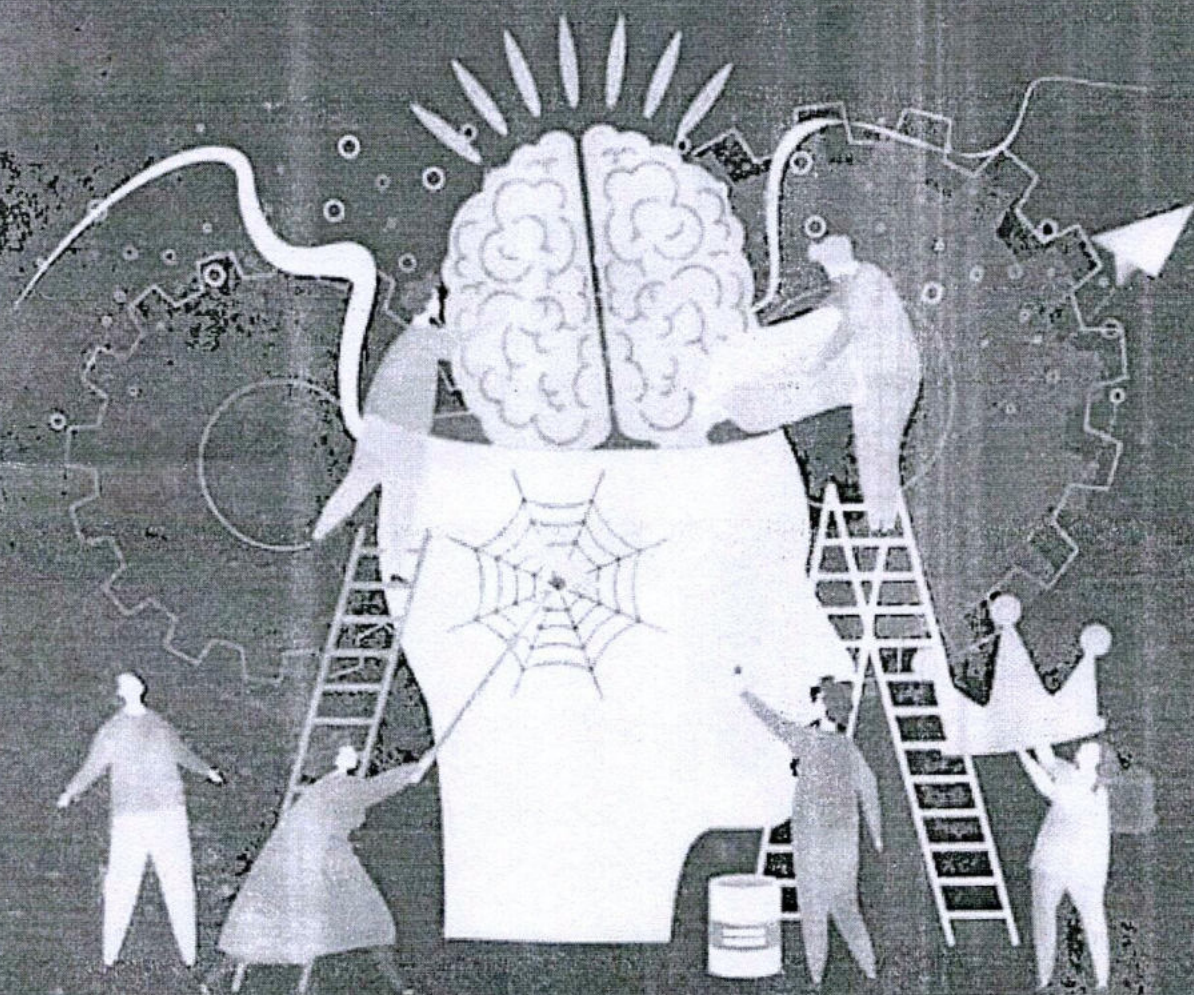


MENTAL HEALTH

Rehabilitation and Intervention



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Chapter Fifteen

Understanding Rehabilitation Psychology

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Abstract

Rehabilitation psychology is a field of psychology which applies the principles of psychology on people with disabilities to improve their overall wellbeing. The manner in which this field of psychology has evolved in India and the various aspects and elements which rehabilitation psychology has integrated till today is discussed. It offers support to people belonging to all age groups from new born to end of life. The ultimate goal of rehabilitation is to ameliorate the negative effects of disability as well as to optimize the functioning levels of patient which contributes to their welfare as well as for their family, community and society. This paper also discusses on the scope of the rehabilitation psychology and is an attempt to give a conceptual understanding of the field.

