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In psychology, a client may refer to an individual/group/organisation who on her/his own seeks help, guidance or intervention from a psychologist with respect to any problem faced.

Skill is defined as proficiency, facility or dexterity that is acquired or developed through training and experience. The Webster dictionary defines it as possession of the qualities required to do something or get something done.

Differentiating pseudo psychologist from actual psychologist

Differentiating between a pseudo psychologist and an actual psychologist mainly depends on training as a researcher and internalization of certain professional values. It is now recognised that the knowledge of tools used by psychologists, their methods and theories are required to develop psychological expertise.

It is important to know about the conditions and competencies necessary besides research skills for a psychologist. There are conditions and competencies for psychologists which have come to be recognised internationally. The basic skills or competencies which psychologists have identified for becoming an effective psychologist fall into three sections,

- General Skills
- Observational Skills
- Specific Skills

General Skills are generic in nature and are needed by all psychologists irrespective of their field of specialisation. It is expected that it will not be proper to provide any form of professional training to students who do not possess these skills.

Interpersonal skills are the ability to listen and be empathetic, to develop respect for/interest in other's cultures, experiences, values, etc. These skills are expressed verbally or non-verbally.

Cognitive skills are the ability to solve problems, engage in critical thinking and organised reasoning and having intellectual curiosity and flexibility.

Affective skills include emotional control and balance, tolerance/understanding of interpersonal conflict, tolerance of ambiguity and uncertainty.

Expressive skills are the ability to communicate one's ideas, feelings and information in verbal, non-verbal and written forms.

Reflective skills are the ability to examine and consider one's own motives, attitudes, behaviours and ability to be sensitive to one's own behaviour or others.

Personal skills include personal organisation, personal hygiene, time management and appropriate dress.

Sensitivity to diversity includes:

- Knowledge of one's self as one operates in the professional settings with diverse others.
- Knowledge about the nature and impact of individual and cultural diversity in different situations.
- Ability to work effectively with diverse backgrounds in assessment, treatment and consultation.
- Ability to respect different cultural norms and beliefs.
- Being sensitive to one's preferences and also to one's preference for own group.
- Ability to promote diversity in cultural beliefs and respecting it to promote positive life outcomes.

Observational skills involve the psychologist observing various facets of surroundings including people and varying events. A psychologist may begin with carefully scrutinising the physical setting in order to capture its 'atmosphere'. These small, subtle and irrelevant looking signals influence human behaviour, which is why a psychologist notes such signals in the surroundings.

- Observe patiently
- Pay close attention to your physical surroundings
- Be aware of people's reactions, emotions and motivations
- Ask questions that can be answered while observing

- Be yourself, give information about yourself if asked
- Observe with an optimistic curiosity
- Be ethical, you have to respect privacy, norms of people you are observing, take care not to disclose any information to anyone

Naturalistic Observation is one of the primary ways of learning about the way people behave in a given setting.

Participant Observation is the where the observer is actively involved in the process of observing by becoming an active member of the setting where the observation takes place. This technique is widely used by anthropologists whose objective is to gain a firsthand perspective of a system from within which otherwise may not be readily available to an outsider.

Advantages and disadvantages of observation:

- It allows behaviour to be seen and studied in its natural setting.
- People from outside, or those already working in a setting, can be trained to use it.
- One disadvantage is that events being observed are subject to bias due to the feelings of the people involved as well as that of the observer.
- Generally day to day activities in a given setting are fairly routine, which can go unnoticed by the observer.
- The actual behaviour and responses of others may get influenced by the presence of the observer, thus defeating the very purpose of the observation.

Specific Skills are core/basic to the field of psychological service. Relevant specific skills and competencies can be classified as follows.

- Communication skills: Speaking, active listening, body language
- Psychological testing skills
- Interviewing skills
- Counselling skills: empathy, positive regard, authenticity

Communication is a conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional process in which feelings and ideas are expressed as verbal and/or non-verbal messages that are sent, received and comprehended.

The process of communication can be accidental, expressive (resulting from the emotional state of the person) or rhetorical (resulting from the specific goal of the communicator). Human communication occurs on the following levels.

