theorist, **Thomas Szasz (2010)**, places such emphasis on society's role that he finds the whole concept of mental illness to be invalid, a *myth* of sorts.
- According to **Szasz**, the deviations that society calls abnormal are simply "problems in living," not signs of something wrong within the person.

NORMAL

The 3 most important defining aspects of abnormality.

Deviance

Distress/Discomfort

Dysfunctional Behavior

Three defining aspects of abnormality on a continuum.

ABNORMAL

There is no distinct or specific boundary between normality and abnormality. Behavior, thinking, and emotions are normal or abnormal by degree based on the extent to which actions, thoughts, and feelings are deviant, personally distressing, dysfunctional or maladaptive, and potentially dangerous to self or others.

“No behavior or misbehavior is a disease or can be a disease. That's not what diseases are.

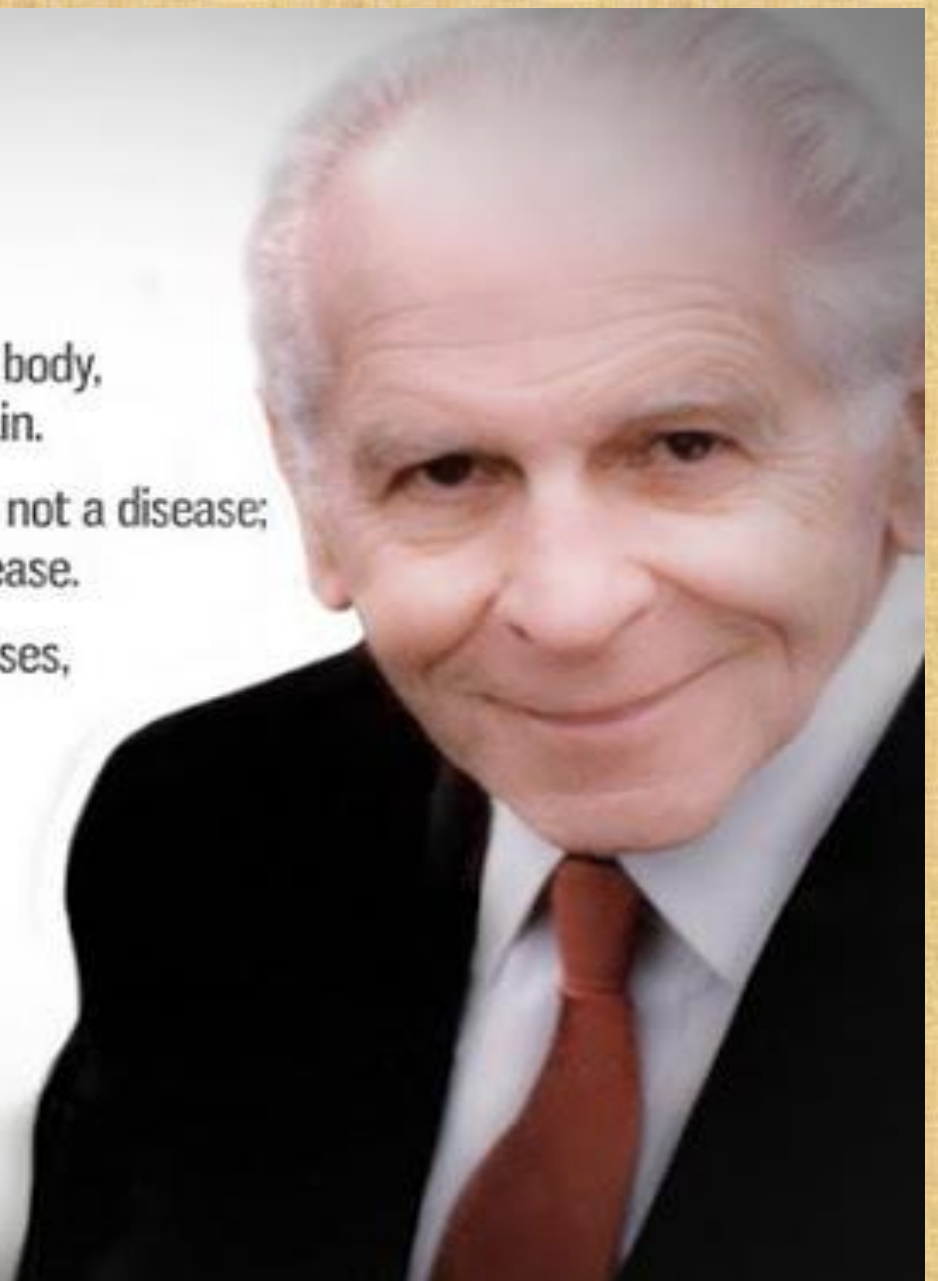
Diseases are malfunctions of the human body, of the heart, the liver, the kidney, the brain.

Typhoid fever is a disease. Spring fever is not a disease; it is a figure of speech, a metaphoric disease.

All mental illnesses are metaphoric diseases, misrepresented as real diseases and mistaken for real diseases.”

–Thomas Szasz,
Professor of Psychiatry Emeritus
Co-Founder CCHR

CCHRInt.org



Thank You