

1.1 Introduction

Syllabus : Definition of Psychology; Historical antecedents of Psychology and trends in the 21st century; Psychology and scientific methods; Psychology in relation to other social sciences and natural sciences; Application of Psychology to societal problems.

Previous Year Questions

2016

Q. Explain how fundamental understanding of Psychology is helpful in understanding societal problems. 10 marks [2016]

2015

Q. Why is it important to understand psychological processes for other disciplines of social science ? 10 marks [2015]

2014

Q. Do you think that natural sciences provide a good model for psychological studies ? Give arguments in favour of your answer. 20 marks [2014]

2013

Q. The discipline of psychology has grown and developed through debate b/w those who held that it should be modeled on natural science and those who subscribed to the view that it has to follow the model of social science. What arguments you envision for or against these views ? What position would you like to endorse and why ? 25 marks [2013]

2011

Q. Describe the key assumptions on which psychology claims to be a science. 10 marks [2011]

2009

Q. The History of psychology shows ‘mind-body’ approach as one of the popular ways of explaining behavior. Discuss how this is being revisited in modern psychology. 20 marks [2009]

Definition of Psychology

Psychology is defined formally as a science which studies mental processes, experiences & behaviour in different contexts.

In doing so, it uses methods of biological and social sciences to obtain data systematically. It makes sense of these data so that they can be organised as knowledge.

Historical antecedents of Psychology and trends in the 21st century

1879 : **Wilhelm Wundt** founded the first laboratory dedicated exclusively to psychological research in **Leipzig**, Germany. Wundt -first person to refer himself as a psychologist. Also referred as founder/father of experimental psychology or simply father of psychology.

Structuralists : Wundt was one of them – an early view suggesting psychology should focus on studying the basic structures composing the human mind.

One of the methods of structuralists like Wundt to decipher structure of mind was **Introspection**: in which trained individuals reported their conscious experience (sounds, optical illusions , other visual stimulus etc.) in response to specific stimuli in detail.

Functionalists : Strongly influenced by Darwin's Theory of Natural selection, proponents of this view such as **William James** argued that since consciousness is a uniquely human characteristic it must serve imp. functions for us otherwise it wouldn't have evolved. Thus focus of study of psych. should be on functions of consciousness rather than its structure. This *evolutionary view* of structuralists also finds place in modern evolutionary psychology. If functionalists were allowed more time, they would have reached the path being treaded by modern psychology. But their further progress was halted by behaviourist view.

Gestalt psychology : Emerged in Germany in early 1900s as a reaction to the structuralism of Wundt. Focussed on organisation of perceptual experiences and stressed that perceptual experiences are more than sum of the components of the perception. Experience is holistic; it is a Gestalt. Ex : Movie is more than series of fast displayed pictures on retina.

Behaviourists : In a provocative article in 1913 , a young psychologist **John B. Watson**, influenced by **Ivan Pavlov's** research on classical conditioning, passionately argued that " only observable, overt activities that can be studied scientifically should be studied by Psychology." and psychos like **B.F. Skinner** supported it totally. By 1930s , it was behaviourism that had taken over the field of psychology.

In later decades came **Freud** and his **psychoanalytic** methods with concepts such as unconscious, **Humanistic** Psychologists stressing on human free will and later the **cognitive revolution** (seen as an combination of aspects of structuralism and gestalt) which has influenced modern psychology heavily.

Constructivism: Modern cognitive psychology views human beings as actively constructing (ever evolving) their minds through their exploration into the physical and the social world. e.g. Piaget's view of development of a child's mind.

Psychology and scientific methods

4 most essential components of scientific methods in psych. are (AOSOm)

- Accuracy : gather info. in an error-free manner afap
- Objectivity : gather info free from bias , non-subjective manner afap
- Skepticism :accepting findings as accurate only after multiple verifications, by many scientists
- Open-Mindedness: willing to change even strongly held views in face of counter-evidence.

