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## **UNIT 4 ASSESSMENT OF RISK, DANGEROUSNESS, RECIDIVISM, CRIMINAL PROFILE**

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### **4.0 INTRODUCTION**

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In this unit we will be learning about psychological Assessment, the difference between testing and assessment, and defining both testing and assessment. We then deal with tools of assessment like various tests that would be used by forensic psychologists. The next area will be to discuss about assessment in different settings, such as the educational settings, geriatric, counselling, clinical, business, governmental and related settings. There will be detailed discussion on assessment in forensic psychology and how the evaluation is done in forensic psychology. An account of ethical issues related to forensic psychology will be put forth along with functions and roles of forensic psychologists. In this unit we will be dealing with risk assessment on individual cases regarding the dangerousness etc., and the laws related to the same.

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### **4.1 OBJECTIVES**

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After completing this unit, you will be able to:

- Define assessment;

- Distinguish between testing and Assessment;
- Elucidate tools of Assessment;
- Describe assessment in different settings;
- Explain assessment in forensic psychology;
- Analyse Forensic psychology evaluation;
- Elucidate the ethical issues in forensic psychology;
- Explain the Functions and roles of forensic psychologists; and
- Analyse Risk assessment on an individual case under study and Law.

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## 4.2 ASSESSMENT

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All fields of human endeavour use measurement in some form, and each field has its own set of measuring tools and measuring units. If you're recently engaged or thinking about becoming engaged, you may have learned about a unit of measure called the carat. If you've been shopping for a computer, you may have learned something about a unit of measurement called a byte. And if you're in need of an air conditioner, you'll no doubt want to know about the Btu (British thermal unit). Other units of measure you may or may not be familiar with include a mile, a nautical mile, miles per hour, and cycles per second. Professionals in the fields that employ these units know the potential uses, benefits, and limitations of such units in the measurements they make. So, too, users and potential users of psychological measurements need a working familiarity with the commonly used units of measure, the theoretical underpinnings of the enterprise, and the tools employed.

### 4.2.1 Testing and Assessment

The roots of contemporary psychological testing and assessment can be found in early twentieth-century France. In 1905, Alfred Binet and a colleague published a test designed to help place Paris schoolchildren in appropriate classes. Binet's test would have consequences well beyond the Paris school district. Within a decade, an English language version of Binet's test was prepared for use in schools in the United States. When the United States declared war on Germany and entered World War I in 1917, the military needed a way to screen large numbers of recruits quickly for intellectual as well as emotional problems. Psychological testing provided this methodology. During World War II, the military would depend even more on psychological tests to screen recruits for service. Following the war, more and more tests purporting to measure an ever widening array of psychological variables were developed and used.

### 4.2.2 Definition of Psychological Testing and Assessment

The world's receptivity to Binet's test in the early twentieth century spawned not only more tests but more test developers, more test publishers, more test users, and the emergence of what, logically enough, has become known as a testing industry. *Testing* was the term used to refer to everything from the administration of a test (as in "Testing in progress") to the interpretation of a test score ("The testing indicated that . . ."). During World War I, the process of testing aptly described the group screening of thousands of military recruits. We suspect it was at that time that *testing* gained a powerful foothold in the vocabulary of

professionals and lay people. The use of *testing* to denote everything from test administration to test interpretation can be found not only in post war textbooks (such as Chapman, 1921; Hull, 1922; Spearman, 1927) but in varied test-related writings for decades thereafter. However, by World War II a semantic distinction between *testing* and a more inclusive term, *assessment*, began to emerge.

Military, clinical, educational, and business settings are but a few of the many contexts that entail behavioural observation and active integration by assessors of test scores and other data. In such situations, the term *assessment* may be preferable to *testing*. The term *assessment* acknowledges that tests are only one type of tool used by professional assessors, and that a test's value is intimately linked to the knowledge, skill, and experience of the assessor. As Sundberg and Tyler (1962) observed, "*Tests are tools. In the hands of a fool or an unscrupulous person they become pseudoscientific perversion*" (p. 131, emphasis in the original). In most evaluation contexts, it is the process of assessment that breathes life and meaning into test scores.

