
UNIT 3 BEHAVIOURAL ASSESSMENT

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3.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit we will be dealing with many methods which are behavioural in nature. This would include the case history method, followed by the interview method and other methods. As one deals with the case history method, we would also be dealing with the meaning and purpose of case history method. There are also many types of case histories which will be presented in this unit. While dealing with this method, the strengths and weaknesses of the method will also be put forward. The next method in behavioural assessment will be the interview method. Defining this method, the unit will be putting for the meaning and purpose of this method and its use in different settings. Also the advantages and disadvantages of this interview method will also be discussed. Other measures such as the experience sampling and biological measures will also be discussed.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Define and describe behavioural assessment;
- Elucidate the categories of behavioural assessment;

- Explain what is functional behavioural assessment;
- Explain some of the advantages and disadvantages of the case history method;
- Elucidate the types of case history method;
- Define and describe interview as a method of assessment;
- Explain the meaning and purpose of the interview method;
- Elucidate the types of interviews; and
- Analyse other methods of assessment in the behavioural category.

3.2 DEFINITION OF BEHAVIOURAL ASSESSMENT

Behavioral assessment refers to assessing and measuring various constituents of a behaviour that are indicative of why a certain behaviour occurs and what causes that behaviour. These would include overt behaviours, feelings, and cognitions and their controlling variables that could be both from within the individual and outside of the individual. Behavioural assessment focuses on what a person does rather than on what a person has or is. It is also said that behavioural assessment is more an exploratory activity which tries to find out the range of procedures used to understand children, adults, groups etc. This definition emphasises a hypothesis-testing problem-solving model of assessment, the goal of which is to identify appropriate intervention strategies in order to remediate specified behaviour problems.

The history of behavioural assessment cannot be separated from behaviourism as a paradigm of scientific psychology and its clinical application. Thus, behavioural assessment began when complex human behaviours were first considered as a subject for scientific study (e.g., Staats 1963, Bandura 1969). Since the 1960s, four main phases have been identified.

As for the nature of behavioural assessment, it may be stated that its main goal has been behavioural change. Therefore, all conceptual and methodological features emerge from the attempt to define and measure a particular behavioural problem and its causal or controlling conditions and design the best treatment. The following five traits could be considered the essence of behavioural assessment: functional analysis, triple response modes and multi-causality, idiographism, multimethodism, and the experimental method.

3.2.1 The Theoretical Model Underlying the Application of Behavioural Assessment Procedures

The theoretical underpinnings of the above concept of behavioural assessment stem from the interaction between the person's previous learning and the external and organismic environments within which the person functions.

The setting in which the behaviour occurs is of primary importance. The biological makeup and physiological functioning help the individuals to adapt and respond to the environment. Evaluating behaviour requires assessment of the person, the setting, and the interaction between the two. Setting in this context refers to the environmental circumstances that might be influencing the occurrence and nonoccurrence of the behaviour. Environmental circumstances in turn refer to those environmental events preceding the behaviour, both immediately and distally, and those following the behaviour.

3.2.2 Common Characteristics and Assumptions of Behavioural Assessment Methods

While there is a wide variety of techniques available for carrying out behavioural assessment, they have certain features in common.

1) **They all focus on behaviour**

Both overt and covert behaviours are measured or evaluated as they occur in specific situations. Behaviours are observed at a specific time and in a limited location. The variables and concepts with descriptions of behaviour are taken up objectively, as assessment requires objective information, which is more useful than inferences or subjective interpretations.

2) **All behavioural assessment methods believe in Quantification**

Behavior is quantified so as to allow for reliable comparisons across time and persons and to allow for communication between persons. This leads to greater objectivity of information.

3) **All the behavioural assessment methods use trained, impartial observers**

Observers are trained in the use of the various measurement techniques of behavioural assessment, recording of the same and collecting information in an objective manner. Observers are expected to achieve a specified standard of consistency in their collecting data, recording the information and interpreting the data.

4) **All of them use empirically validated measures.**

It is important to have consistency in the measurement across situations. The measures should be empirically validated.

5) **All of them recognize errors and try to counteract the errors or minimise errors to the extent possible using statistical methods.**

All assessment involves differing degrees of error causing unreliability of the results. Hence it is important to minimize the errors and this is generally carried out through statistical techniques..

6) **All of these believe that the behaviour concerned occurs due to stimuli from the environment.**

Assessment is directed toward discovering the situational influences on behaviour. The emphasis is on public events and direct observation of behaviour in the natural environment, with behaviour being recorded at the time of its occurrence whenever possible.