Theories : frameworks in scientific method that help explain various events and processes.

Hypotheses : testable predictions derived from theories

In **Hypothetico-Deductive Model** in science , If hypotheses (predictions) based on a particular theory are negatively tested, confidence in the theory is reduced and ultimately the theory is rejected and vice-versa.

Popular Notions vs. Discipline of Psychology

Q.) Why use scientific methods in psychology ? Why not rely on long lasting folk wisdom of centuries or common sense derived from everyday life experiences. Give examples to substantiate your answer.

Ans) Common sense or folk wisdoms are faulty guides of human behaviour. They can often be contradictory. For ex:

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder" vs " Out of sight, out of mind"
"Birds of a feather flock together" vs "Opposites attract".

People have ready explanations and theories derived from their own common sense which is based on hindsight whereas Psychology bases itself on systematic study.

Our common sensical thinking is subjected to various forms of errors which can lead us to wrong conclusions. For ex : **confirmation bias , availability heuristics , observational selection bias, hindsight bias** etc.

Scientific methods on the other hand are based on ample amount of rational and objective evidence and multiple validation by professionals.

In many studies, Psychology has proven common notions about human behaviour as wrong. E.g. **Dweck (1975)** conducted experiments on children and found out that ones who have faced more challenges in past are expected to give up later than the ones who have had it easy all their lives. This goes against the common belief as we think that people who have had success in all their ventures are more confident and can tackle tough situations easily. Dweck's study completely contradicts it.

Psychology : Natural Science or Social Science ?

Natural Science

- Till date, most of the research in psychology follows hypothetico-deductive approach, which is characteristic of natural sciences.
- Apart from this, psychologists have also been considerably influenced by the **evolutionary approach** which is dominant in biological sciences (a natural science). This approach has also been used to explain diverse kinds of psychological phenomenon e.g. attachment, aggression etc.
- Uses scientific method for all research work

Psychology as Social Science

Psychology as a social science discipline focuses on humans as social beings and studies human behaviour in different complex socio-cultural and physical settings.

Psychology and other disciplines

Psych. gives and takes from many fields including Philosophy, Anthropology, Sociology, Biology, Economics, Political Science, Law/criminology, Medicine, Architecture and Engineering, Music and Fine Arts.

Application of Psychology to societal problems

Corruption : Cognitive dissonance - father hero of daughter

Social Prejudices and discrimination : Intergroup contact hypothesis -Allport

Adolescence : Parenting, C.C - O.C.

McClelland's study on Achievement Motivation vis-a-vis Economic Development and Poverty is a great application of Psychology to the socio-economic problem of Poverty

Psychology In India

Ancient times : Rich Indian Philosophy's focus on mental processes and behaviours.

1915 : Calcutta Univ establishes first psychology lab

1916 : Calcutta Univ introduces Dept. of Psychology

Early centres of teaching other than Calcutta Univ. were Mysore and Patna.

Indian Psychologists :

N.N. Sengupta : trained on methods of experimental Psychology in U.S.A - in Wundt's methods.

G. Bose : Trained in Freudian psychoanalysis. Established the Indian Psychoanalysis Association-1922.

Durganand Sinha : wrote - "**Psychology in a 3rd world country**". A/c to him – 4 phases of Indian Psychology :

- Phase I : Till independence : Completely influenced by western techniques.
- Phase II: Till 1960s : Phase of expansion into different branches of Psychology; Desire to have an Indian identity using western ideas to Indian conditions.
- Phase III: Post 1960s : More focus on problem oriented research; excessive dependence on western studies was reduced.
- Phase IV: Late 1970s till now : rejection of western framework and attempts to develop approaches which were culturally and socially relevant.

Formal courses and education

- Universitites of Allahabad , Utkal Univ. are UGC funded centers for excellence in Psychology
 - As of now around 70 univ offering courses in Psychology
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