*Psychological Assessment*, a measurement textbook by Maloney and Ward (1976), echoed the uneasiness of psychologists with the anachronistic use of "psychological testing" to describe their many varied assessment related activities. By articulating several differences between testing and assessment, Maloney and Ward clarified the rich texture of the thoughtful, problem-solving processes of psychological assessment, that is "unclumping" it from the more technician-like tasks of psychological testing.

The term *assessment* is preferable to *testing* for various evaluation situations. Consider, for example, an evaluation of a student's intelligence designed to answer referral questions about the student's ability to function in a regular classroom. Such an evaluation might explore not only the student's intellectual strengths and weaknesses but also social skills and judgment. By contrast, testing "could take place without being directed at answering a specific referral question and even without the tester actually seeing the client or testee" (Maloney & Ward, 1976, p. 9).

The semantic distinction between *psychological testing* and *psychological assessment* is blurred in everyday conversation, even in many published textbooks that make little distinction between the two terms. Yet the distinction is important. Society at large is best served by clear definition of and differentiation between these two terms as well as related terms such as *psychological test user* and *psychological assessor*.

We define psychological assessment as the gathering and integration of psychology related data for the purpose of making a psychological evaluation, accomplished through the use of tools such as tests, interviews, case studies, behavioural observation, and specially designed apparatuses and measurement procedures. We define psychological testing as the process of measuring psychology related variables by means of devices or procedures designed to obtain a sample of behaviour.

### 4.2.3 Tools of Assessment

There are many tools of assessment such as the test, the interview, the portfolio, the case study, behavioural observation, role play, computer as tools. Let us deal with these in some detail one by one.

### *The test*

A test may be defined simply as a measuring device or procedure. When the word *test* is prefaced with a modifier, it refers to a device or procedure designed to measure a variable related to that modifier. Consider, for example, the term *medical test*, which refers to a device or procedure designed to measure some variable related to the practice of medicine (including a wide range of tools and procedures such as X-rays, blood tests, and testing of reflexes).

In a like manner, the term psychological test refers to a device or procedure designed to measure variables related to psychology (for example, intelligence, personality, aptitude, interests, attitudes, and values). And whereas a medical test might involve the analysis of a sample of blood, tissue, or the like, a psychological test almost always involves the analysis of a sample of behaviour.

The behaviour sample could range from responses to a pencil-and-paper questionnaire to oral responses to questions to performance of some task. The behaviour sample could be elicited by the stimulus of the test itself, or it could be naturally occurring behaviour (under observation).

Psychological tests and other tools of assessment may differ on a number of variables such as content, format, administration procedures, scoring and interpretation procedures, and technical quality.

### *The interview*

Another widely used tool in psychological assessment is the interview, a word that may conjure images of face-to-face talk. But the interview as a tool of psychological assessment involves more than talk. If the interview is conducted face to face, the interviewer probably notes nonverbal as well as verbal behaviour, such as the interviewee's dress, manner, and eye contact. An interview may be conducted over the telephone, in which case the interviewer might make inferences about what is said as a function of changes in the interviewee's voice quality. Interviews need not involve speech, as when they are conducted in sign language. Interviews may be conducted by means of electronic media, such as e-mail. In its broadest sense, then, we can define an interview as a method of gathering information through direct communication involving reciprocal exchange.

Interviews differ with regard to many variables, such as their purpose, their length, or other restrictions under which they are conducted, and the willingness of the interviewee to provide information candidly. Interviews may be used by psychologists and others in clinical, counseling, forensic, or neuropsychological settings to help make diagnostic or treatment decisions.

School psychologists and others in educational settings may use interviews to help make decisions about the appropriateness of various educational interventions or class placements. An interview may be used to help human resources professionals make more informed recommendations about the hiring, firing, and advancement of personnel. In some instances, the process takes the form of a panel interview, wherein more than one interviewer participates in the assessment of personnel.

### *The portfolio*

In recent years, the popularity of portfolio (work sample) assessment in many fields, including education, has been rising. Some have argued, for example, that the best evaluation of a student's writing skills can be accomplished not by the administration of a test but by asking the student to compile a selection of writing samples. From the perspective of education administrators, portfolio assessment also has distinct advantages in assessing the effectiveness of teachers. By examining teachers' portfolios and seeing how teachers approach their coverage of various topics, educational evaluators have another tool to help anchor judgments to work samples.