7) **All these assessment techniques depend not on one but multiple sources of information.**

In addition to the behavioural assessment, a wide-range of assessment strategies are used, including behavioural interviews, checklists, rating scales, standardised instruments, self-reports, self-monitoring forms, and observations, as no single test or source could give adequate information as to why a behaviour occurs.

8) **All the behavioural assessment techniques ultimately place high emphasis on intervention.**

The primary purpose of assessment is not to categorise or label a person but to obtain information that will assist in developing effective intervention

strategies. The emphasis on intervention results in the application of the behavioural assessment model to the particular person , situation etc.

9) **All the behavioural assessment techniques use continuous assessment.**

Assessment is continuous throughout baseline, intervention, and follow up phases. The effectiveness of intervention strategies is continuously evaluated.

10) **Each of these behavioural assessment techniques emphasises on empirically based decision making process.**

Decisions about specific assessment strategies and interventions are based on empirical data available on the individual concerned from the person's self and the environment in which the person lives.

11) **Most of these behavioural assessment techniques focus on individual person rather than groups.**

Assessment focuses on the individual person rather than comparisons to a norm group. There is a recognition of individual differences in behaviour and its determinants, leading to idiosyncratic assessment and intervention.

12) **High emphasis is placed on individual differences.**

Individual differences among persons are not absolute. Differences must be seen in relative terms, with consideration given to situational and cultural differences. It must be kept in mind that a certain behaviour considered normal in one setting may be considered abnormal in another setting.

13) **All behavioural assessment techniques not only look for causes contributing to the problem but also try to solve the problem concerned, once the cause is known.**

The purpose of behavioural assessment is problem solving, and hence identification of causes is extremely important so as to devise intervention strategies to overcome the problem.

14) **All the behavioural assessment techniques focus on developing adaptive behaviour in the individual.**

The focus of behavioural assessment is on developing adaptive, positive, or desirable behaviour rather than on control and reduction of undesirable behaviours. Hence behavioural interventions should be designed and implemented with the benefit of the particular person concerned in mind.

3.2.3 Advantages and Limitations of Behavioral Assessment

Advantages

- Behavioral assessment provides objective data for deciding specific instructional content and strategies for intervention.
- Behavioural assessment leads directly to the formulation of intervention strategies.
- Behavioural assessment can be undertaken in the setting in which the concerned behaviour occurs or in simulated conditions resembling the natural setting.
- Behavioral assessment is tailored to the unique characteristics of the referred person and the targeted environment.

- The continuity of behavioural assessment facilitates determining the progress and evaluation of outcomes.
- Behavioural assessment has such variety of techniques that these help in multifaceted assessment.
- Most behavioural assessment techniques can be implemented by anyone with sufficient training and do not require advanced degrees.

Limitations of behavioural assessment

- Much of behavioural assessment methodology is not standardised.
- Differing levels of specification of the concerned behaviours may result in inconsistent data.
- Narrow definitions of behaviour may result in less consistency in behavioural observation.
- Behavioral assessment methodology may appear rather easy to apply. However if the psychologist or behaviourist is not trained in the techniques, the assessment will be defective and consequently the intervention will be ineffective.

3.3 FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIOURAL ASSESSMENT

A *Functional Behavioral Assessment (FBA)* is an attempt to look beyond the obvious interpretation of behaviour as “bad” and determine what function it may be serving for the individual. Truly understanding why the person behaves the way he or she does is the first step to developing strategies to stop the behaviour. The process usually involves documenting the individual’s behaviour in different situations, interviewing the family members and obtaining information about the behaviour of the individual, if necessary getting information from the work place regarding the behaviour of the individual and many other related sources. All these are done by a behavioural specialist, based on which the intervention plan is drawn.

Behavioural assessment provides information that typically cannot be obtained from traditional assessment but which is necessary for establishing effective remedial strategies and interventions for problems exhibited by individuals.

3.3.1 Reliability and Validity Issues in Behavioural Assessment

Reliability in behavioural assessment, refers to agreement between observers viewing the same behaviour at the same time (inter rater reliability), or a single observer observing the same behavioural sequence on different occasions. On the other hand validity in behavioural assessment refers to data obtained from one measure (e.g., classroom observation) being predictive of behaviour obtained through other measures (e.g., classroom achievement scores or teacher ratings) in different settings, under different conditions, at different times, or by different observers.

Multifaceted assessment is the rule in behavioural assessment, and each of the assessment procedures utilised should provide equivalent data (**convergent validity**).

Another important consideration with respect to validity in behavioural assessment is the extent to which information gathered through a multifaceted assessment leads to beneficial treatment outcomes (**treatment validity**).