- Intrapersonal communication – involves communicating with yourself and encompasses such activities such as thought processes, personal decision making, and focusing on self.

- Interpersonal communication – refers to the communication that takes place between two or more persons who establish a communicative relationship.
- Public communication – characterised by a speaker sending a message to an audience. It can be direct (face-to-face messages delivered by the speaker to an audience) or indirect (messages relayed over radio or television).

Characteristics of communication:

- It is dynamic, as the process is constantly in a state of change. As expectations, attitudes, feelings and emotions of the persons who are communicating change, the nature of their communication also changes.
- It is continuous because it never stops, whether we are asleep or awake we are always processing ideas or thoughts; our brain remains active.
- It is irreversible because once we send a message we cannot take it back.
- It is interactive because we are constantly in contact with other people and with ourselves.

When we communicate, we encode (take ideas, give them meaning and put them into message forms) and send the idea through a channel composed of our primary signal system based on our senses. The message is sent to someone who receives it using their primary signal system and decodes (translates the message into understandable forms) it.

The act of speech itself is not communication. Speech is only a biological act. Communication is broader as it involves a relationship among two or more people in which they attempt to share meaning so that the intent of message received is the same as the intent of the message sent.

Listening requires a person to be attentive. You need to be patient, non-judgemental and yet have the capacity to analyse and respond. Hearing and listening are not the same. Hearing is a biological activity that involves the reception of a message through sensory channels, and is only a part of listening, a process that involves reception, attention, assignment of meaning and the listener's response to the message presented.

Reception is the initial step in the listening process. In addition to using the hearing mechanism, people listen through their visual system. They observe a person's facial expressions, posture, etc. which may provide important cues that may not be obvious merely by listening to the verbal part of the message.

Once the stimulus is received, it reaches the **attention** stage of the human processing system. In this phase, the other stimuli recede so that we can concentrate on specific words or visual symbols. Divided attention makes it difficult for you to receive signals or messages.

Paraphrasing is where the person does not repeat your exact words, but makes a summary of the ideas just received and provides you with a restatement of what they understand. It allows you to understand how much they understood of what was communicated.

The process of putting the stimulus we have received into some predetermined category develops as we acquire language. We develop mental categories for interpreting the message we receive.

Like the brain, the culture in which we have brought up also influences our listening and learning abilities. Asian cultures, such as India, emphasise on listening by being a silent communicator when receiving messages from seniors or elders. Some cultures focus on controlling attention. Buddhism has a notion called mindfulness that means devoting your complete attention to whatever you are doing.

Body language is composed of all those messages that people exchange besides words. While reading body language, we must remember that a single non-verbal signal does not carry complete meaning. Factors such as gestures, postures, etc. all have to be considered together as a cluster.

A person's background and past patterns of behaviour are also considered when we analyse body language. The consistency between past and current patterns of behaviour, as well as harmony between verbal and non-verbal communication is termed **congruency**.

The skills needed for psychological assessment are:

- Ability to select and implement multiple methods and means of evaluation ways that are responsive to and respectful of diverse individuals, couples, families and groups.
- Ability to utilise systematic approaches to gather data required for taking decisions.
- Knowledge of psychometric issues and bases of assessment methods.

- Knowledge of issues related to integration of different data sources.
- Ability to integrate assessment data from different sources for diagnostic purposes.
- Ability to formulate and apply diagnoses, to understand strengths and limitations of current diagnostic approaches.
- Capacity for effective use of supervision to implement and enhance skills.

An **interview** is a purposeful conversation between two or more people that follows a basic question and answer format. Interviewing is more formal than most other conversations because it has a set purpose and uses a focused structure. The basic format, regardless of the interview's purpose, are opening, the body and the closing.

- Opening of the interview – It involves establishing rapport between the two communicators. The purpose is to make the interviewee comfortable. Generally, the interviewer starts the conversation and does most of the talking at the outset. This serves two functions. It establishes the goal of the interview and gives the interview time to become comfortable.
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