### *Case history data*

In a general sense, case history data refers to records, transcripts, and other accounts in written, pictorial, or other form, in any media, that preserve archival information, official and informal accounts, and other data and items relevant to an assessee. Case history data may include files or excerpts from files maintained at institutions and agencies such as schools, hospitals, employers, religious institutions, and criminal justice agencies. Other examples of case history data are letters and written correspondence; photos and family albums; newspaper and magazine clippings; and home videos, movies, and audiotapes. Work samples, artwork, doodlings, and accounts and pictures pertaining to interests and hobbies are yet other examples.

### *Behavioural observation*

If you want to know how someone behaves in a particular situation, observe his or her behaviour in that situation. Such "down-home" wisdom underlies at least one approach to evaluation. Behavioural observation as it is employed by assessment professionals may be defined as monitoring the actions of others or oneself by visual or electronic means while recording quantitative and/or qualitative information regarding the actions.

Behavioural observation may be used in a variety of settings for a variety of assessment objectives. It may be used, for example, as a diagnostic aid in a clinical setting or as a means of data collection in basic research. Observations may be made in laboratory or otherwise structured settings. An example of this is a researcher's observation of a child who is asked to perform some task as part of an experiment. Observation may also occur in the natural setting in which the behaviour would typically be elicited or expected to occur. This variety of behavioural observation is referred to as naturalistic observation.

### *Role-play tests*

If you have ever enjoyed the television program *Whose Line Is It Anyway*, you may appreciate just how entertaining improvisation can be. Beyond entertainment, however, improvisational acting has a place in the context of psychological assessment. In this context, role play may be defined as acting an improvised or partially improvised part in a simulated situation. A role-play test is a tool of assessment wherein assesseees are directed to act as if they were in a particular situation. Assesseees may then be evaluated with regard to their expressed thoughts, behaviours, abilities, and other variables.

### *Computers as tools*

Professionals who specialise in psychological and educational assessment have long recognised the value of computers in administering, scoring, and interpreting tests. As early as 1930, electromechanical scoring was available for at least one psychological test, the Strong Vocational Interest Blank (SVIB) (Campbell, 1971). By 1946, thanks to the efforts of a Minneapolis engineer named Elmer Hanks, profiling of the SVIB could be done by machine. And by the late 1950s, computers were used not only for scoring and profiling but also for test interpretation (Rome et al., 1965). With the advent of the personal computer in the 1970s, office-based test administration, scoring, and interpretation became reality. As technology has flourished, the use of computers has burgeoned.

### *Other tools*

Varied instruments can be applied as tools of assessment. Psychologists and others who devise tools to assess people with disabilities and members of other special populations have been most innovative. For example, Wilson et al. (1982) developed a mechanism for test response involving a dental plate activated by the tongue. Useful to test takers who lack the capacity for speech or control of their limbs, the device permits five kinds of response.

#### **Self Assessment Questions 1**

1) Define Testing and Assessment?

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2) Write about the historical prospects of Testing and Assessment?

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3) State the difference between Testing and Testing?

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- 4) What are the tools of Assessment? Write a brief description on each one of the assessment tool?

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- 5) What are the variables that differ from one psychological test to the other?

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- 6) List the various verbal as well as non-verbal cues that can observed during an interview.

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- 7) Name the different settings under which an interview may be useful and in what way?

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- 8) Name in various forms in which one can avail of the case history data.

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9) List the situations under which behavioural observations can be useful?

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10) By 1946, thanks to the efforts of a Minneapolis engineer named  
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## 4.3 ASSESSMENT IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS

### 4.3.1 Educational Settings

You know from your own experience that a diagnosis may be defined as a description or conclusion reached on the basis of evidence and opinion. Typically, this conclusion is reached through a process of distinguishing the nature of something and ruling out alternative conclusions. As its name implies, a diagnostic test is a tool of assessment used to help narrow down and identify areas of deficit to be targeted for intervention. Diagnostic tests of reading, mathematics, and other academic subjects may be administered in educational settings by teachers, school counselors, and school psychologists to assess the need for educational interventions as well as eligibility for special education programs.