Key Words Disability, Rehabilitation, Rehabilitation psychology, Wellbeing

Introduction

Every individual has their own set of challenges to face every day, but for a person with disability or chronic illness daily tasks tend to become

burdensome. Similarly, person suffering from ill mental health or undergoing emotional turmoil or substance abuse are indeed in need for support for recovering and to enhance their quality of life. Rehabilitation is an amalgamated program of interventions which aims to empower the individuals with disabilities and chronic health conditions for achieving a "personally fulfilling, socially meaningful, and functionally effective interaction" in their daily endeavors (Peterson & Aguiar, 2004). It is a need for those people suffering from severe psychiatric illness, motor impairment or any form of disability to develop the necessary skill for carrying out their livelihood. The term rehabilitation is taken from Latin which refers to "habitat or dress."

According to the World Health Organization (WHO,1981), "Rehabilitation is referred to as "a process aimed at enabling disabled people to reach and maintain their optimal physical, sensory, intellectual, psychological and social functional levels." Rehabilitation provides necessary tools for people with disabilities to support them to attain independence and self-determination. Hence, the major aim of rehabilitation is to normalize the functioning of people who have suffered any sort of injury of disease or any sort of congenital defects or ageing or genetic predisposition. The World Report on Disability, stated that rehabilitation is "an array of measures which assist people who are experiencing or are prone/ expected to experience disability, for achieving and maintaining an optimal level of functioning in their daily interactions with their environments" (WHO, 2011). Around the globe, around 2.4 billion of people are presently suffering from a health condition which can be managed or improves from rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation psychology caters for the entire life span of humans beginning from new-borns to end of life. Rehabilitation is helpful for a child or an adult or any older person who wants to perform everyday activities as independently as possible and it facilitates participation in sectors like education, work and build meaningful life roles and relationships like looking after family. It is a specialty area of psychology which mainly focuses on applying the psychological skills and knowledge on the

people with disabilities to improve their health and wellbeing, independence, enhance their social participation, individual choice and functional ability. The rehabilitation psychologists are specially trained and indulge in variety of activities such as clinical practice, developmental programs, research, training, teaching and education, service provision and developing policies and advocacy for people with disability and chronic health conditions.

They play a crucial role of providing support to people coping with their psychological and physical challenges by helping them to adapt and making lifestyle changes which promotes an overall healthy life and social function. Rehabilitation psychologists are likely to work in different settings like acute care hospitals, community centers, health care centers, physical rehabilitation centers, assisted living centers, and long-term care facilities. With specialization and training working in sports injury centers or in cardiac centers as a cardiac rehabilitator is also possible. They assist people suffering from chronic illness like cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury, multiple sclerosis, deafness, blindness or any sort of physical injury which hampers a person movement or functioning. Making a dependent individual become independent or near to being independent, enriching their quality of life and developing a sense of well-being is the main goal or target of Rehabilitation psychologist for which a holistic treatment has to be facilitated to disabled person. Hence, a rehabilitation psychologist supports a disabled person in issues like government aid, litigation, employment opportunities, educational institutions, public policies, reservations and others which will contribute towards the overall development and betterment of a disabled person. The rehabilitation psychologist ensures that the individual is in the society's main stream that is they are working in association with multimodalities.

