1. Health Psychology: a domain of interference between Medicine and Psychosocial Sciences
Fields of Medical Psychology

Health Psychology

- Psychological mechanisms of staying healthy or falling ill (mechanisms of incorporating stress, coping strategies)

Behavioral Medicine

- Interdisciplinary field which has the main objective to develop and integrate psychosocial, behavioral and biomedical knowledge to promote health, disease prevention and treatment / rehabilitation

Psychosomatics

- Studies the causal relationship between the psychological factors and disease and the psychopathological mechanisms specific for psychosomatic disorders and diseases
Psychosomatic disorders and diseases

Psychological causes (e.g., stress, traumas), plus organic vulnerabilities → psychosomatic disorders / psychosomatic diseases

**Psychosomatic (PS) disorders**

- acute, entirely reversible (with no concomitant lesions in the organs);

- can become permanent (they generally worsen, as time goes by).

When organ lesions occur → **Psychosomatic (PS) diseases**

- are chronic, partially reversible or irreversible;

- have a poorer prognosis than PS disorders.
The orientation of the clinician when dealing with a patient with a behavioral disorder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neuroses</th>
<th>Psychoses</th>
<th>Personality disorders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- reactive disorders;</td>
<td>- the causes are not clear;</td>
<td>- distorted behavior (some aspects are abnormal, however the social functioning can be relatively good)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the individual is aware of the problem, but he/she does not find the solution w/o getting helped;</td>
<td>- the symptoms are more severe (delirium, hallucinations);</td>
<td>- disharmonic way of being;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- the individual’s insertion in the society is maintained;</td>
<td>- the individual is not aware of the problem or denies it;</td>
<td>- low level of awareness;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- psychotherapy is indicated (referral to the psychologist).</td>
<td>- social integration is severely impaired;</td>
<td>- may be perceived as &quot;Interesting&quot; or &quot;special&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- psychotherapy may be an option, but this is atypical;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- pharmacological treatment: reserved for crises.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

E.g., phobias OCD PTSD
E.g., schizophrenia
E.g., paranoid histrionic obsessional schizoid
Methods in Health Psychology

- Observation;
- Clinical interview;
- Experiment;
- Psychological tests;
- Surveys;
- Case studies;
- Meta-analyses;
- Ethnographic / anthropologic analyzes;
- The study of diaries or other biographic documents.
Observation

Planning and implementation

1. preparation
   → goal → objectives;
   → number of observed behavioral features;
   → implementation of observation protocol;
   → establishing rules of observation;
2. implementation → with working hypotheses;
   → no working hypotheses (empirical observation);
3. interpretation → Phase I – speculation;
   → Phase II – the final interpretation.
Observation

• **Advantages:**
  - minimal costs;
  - encourages subject’s spontaneity;
  - enables the generation of some valuable hypotheses for future research.

• **Disadvantages:**
  - does not provide control to the observer;
  - subjectivity – observation alone cannot produce statistical significance;
  - retrospective approach – observation cannot be applied to the study of a behavior with irreversible consequences, such as suicide or violent behavior.
Clinical interview

Stages:
1. introduction;
2. relationship building;
3. evaluation;
4. obtaining information:
   - open-ended, close-ended and multiple choice questions;
   - elaboration and clarification;
   - participatory listening;
   - additional tools;
5. establishing credibility and authenticity;
   (5b). use of other study methods;
6. conclusion.
Clinical interview

**Types:** structured / semi-structured.

**Advantages:**
- more objective than observation;
- can be integrated into anamnesis;
- provides important data about the patient’s somatic / psychological status;
- easy to use in order to appreciate the behavior in relation to all temporal coordinates (past, present, future);
- good cost-benefit balance.

**Disadvantages:**
- occasionally, interviewees can predict responses;
- respondents may manipulate the result for their own purposes.
Experiment

= method by which, in psychology, a behavior may be caused, controlled or manipulated, allowing clear associations to be established between the studied variables.

Types– natural / laboratory

The characteristic of the experimental situation manipulated or varied by the researcher is known as the *independent variable*. The reaction of the subjects, in this case the behavior that the researcher tries to predict, is the *dependent variable*.

Every experiment has at least one independent and one dependent variable.
Survey

- explores the stable, often ritualized behaviors, derived from feelings or strong beliefs.

**Benefits:**
- easily formed study group;
- relatively low costs;
- useful in assessing risk behaviors;

**Disadvantages:**
- results expressed only statistically;
- does not allow fine quality assessments;
- representativity of results.
Psychological tests

= standardized tests that measure or describe a certain type of behavior.

**Parameters:**

- *reliability* = the degree in which the individual differences that appear in the scores of the test are caused by real differences concerning the measured characteristics, or are random

- *validity* = the degree to which a test really measures what it is meant to;

- *sensitivity* = the finesse of the possible differences obtained by using the test.
Personality tests

Inventories, questionnaires
- measure beliefs, feelings or behaviors;
- typically the format is pencil-and-paper and relies on specific items and questions. They yield numerical scores and profiles easily subjected to mathematical or statistical analysis.
- examples of answers: yes / no; true / false; check-the-best answer questions
  - e.g.,
    - 16 PF Cattell (16 personality factors);
    - CPI (California Psychological Inventory);
    - MMPI-2 (Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory).

Projective tests
- examinees are shown a standard set of ambiguous stimuli and asked to respond in an unrestricted manner;
- are based on spontaneous, creative interpretations;
- are designed to tap unconscious feelings or motives
  - e.g.,
    - Rorschach Inkblot Test;
    - Thematic Apperception Test;
    - Draw a Person (DAP) Test;
    - Tree Test;
    - Family Drawing Test;
## Comparison between personality tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Questionnaires</th>
<th>Projective tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General impression</td>
<td>objective</td>
<td>subjective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task</td>
<td>answer to questions</td>
<td>free expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time for solving</td>
<td>long</td>
<td>short</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time for interpretation</td>
<td>short</td>
<td>long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>standardized</td>
<td>complex, needs specialized personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scales to detect deception</td>
<td>yes (some of them)</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistical comparison</td>
<td>yes:</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- different individuals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- same individual in different</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>moments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results are expressed</td>
<td>quantitatively</td>
<td>qualitatively</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Other study methods

Case studies
- qualitative description of behavior or of a psychological phenomenon that can not be analyzed through quantitative methods, because of its complexity and variety.

Meta-analyses
- the statistical analysis of a number of previously completed studies.

Ethnographic studies
- study beliefs, mentalities and specific ways to understand and explain reality.

The study of diaries and other biographic documents
- used successfully in longitudinal studies.