Schoolchildren receive grades on their report cards that are not based on any formal assessment. For example, the grade next to “Works and plays well with others” is probably based more on the teacher’s *informal evaluation* in the classroom than on scores on any published measure of social interaction. We may define informal evaluation as a typically non systematic assessment that leads to the formation of an opinion or attitude.

Informal evaluation is, of course, not limited to educational settings; it is very much a part of everyday life.

### 4.3.2 Geriatric Settings

Old individuals may live at home, in special housing designed for independent living, in housing designed for assisted living, or in long-term care facilities such as hospitals and hospices. Wherever older individuals reside, they may at some point require psychological assessment to evaluate cognitive, psychological, adaptive, or other functioning.

### 4.3.3 Counselling Settings

Assessment in a counselling context may occur in environments as diverse as schools, prisons, and government – or privately-owned institutions. Regardless of the particular tools used, the ultimate objective of many such assessments is the improvement of the assessee in terms of adjustment, productivity, quality of life, or some related variable. Measures of social and academic skills and measures of personality, interest, attitudes, and values are among the many types of tests that a counsellor might administer to a client. Because the test-taker is in many

instances the primary recipient and user of the data from a test administered by a counsellor, it is imperative that the counsellor understand the strengths and limitations of the findings and be able to competently convey the test results to the client.

#### 4.3.4 Clinical Psychology

Tests and many other tools of assessment are widely used in clinical settings such as public, private, and military hospitals, inpatient and outpatient clinics, private-practice consulting rooms, schools, and other institutions. These tools are used to help screen for or diagnose behaviour problems. What types of situations might prompt the employment of such tools? A few examples are given below:

- A private psychotherapy client wishes to be evaluated to see if the assessment can provide any non-obvious clues regarding his maladjustment.
- A school psychologist clinically evaluates a child experiencing learning difficulties to determine what factors are primarily responsible for it.
- A psychotherapy researcher uses assessment procedures to determine if a particular method of psychotherapy is effective in treating a particular problem.
- A psychologist consultant retained by an insurance company is called on to give an opinion as to the reality of a client's psychological problem. Is the client really experiencing such problems, or just malingering?
- A court-appointed psychologist is asked to give an opinion as to a defendant's competency to stand trial.
- A prison psychologist is called on to give an opinion regarding the extent of a convicted violent prisoner's rehabilitation.

The hallmark of testing in clinical settings is that the test or measurement technique is employed with only one individual at a time. Group testing is used primarily for screening; that is, identifying those individuals who require further diagnostic evaluation.

#### 4.3.5 Business and Military Settings

In business, as in the military, tests are used in many ways, perhaps most notably in decision making about the careers of personnel. A wide range of achievement, aptitude, interest, motivational, and other tests may be employed in the decision to hire, as well as in related decisions regarding promotions, transfer, job satisfaction, and eligibility for further training. For a prospective air traffic controller, successful performance on a test of sustained attention to detail may be one requirement of employment. For promotion to the rank of officer in the military, successful performance on a series of leadership tasks may be essential.

Another application of psychological tests involves the engineering and design of products and environments. Engineering psychologists employ a variety of existing and specially devised tests in research designed to help people at home, in the workplace, and in the military. Products ranging from home computers to office furniture to jet cockpit control panels benefit from the work of such research efforts.

Using tests, interviews, and other tools of assessment, psychologists who specialise in the marketing and sale of products are involved in taking the pulse of consumers— helping to predict the public’s receptivity to a new product, a new brand, or a new advertising or marketing campaign.

### 4.3.6 Governmental and Organisational Credentialing

One of the many applications of measurement is in governmental licensing, certification, or general credentialing of professionals. Before they are legally entitled to practice medicine, physicians must pass an examination. Law school graduates cannot hold themselves out to the public as attorneys until they pass their state’s bar examination. Psychologists, too, must pass an examination entitling them to present themselves to the public with the title “psychologist.” Members of some professions have formed organisations with requirements for membership that go beyond those of licensing or certification requirements.