History of Rehabilitation Psychology in India

In India, the development of disability rehabilitation led to the foundation of Rehabilitation Psychology. India being an agriculture-based country, had majority of its population living in the rural areas. The culture of

"community living" was predominantly found in villages during the pre-independence era. They had an important role to play in treating people with disabilities as equal part of the community. Along with this, major support came from the families in providing care, support for the disabled. For many years in the past, Rehabilitation services were conducted to the disabled in an unorganized manner, by seeking necessary support from the family. With the abilities the disabled had, they were involved in agricultural practices bringing them the needed social acceptance and respect from the community.

With the changes in social and cultural practices, the societal treatment of disabled people also took a change. The education system did not cater to the children with disabilities during the British rule in India, but the Christian missionaries contributed at a significant level for providing rehabilitation services for the disabled. Special schools and NGOs were established which took responsibility for providing rehabilitation for the disabled and for people with chronic health conditions. It was during the pre-independence period that East India company started to build lunatic asylums which began the tradition of separating people with mental illness from the mainstream society.

After independence due to urbanization and industrialization, a need for restoring the ideal functioning levels of disabled people was aroused. This led to the movement of developing rehabilitation services in a more organized and efficient manner. During the 1980's and 1990's due to the recommendations made by the United Nations for empowering people with disability, a drive to develop disability rehabilitation began. The drive to develop disability rehabilitation began during the 1980s and 1990s which was a result of various resolutions and recommendations made by the United Nations towards the empowerment of persons with disabilities. India being a member of UN, brought into effect numerous laws for benefitting people with disabilities. The fundamental rights in Indian constitution are equally applicable for disabled people as well. Along with this, there are special rights, reservations and laws for people with disabilities like RCI act, PWD act, Mental health bill and National Trust Act.

The Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI) came into being as a registered entity in 1986 and became a registered body in 1993 (Kundu, 2000). RCI is the first to lay down the foundation for professional training in Rehabilitation Psychology. Technological advancements and also the ever-increasing number of people with disabilities and chronic health conditions paved way for further development of Rehabilitation psychology. Concurrently in 2000, the RCI Act (1992) was revised under the scope of a larger act, Persons with Disabilities Act (Equal Opportunities, Full participation and Protection of rights). The psychologists who were working in rehabilitation centres, special schools, counseling clinics and healthcare settings focused on supporting the individuals with accepting and adjusting with the disability. Hence, it became necessary to train the professionals in Rehabilitation Psychology in order to meet the needs of people with disabilities, as well as to help them in maximizing their independence, confidence, overall health and wellbeing. It has been two decades since the RCI has recognized rehabilitation psychology as a clinical specialization in the field of psychology.

Goals of Rehabilitation Psychology

- The major goal of Rehabilitation psychology is to enhance the functioning of an individual with respect to any impairments, injuries, acute or chronic disease
- Rehabilitation psychologist focusses on all the factors of a person's life which tends to contribute on wellness and recovery. It can be the support from family or friends which a disabled person receives or relationship with the rehabilitator. The rehabilitation psychologists focus on every aspect which directly or indirectly promotes betterment.
- It seeks to enhance and restore the quality of life, improve the social functioning and mental functioning of people with disabilities.

- Independence in all aspects like financial independence, emotional independence, mental independence is fostered along with providing necessary opportunities to make them self-reliant.
- A rehabilitation psychologist serves the caregivers/ family members of the disabled person as well. They impart the importance of regularity of treatment, along with psycho-educating the caregiver regarding the nature of illness and its prognosis. The ways to promote independent living, preventing the chances of relapse are explained to the caregiver.
- Rehabilitation psychologists essentially advocate for bringing an improvement in the quality of life and overall wellbeing of people with disabilities. Hence, they tend to involve in developing public policies and legislations which uphold non-discriminatory mode practices and funding the services which focuses on maximizing independence of disabled people.

Rehabilitation Elements

Dietz (1969) has delineated four major elements of rehabilitation, particularly for the people suffering from cancer. But presently these elements are being used and applied throughout rehabilitation for various conditions. The four elements are as follow.

