Examine the concepts of normality and abnormality.

Abnormality is defined by statistical deviance

Abnormality is defined by a set of symptoms - depending on duration and severity.

Those behaviours which are not within the norm within a society are concerned abnormal.

This is a very pragmatic definition of normality. But many behaviours which are “the norm” are not healthy - and some that are very rare are desirable. Also, cultural is dynamic, so what may be the norm today, may not be the norm tomorrow.

Szasz feels that the label of abnormality is unacceptable - and there are no real “abnormalities” - just “problems with living.” He feels that the labels stigmatize. Homosexuality was labeled as abnormal because the public saw it as odd and not fitting social norms.

Jahoda came up with a list of six traits that define mental health or “normalcy”, including realistic self-esteem, accurate perception of the world, sustaining relationships, and productivity.

These appear to be value judgments. Culturally biased. There is no agreement on what constitutes “mental health.”

Difficult to measure and to determine how many of these criteria need to be met to be healthy. Also, an emic approach to cultures may be necessary to apply this. For example, Bolton’s research on Rwanda.

The DSM and other classifactory systems are based on the idea of sets of symptoms defining abnormal behaviour. If the symptoms make on dysfunctional or cause stress.

There are cultural variations in symptoms for disorders, as well as for what is seen as normal. Communicating with dead ancestors, hallucinations, or bragging about one's achievements may all be culturally acceptable.

Not all behaviours that are “abnormal” are dysfunctional.

There is no universal concept of abnormality. As culture is a dynamic system, the concept of abnormality changes over time. It is important to understand abnormality within the context of a culture.

There are ethical concerns with the labels created by “abnormality” and “normality.”