Psychologists specialising in certain areas may be evaluated for a diploma from the American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP) to recognise excellence in the practice of psychology. Another organisation, the American Board of Assessment Psychology (ABAP), awards its diploma on the basis of an examination to test users, test developers, and others who have distinguished themselves in the field of testing and assessment.

### 4.3.7 Other Settings

Many different kinds of measurement procedures find application in a wide variety of settings. For example, the courts rely on psychological test data and related expert testimony as one source of information to help answer important questions such as “Is this defendant competent to stand trial?” and “Did this defendant know right from wrong at the time the criminal act was committed?”

Tools of assessment can be found in use in research and practice in every specialty area within psychology. For example, consider health psychology, a specialty area that focuses on understanding the role of psychological variables in the onset, course, treatment, and prevention of illness, disease, and disability (Cohen, 1994).

Health psychologists are involved in teaching, research, or direct-service activities designed to promote good health. Individual interviews, surveys, and paper-and-pencil tests are some of the tools that may be employed to help assess a current state of affairs with regard to some disease or condition, gauge treatment progress, and evaluate outcome of intervention.

Of course, psychological testing and assessment is not confined to health psychology. It is very much a part of *all* specialty areas within psychology and education. Further, what constitutes a “test” may take many different forms. There you will find a very small sample of the tens of thousands of measurement methods that have been used in one situation or another. They are not presented here to illustrate the most typical kinds of assessment procedures, but rather to illustrate the diversity of measuring tools that have been created for varied uses. In short, if a need exists to measure a particular variable, a way to measure that variable will be devised.

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## 4.4 ASSESSMENT IN FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

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The forensic assessment has to be in extreme detail and follow certain uniform rules and regulations. Not only the crime scene visited needs to be recorded in detail with the help of experts, there is also a need to review the relevant information and the related files in regard to a particular case. Both secondary and primary data have to be collected so as to deliver fair justice to the person concerned. For instance the information from secondary source to be obtained include:

- Crime and police reports.
- History of psychiatric illness and related records of the person concerned.
- Records in regards to serving a term or two in the prison for the crime committed as a juvenile or as an adult.
- If the person had been institutionalised in a mental hospital, records pertaining to the same have been obtained.
- If the individual had undergone any psychiatric treatment, the same should be given in detail.
- Educational history of the individual.
- As for the information from primary sources, a detailed personal interview is to be conducted with the person concerned.

### **Test that are used in Forensic Psychological Assessment:**

- Intelligence test
- Achievement and Aptitude Test.
- The MMPI Test
- The Rorschach Test
- Thematic Apperception Test
- House, Tree, Person Test
- The Kinetic Family Drawing
- Beck's Depression Inventory
- Neuropsychological Test

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## 4.5 FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY EVALUATION

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A "Forensic Psychology Evaluation" involves more than a standard psychological evaluation. The forensic psychologist is trained in psychometry and so is an expert who has extensive experience in administering a wide range of psychological tests that aim to answer certain legal questions. Many of these evaluations are related to criminal Proceedings which include the following:

- Trial Competency
- Waiver of Miranda Rights
- Criminal Responsibility
- Death Penalty Mitigation

- Impact of Mental Illness or Substance Abuse on Behaviour
- Malingering
- Civil Proceedings and Commitment
- Personal Injury
- Mental Disability
- Employment Discrimination
- Professional Malpractice
- Neuropsychological functioning (e.g. Memory problems, dementia).

### Self Assessment Questions 2

- 1) What are the different settings under which assessment is usually conducted and describe each one of them in 2 sentences?

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- 2) What is a diagnostic test?

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- 3) Define informal evaluation.

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- 4) What is the objective of assessment in counselling settings?

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- 5) Name 3 situations wherein clinical assessment is carried out and for what purpose?

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- 6) List the wide range of utilisation of assessment in business and military settings?

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- 7) Name any 5 Test utilised in Forensic setting?

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- 8) List a few legal questions that a forensic psychologist should be able to answer in the court of law?