3.3.2 Uses of Behavioural Assessment

Behavioural assessment is used in many situations and for many purposes, as for example screening, problem identification and analysis and for selection of a good intervention programme which will be effective in resolving the problem concerned.

The assessment continues even after the intervention is completed. Assessment at this point is important to know how far the intervention had been effective in resolving the problem for which the individual was assessed. Some of the issues on which the assessment will be done are given below:

- Has the treatment been administered as planned?
- Have changes in behaviour been monitored and documented?
- If change occurred, has it been demonstrated that it is due to the treatment?
- Have treatment costs been assessed and has it been decided whether the benefits are cost effective?
- Has a decision been made about modifying the treatment or maintaining treatment gains if desired outcomes have been achieved?

3.3.3 Types of Behavioural Assessment

Behavioural assessment can be of different types and some of which are given below:

- 1) Direct assessment
- 2) Analogue assessment
- 3) Indirect assessment
- 4) Idiographic assessment
- 5) Contextual assessment.

Let us discuss each of these in a little detail.

Direct assessment: Here the recording of a behaviour is done as it occurs in the situation.

Analogue assessment: This involves measuring of behaviour under simulated conditions as at times the behaviour may not occur in a natural situation.(e.g. role play)

Indirect Assessment: Here the behaviour is not observed but inferred through retrospective analysis.

Idiographic assessment: This describes the behavioural characteristics of the individual concerned. For example let us say a child with a disorder called Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Here the assessment is disorder focused.

Contextual assessment: The stimuli in the environment that cause the behaviour are in focus in this method of assessment.

The main tool of behavioural assessment is functional analysis.

Behavioural problems were to be defined through the triple response mode—motor, cognitive, physiological—and diverse potential causes—multicausality—were to be accepted.

For example, a person's depression should be defined through cognitive (feelings of loneliness, attention and concentration problems), physiological (sleep disturbance) and motor (low rate of social behaviours and physical activity) behaviours.

This problem can be explained functionally by several conditions of the subject, such as a reinforcement system deficit, inadequate motivational system (personal condition), or a dysfunction in biological conditions—and usually by the interaction of all of these factors.

Since behavioural problems should be described through the triple response mode, that is through motor, cognitive, physiological modes, other methods of assessment than observation of overt behaviour and other informants (than the subject) should be considered. In other words, multi methodism is one of the most important characteristics of behavioural assessment.

Behavioral assessment provides the basis for behavioural change, and behavioural change requires treatment, and treatment demands experimental manipulations and evaluation. This is why, throughout the history of behavioural assessment, the experimental method has been a constant among its basic characteristics.

3.3.4 Process of Behavioural Change: Assessment, Treatment, and Evaluation

One of the most important features of behavioural assessment is its role in behaviour modification or behavioural change. In order to change the behaviour, the first step is to make an assessment as to why a behaviour occurs as it is. Once assessment is made, the cause becomes known and one can formulate the treatment intervention and evaluate as to whether the intervention brought about the desired change.

Behavioural assessment has several challenges to face, it is presently applicable only in the clinical field. It has to be made applicable to other fields also. Behavioural assessment needs measurement instruments and improved measurement devices.

Assessment involves a process of decision-making that is well known in terms of the operations undertaken. Nevertheless, this process is not prescriptive. We might expect that in future standards or guidelines for the assessment process will be developed and supported by scientific associations. Not only disorders should be assessed but we must have assessment instruments that could measure normal behaviour and propose successful living.

3.4 CASE STUDY METHOD

The case study method is one of the important types of research method which is non-experimental or descriptive research. It is not a specific technique, but is one way of organising social data for the purpose of viewing reality. It tends to

preserve the unitary character of a social object being studied. It tends to examine a social unit as a whole. The unit may be a person, a family, a social group, a social institution or even a community (Good & Hatt, 1981; Best & Kahn, 1992).

The detailed study of a single individual's behaviour over an extended period of time is called a *case history or case study*. This approach is used frequently in clinical and medical settings in order to diagnose and treat people who have psychological problems.

As such, case histories usually deal with abnormal or troubled people whose lives are studied during psychotherapy or diagnosis (Runyan, 1982). The clinician seeks to achieve an understanding of the person's life experiences and behaviour patterns through a variety of procedures, including the person's own recollections, interviews with others who know the person, autobiographical and biographical documents, and any available information from psychological tests.