1. Preventive rehabilitation: It tends to occur immediately after a diagnosis has been done or with an onset of an impairment. The central criteria here is to impart education, guidance and to implement intervention strategies for slowing down the advancement of impairment. It focuses on maintaining the level of ability of a person. This is a most common form of rehabilitation used during long term care like cancer, neurological conditions, diabetes etc. It also fortifies self-management through support and also incorporate interventions designed for maintaining functionality of a disabled person as long as possible.

2. **Restorative rehabilitation:** It has its focus on interventions which aims to improve the impairment or disability like low muscle strength, respiratory problems, impaired cognitive function in order to bring a maximum amount of recovery in functioning. This rehabilitation is commonly used after a surgery or illness or any acute events like stroke, traumatic event.
3. **Supportive Rehabilitation:** Supportive rehabilitation is also referred to as Adaptive rehabilitation. It emphasizes on fostering the mobility and self-care ability of a person with the assistance of self-help devices and by training them with alternative and compensatory strategies of performing things. This type of rehabilitation includes the usage of assistive equipment or any sort of environmental modifications.
4. **Palliative rehabilitation:** It empowers people with life restricting conditions to lead a good life mentally, physically and socially. It also focusses on alleviating symptoms of pain, dyspnoea, hypernea, oedema, respiratory assistance and encouraging psychological wellbeing and usage of assistive device. This is done to improve the functional independence and to bring comfort, dignity to people with disabilities.

Scope of Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation covers a massive range within the patients' pathway. It encompasses necessary support to make the person learn basic communication skills, employ techniques to enhance or maintain optimum health, overall wellbeing and employment. Rehabilitation is appropriate at any age as and when a person has a need to change their course of life. The support can be required in the following situations.

- **Develop New Skills** – When a child is facing developmental difficulties, they may be need of help to develop certain skills for their health and independence (Field,2010; Allen 2011).

- **Maintain Skills and Independence** – For conditions like dementia, cancer, neural disease and others which are progressive in nature require early diagnosis and rehabilitation interventions. This can help in maintaining their skills and also assist in their independence for as long as time permits.
- **Enhance Performance** – Rehabilitation provides an opportunity to boost the performance of sports people and athletes after they have faced an injury or have taken a time gap from sporting.
- **Recover from Unexpected Illness** – People are likely to face issues like depression, stress, anxiety, acute tension, psychosis or a sudden admission to hospital due to stroke, a sudden fall, accident, surgery or due to any infections or cardiac problems.
- **Recover from Major Trauma** – Rehabilitation and reclamation assists people in redeeming and amplifying their skills, abilities and independence including their way back to previous being.
- **Manage Long-term Conditions** – People suffering from a long term or chronic illness tend to unexpectedly fall ill or their illness can worsen. During these situations they can benefit a lot from rehabilitation interventions as it can help in regaining or improving their independence and overall wellbeing.
- **Self-manage Conditions** – Even though people have a chronic or long-term condition, they are encouraged to take care of their own health and are assisted in reducing or avoiding the risk of mounting secondary complications which can affect the mental or physical health of a person with disability like loss of strength, cardiovascular concerns, ulcers, pain, depression, stress, contractures etc (NHS).
- **Access Advocacy** – Many people who are vulnerable and require support like suffering from cognitive impairment, immobility, communication difficulties are offered support as a part of rehabilitation interventions.

Conclusion

Without an element of doubt, it can be mentioned that rehabilitation is a crucial feature in health sector which aims to enhance and empower the functioning and independence of person with disability. This field of psychology has evolved through different phases and now it has integrated various elements from biological, societal and situational factors which is likely to have an effect on wellbeing, health and functionality of people facing health difficulties. It addresses the needs to a person across lifespan.

It can be required by any individual facing a health condition, injury or any sort of acute or chronic limitations. Irrespective of who is getting rehabilitation or who is the rehabilitator or the place where it is being done, the ultimate goal of rehabilitation process is to ameliorate the negative effects of disability as well as to optimize the functioning of patient which contributes to their wellbeing (Cieza, 2019) and helps in attaining their full potential and participation in society. This also lays effect on the families, economy and on the community. Overall, it can be understood that rehabilitation psychologist is a pressing priority in the current time and there is a need for more professionally trained people for this sector.

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