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## 4.6 ETHICS OF FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY

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There has always been an agreement among the professionals on a need to have a set of ethical guidelines and code of conduct to regulate, educate and inspire the practitioners (Grisso, 2005; Committee on Ethical Guideline for Forensic Psychologists, 1991). Hess (2006) urges the forensic psychologist to assume an obligation to practice the profession in a way that serves the public and not merely the individual profession. Various authorities that regulate the field of forensic psychology have articulate principles, codes, guidelines and standards for the practitioners.

For example the APA has described five principle of practice including

- 1) Beneficence and malfeasance,
- 2) Fidelity and Responsibility,
- 3) Integrity,
- 4) Justice and
- 5) Respect for people rights and dignity.

There are a number of standards for practicing forensic psychologists, covered by most of the regulating bodies including the test suggested by the APA, briefly described below:

- 1) *Responsibility*: This reflects the need for service to be provided in a forthright, responsible manner, reflecting the high standards of the profession.
- 2) *Competence*: This stresses that the services should be provided only if the person has specialised education, knowledge, skills, and / or experience along the necessary cultural competence.
- 3) *Relationship*: This urges the need to focus on the well-being of the client and also stresses the importance of the informed consent by providing information on their rights, anticipated costs, etc.
- 4) *Privacy and Confidentiality*: This reminds that efforts should be made to maintain confidentiality of information that does not bear directly on their legal purpose of services provided.
- 5) *Advertising and Public Statements*: This reminds the profession to avoid false claims and of the need of claims to be modest without guaranteeing any outcome.
- 6) *Methods and Materials*: This recommends accepted clinical and scientific standards for scholarly / empirical investigation, need for active testing of plausible rival hypothesis, minimising reliance upon hearsay, and exercising extreme caution in preparing reports or other documentation, applying such details and quality to the documentation so that the standards is higher than that for a general clinical practice.
- 7) *Research Methodology and Publication*: This cautions the professional of the ethics in using data that can go against those who gave consent for studies, ‘assistants’ interacting with clients in large scale studies and revelation of sensitive information while publishing.
- 8) *Communications*: This recommends every reasonable effort to be made to avoid any misunderstanding, misuse, or misinterpretation of services, evidence, and testimony, however, avoiding any out-of-court statements, considering the seriousness of the legal matters in hand.
- 9) *Education and Training*: This basically stresses the need for quality in terms of level of education and training required to handle delicate and sensitive issues like legal matters.

An analysis of these standards clearly reflects the need for integrity and social responsibility in forensic psychology as essential components of an ethical practice. It is vital for a practitioner to know the principles and ethical guidelines to offer quality services based on high level of proficiency achieved through knowledge, skills, education, training, and experience.

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## 4.7 FUNCTIONS AND ROLES OF A FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGISTS

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### *Criminal profiling of the offenders*

This is done by the forensic psychologist using information of the crime, interviews and psychological instruments and also witness accounts, to infer characteristics about the likely offender. The defence uses this information and the forensic psychological report to formulate their legal arguments in front of the judge.

Forensic psychologist deal in both civil and criminal cases, such as compensation when one person / party has interfered with another's rights. In such cases compensation is the remedy, for which considerable expert psychological evidence is required. In certain cases identifying symptoms of; post traumatic stress disorder from the basis of compensation.

### *Dealing with sexual harassment of cases*

Another area in which the forensic psychologists contribute in the criminal cases such as sexual harassment. The forensic psychologists assess the mental and emotional damage caused to the victim as a result of sexual harassment. For instance, anxiety, depression, withdrawnness, suicidal tendencies, drug and alcohol abuse, and other acting out behaviours are assessed by the forensic psychologist. He has to determine whether any of these conditions exists and to what extent they may be related to the sexual harassment alleges in the lawsuit.

### *Assessment of competency to stand trial*

Forensic psychology contributes to the assessment of the client as to whether he has the competency to stand trial. That is, if the client is fit enough mentally to plead his case, whether possesses cognitive abilities to defend himself, etc. The forensic psychologist after making such assessment provides evidence in the court regarding the competency of the incumbent to stand trial and defend himself as well as medical, psychiatric or psychological status of the client.