The clinician, usually searches clues in the past or present life to determine the causes of the person's difficulties. Case history provides a primary data enabling the clinician to establish effective strategies to treat emotional disorders. Fredrick le Play (1806-1882) had, for the first time, introduced case history method into social sciences research in the studies of family budgets. Herbert Spencer, an English sociologist (1820-1882) was the first to use the case materials in his ethnographic studies. William Healy, a psychiatrist, for the first time adopted the case study method in his work with juvenile delinquents.

Case histories made by clinicians working with patients have played an important role in the development of certain personality theories and clinical thinking in general. Freud's psychodynamic theory is almost entirely based on intensive study of single cases. Freud and his fellow psychoanalysts spent years probing deeply into all sorts of behaviour: early childhood recollection of dreams, fantasies, physical illnesses, love-hate relationships. Along with gaining rich insights into the uniqueness of persons, Freud used case studies to support his theoretical claims. Carl Rogers also relied heavily on case studies of psychotherapy clients in formulating his phenomenological approach to personality.

3.4.1 Purpose of Case Study Method

The purpose of the case study method is to understand the important aspects of the life cycle of a unit. Case study analyses deeply and interprets the interactions between the different factors that influence the change or growth of unit. Thus, it is a basically a longitudinal approach which studies the units over a period of time. A review of literature in this field suggests that case studies are not confined to the study of individuals and their important behavioural characteristics, rather, case studies have been made of all types of communities and of all types of individuals. Whatever the type of individual or community is, the element of typicalness, rather than uniqueness, is the focus of attention in case study.

Though case study is a detailed description and analysis of a particular individual's personality, it is also an immensely important research strategy. A single case-study suggests a deep insight about human behaviour, but usually one case does not provide a firm basis for deriving general principles of behaviour. However, if a number of case studies are accessible for scrutiny, researchers may be able to identify threads of consistency among them and draw some general conclusions.

The case study method may also be used to study the lives of normal individuals. A group led by Henry Murray (Murray et al., 1938) at the Harvard Psychological Clinic provides a rare but compelling model for the intensive study of individual lives over a substantial period of time. The Harvard “personologists” focused on in depth assessments of a small group of college males. The objective was to learn about the basic needs, conflicts, values, attitudes, and patterns of social interaction evident among these young men. The assessment techniques included several self-report personality questionnaires and projective tests administered at different times. In addition to this, assessment of these students involved gathering extensive biographical data and autobiographical sketches, putting them into small-scale experiments, and conducting stress interviews where they were focused to answer embarrassing questions or were challenged to defend some of their deeply held values. Finally, the students were studied in small group settings so that the observers could ascertain their public styles of interpersonal interaction.

The methods used by Murray and his colleagues covered many topics and facets of each student’s life and produced a rich narrative account of each student as a whole in his natural setting. To better assess each student’s thoughts, feelings, and actions, Murray assembled a group of experienced psychologists who shared their insights of each student at a staff conference or “diagnostic council”. In this council, different researchers from different background who had studied the same student would offer their respective clinical impressions about the student. Debate followed and eventually a conclusion about how best to characterise the student’s personality was reached by majority vote.

The eclectic approach adopted by Harvard personologists to the study of personality influenced an entire generation of researchers by directing their attention to the whole person, to the importance of environment, and to the need for comprehensive assessment. Robert White’s *Lives in Progress* (1975), a longitudinal study of three relatively normal individuals, illustrates the importance of the case history as a strategy well-suited for conducting personality research.

3.4.2 Types of Case Study Method

Based upon the number of individuals, the case study may be of two types – the *individual case study*, and the *community case study*. In individual case study the social unit consists of one individual or person. Since there is only one individual involved, it emphasises analysis in depth. Such an individual case study is significant in developing some hypothesis to be tested but is not helpful in making broad generalisations. The community case study is one in which the social unit is not a person, rather, a family or social group. Such case study is a thorough observation and analysis of a group of people who are living together in a particular geographical territory. The community case study tries to deal with different elements of the community life such as location, prevailing economic activity, climate and natural resources, historical development, social structure, life values, health education, and the like.

On the basis of the purpose a case study may be subdivided into two categories- *deviant case analysis* and *isolated clinical case analysis*. In the former, the researcher starts with the difference already found between two people or groups of persons and his task is to read backward to deduce the condition that might have produced the difference (Warwick & Osherson, 1973).

3.5 INTERVIEW METHOD

3.5.1 Meaning and Purpose of Interview Method

The interview is one of the oldest and most widely used methods of collecting information about persons. In the interview, the personologist obtains information from the person being evaluated by asking relevant questions and listening to answers. The interviewer and respondent engage in a face-to-face dialogue for the purpose of achieving a specific goal. In fact, the way in which an interview is conducted depends on the particular objective or goal in question. An employment interview, for instance, seeks to assess the personality characteristics of the job applicant.

A research interview aims to gather information about a person concerning a specific research topic under investigation. A clinical interview has its goal the diagnosis of a patient's problem and the type of therapy technique that may be most appropriate for the given diagnosis. Interviews are also used to measure specific aspects of personality.

Psychoanalysis uses one type of interview to probe supposedly underlying aspects of personality. But in modern research special types of interviews, in which individuals are asked questions assumed to be related to specific traits, are often used instead. For instance, interviews are used to measure the *Type A behaviour pattern*, an important aspect of personality related to personal health. Persons high on this pattern are always in a hurry and they hate being delayed. Thus, questions asked during the interview focus on this tendency; for instance: "What do you do when you are stuck on the highway behind a slow driver?"

There is a variety in the degree to which interviews may be *structured* or *unstructured*. In the former type of interview, questions are carefully worded and skillfully presented in a prescribed order. For instance: "How long have you been married?" "How many children do you have?" "Do you believe that children should be allowed to do whatever they want?" "If you had a teenager would you allow him or her to quit school and take a part time job?" As you can see, the most personal and threatening questions appeared last.

The strategy behind asking general and innocuous questions first is that they should be at least threatening for respondents and pave the way for divulging more intimate more information once they have developed a sense of trust toward the interviewer. (White & Speisman, 1982).

In an unstructured interview, questions are framed in such a way as to allow the person considerable latitude in responding. The interviewer may say, "You feel that your spouse really lets you down," or "That must have been a very stressful experience." The respondent is free to reveal whatever information s/he desires to such questions. In turn, the interviewer may abandon a certain line of questioning if it seems to be generating no useful information and some other area of questioning. Compared to a structured interview, an unstructured interview allows the personologist more flexibility to probe the respondent's thoughts and feelings in the context of give-and-take exchange.

- i) **Experience sampling method:** With the advent of electronic pagers now allows researchers to beep individuals at random or pre-established times during the day in order to obtain descriptions of their behaviour at these times? This *experience sampling method* (Stone, Kessler, & Haythornthwaite, 1991) can often reveal much about stable patterns of individual behaviour; and these constitute an important aspect of personality.
- ii) **Biological measures:** In recent years several *biological measures* of personality have also been developed. Some of these use positron emission tomography (PET) scans to see if individuals show characteristic patterns of activity in their brains- patterns that are related to differences in their overt behaviour. Other measures focus on hormone levels, for instance, the question of whether highly aggressive persons have different levels of certain sex hormones than other persons. Some results suggest that this may indeed may be the case(Harris et al., 1996).

It may be concluded that there are many tools for measuring personality. None are perfect, but together they provide psychologists with many useful techniques for investigating the stable patterns of behaviour that make each of us a unique human being.

3.7 LET US SUM UP

The case study or case history method seeks to provide an in-depth account of an individual's personality. Its primary focus is to diagnose and treat a person's suffering from emotional problems. Also, case histories have played a role in the development of certain personality theories and the study of normal persons over many years.

Several assessment techniques may be used in conducting a case history, including biographical and autobiographical sketches, personality and projective tests, interviews, and information provided by others who know the person reasonably well. Although case histories are valuable source of insights about people, several shortcomings faced in studying one person at a time were noted.

Case histories do not identify factors that might cause the events observed, the results obtained are of limited generalisability, and the data collected may be subject to personal bias and difficult to verify in terms of accuracy.

Principal features of unstructured and structured interviews are that in the former, the interviewer can "dig deeper", and get a deeper understanding of the respondents questions. While in the latter, there is a systematic procedure for collecting information and hence, the reported validities of such interviews is greater than the former type of interviews.

The other measures of personality assessment that the psychologists are currently using are experience sampling and biological measures.

3.8 UNIT END QUESTIONS

Describe the case history method for assessing personality. What are some of the strengths and limitations of case history method?

How does structured interview differ from unstructured interview? Point out the major sources of error in interview.

Briefly describe the current methods being used by psychologists for personality assessment.

What other measures of personality do psychologists currently use?

3.9 GLOSSARY

Case study method : Research strategy whereby a particular person is studied in great detail.

Hypothesis : A single prediction about the relationship between two or more variables that is logically derived from a theory.

Structured interview : An interview that follows a set format, thus allows a person little or no freedom to digress from the information sought by the interviewer. An unstructured interview, by contrast, allows the person maximum freedom to divulge information in a more spontaneous manner.

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