### *Assessment of cases that come before the Family Law*

Family law is the area, which is relatively a new area wherein the forensic psychologist provides evidence in the court. This deals with modern family problems and protection of children. The Forensic Psychologist investigates facts relating to physical and sexual abuse of a child, domestic violence, foster care, and child custody. After due assessment and investigation, he provides evidence in the court regarding these aspects and helps the court to decide in the best interest of the family. Using techniques like anatomical doll, interviews, play sessions, drawing and painting, the psychologist is able to understand the trauma caused to the child by the physical and sexual abuse and presents these as evidence in the court. In certain cases where the children need protection and care, they

may also advocate foster for which these cases children who need a substitute family and presents their recommendations to the justice system in order to secure a safe and healthy environment for the children to proper and grow.

*Assessment of victims of domestic violence*

In India and elsewhere most domestic violence that are reported, or come under the purview of the legal system, take the form of spousal abuse and may at times overlap with child abuse too. The Forensic Psychologist through many techniques and assessment tools is able to ascertain the extent of damage or harm caused mentally and physically to the victims and uses these findings as evidence in the court so that justice could be ensured to the victim.

*Assessment in regard to child custody cases*

Forensic Psychologists are also called upon to assist in child custody cases. This often includes custody disputes which may arise when the divorcing parents are not able to agree on residential and parenting arrangements of their children or when one parent uses the issue as a wedge against an unfavourable divorce outcome. Custody disputes often involve determinations about visitations. Sometimes, the Forensic Psychologist evaluates a visitation dispute, rather than an argument over custody.

In certain cases, they may have involved in mediating if couples are motivated to be child-centered in their custody negotiations and both parents are able to trust and work with the mediator. Mediation has been heralded by some as an important alternative to the adversarial system of custody disputes.

**Self Assessment Questions 3**

1) What does Hess urge a forensic psychologist to assume?

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2) As per the APA what are the 5 principles of practice with regards to forensic psychology?

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- 3) What are the standards as per the APA for individuals practicing forensic psychology? Describe each one of them in brief?

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- 4) What are the two essential components of an ethical practice in forensic psychology?

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- 5) State the role of a forensic psychologist in the competency of an individual to stand trial?

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- 6) Mention the examples wherein the application of forensic psychological assessment can be of utmost use.

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## 4.8 RISK ASSESSMENT ON AN INDIVIDUAL, CASE UNDER STUDY AND LAW

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Risk assessment is a dangerous tool in its infancy despite having been part of forensic and criminal psychology. Traditionally, recidivism has been the crucial topic. This is the likelihood that an offender will reoffend after release or some other stage in the future.

Conceptually, there is an obvious distinction made between the statistical risk of the occurrence of an event in the future and the dangerousness of the event. The prediction of dangerousness seems to refer to two distinct professional activities (Hodgins, 1997):

- a) Deciding which patient or clients or offenders will behave violently or aggressively or criminally.
- b) Identifying the particular condition in which a specific individual is likely to behave violently, aggressively or criminally.

There are many different activities by knowing more about the condition encouraging violence, say, in particular individual, we may be in a position to make more accurate predictions of their dangerousness.

There is imply no universal predictor of future behaviours and the factors predicting different types of behaviours are different.

For criminal behaviours and other behaviours, a number of effective but simple predictor variables have been established. These are largely associated with the age of the offender – youthful offender are more likely to reoffend – and criminal history – those with most criminal offences are the most likely to reoffend. Such indicators are readily, systematically measureable and are prime aspects in predicting future behaviour (Clark, 1999). One difficulty is the non-dynamic nature of these predictions. They would give the prisoner the same likelihood of reoffending when his term of imprisonment starts as when it finishes. Thus, if the prisoner has received therapy within the prison context, there will be perhaps should be some adjustment to the prediction (i.e. successful therapy might reduce reoffending) but the data available are not sophisticated enough to allow that to be done.

Care should be taken to distinguish between:

- 1) Those factors that predict dangerousness in an individual, and
- 2) The factors that caused that particular individual to be a danger to others (Hodgins, 1997)
- 3) This distinction between predictors and causes is important.

The predictors of dangerousness are often very simple factors such as age and previous history of crime. The causes of crime are multiple and complexity interrelated. Genetic is one of the causes but it does not mean that we have the technology to identify precisely what genes are involved - thus we have no genetic test. Research may show that a long history of crime is strongly correlated with future violence. We can use history of crime as an indicator of likely future violence. Some predictors may turn out to be causes of violence.

Risk and dangerousness prediction is at the moment rather inexact and we are unlikely ever to have perfect predictors. In particular, at this time we do know how stable risk factors are across different forensic population (types of offenders, location of offenders). This sort of uncertainty led Monahan (1993) to argue that all organisations dealing therapeutically or otherwise with potentially dangerous client population (including all forensic settings) should adopt the following principles:

Experts in assessing client dangerousness should be employed in all.

All therapist should collect data on the risk demonstrated by their client pool as part of an effort to extend knowledge in the field.

Data on risk and dangerousness are potentially of value to the practitioners. Consequently it is incumbent on practitioners to communicate their findings to other practitioner's decision makers working with potentially dangerous client populations.

Some authors stress the positive aspects of risk assessment (e.g. Glover, 1999). If risk had only negative outcomes (such as general public suffering violent assaults) then there would be no reason to take that risk. Just leave the offender behind bars which reduces the risk to the general public to the very minimum. It is because we want the positive benefits of taking the risk that we take that risk. For example, we may feel it more humane to release prisoners into the community whenever possible or we may seek the economic benefit of not having to pay the high financial costs of keeping the offender in prison.

#### **Self Assessment Questions 4**

- 1) What are the two professional activities that can predict dangerousness?

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- 2) What are the predictive variables of criminal as well as other behaviours?

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- 3) State the principles listed by Monahan (1993) towards all organisations dealing therapeutically or otherwise with potentially dangerous client population?

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## 4.9 LET US SUM UP

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The decisions that are made by practitioners about the disposal of offenders may increase the chances of public becoming victims. Risk and dangerousness assessment is a technique developed to limit the levels of risk and danger while at the same time providing less restrictive arrangements for offenders.

This is not a precise science though empirical studies have demonstrated that certain variables predict future behaviours reasonably well. These include historical factors such as background of violent offending. Some psychological measures such as the psychopathy checklist are also effective.

Different types of offences require different predictor variables. So the predictors of sexual reoffending. The predictors of suicide may also be different.

The criteria stipulated that define recidivism may have a big influence on the likelihood of recidivism. Thus, for sex offenders, the likelihood of committing any type of crime may have much higher than committing a sexual crime.

Clinical approaches tend to be varied. These are methods that rely in part on the skills of the psychiatrist or psychologist. Generally, the clinical approach is regarded as ineffective. This seems to be more true of unstructured clinical work. There is evidence that structured guides to risk and dangerousness assessment may be very effective in some circumstances. Generally speaking, one should be little cautious concerning the criticism of the clinical method since there is good reason to think that some clinical variables ought to increase the accuracy of predictions. One should not confuse sloppy and bad practices with the best clinical work can do. It should be stressed that many clinicians do not see things this way

Mistakes are inevitable in predictions. It is harder to predict rare events than common events. The number of false positives and false negatives are important. False negatives are the offenders who are declared safe but actually reoffend. False positives are those who are declared a risk but do not offend. Prediction is easier for common events than uncommon events.

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## 4.10 UNIT END QUESTIONS

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- 1) What is assessment? Distinguish assessment from testing? Give suitable examples.
- 2) What are the various tools of assessment? Describe
- 3) Elucidate forensic psychology assessment in educational and counselling settings.
- 4) What are the important features of forensic psychology assessment in geriatric setting?
- 5) Compare forensic psychology assessment in business and government settings.
- 6) What are the important ethical considerations in forensic psychology assessment?
- 7) Define risk assessment and bring out the typical forensic psychology assessment in this regard.

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## 4.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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Howitt, Dennis (2002). *Correlates of Crime*. Pearson Education, NY

Ronald Jay Cohen and Mark E. Swerdlik (2009). (6<sup>th</sup> edition). *Psychological Testing and Assessment: An Introduction to Tests and Measurement*. McGraw Hill & Co., NY

Veeraraghavan, Vimala (2009). *Handbook of Forensic Psychology*. Select Scientific Publishers, New Delhi.