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# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

P.G.Sem . – 4

Paper – EC – 1

Introduction to clinical psychology



# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Clinical psychology is the branch of psychology concerned with assessing and treating mental illness, abnormal behavior, and psychiatric problems. This psychology specialty area provides comprehensive care and treatment for complex mental health problems.

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The roots of clinical psychology can be traced back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when the field of psychology itself was in its infancy. Pioneering figures like Wilhelm Wundt, often regarded as the father of experimental psychology, and William James, a prominent American psychologist, laid the groundwork for understanding the intricacies of human behavior and mental processes.

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Early influences on the field of clinical psychology include the work of the Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud .He was one of the first to focus on the idea that mental illness was something that could be treated by talking with the patient, and his talk therapy approach that is often cited as the earliest scientific use of clinical psychology.

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Freud's emphasis on the unconscious mind, psychosexual development, and the role of defense mechanisms opened new avenues for exploring and treating mental health issues.



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American psychologist Lightner Witmer opened the first psychological clinic in 1896 with a specific focus on helping children who had learning disabilities. It was also Witmer who first introduced the term "clinical psychology" in 1907.



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Witmer, a former student of Wilhelm Wundt, defined clinical psychology as "the study of individuals, by observation or experimentation, with the intention of promoting change .

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Clinical psychology became more established during the period of World War I as practitioners demonstrated the usefulness of psychological assessments. In 1917, the American Association of Clinical Psychology was established .

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During World War II, clinical psychologists were called upon to help treat what was then known as shell shock, now referred to as Post – traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).



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Clinical psychologists work in a variety of settings (hospitals, clinics, private practice, universities, schools, etc.) and in many capacities. All of them require these professionals to draw on their expertise in special ways and for different purposes.



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The historical development of clinical psychology reflects a dynamic journey marked by intellectual contributions, societal demands, and a commitment to evidence-based practices. From its early roots in psychoanalysis to its current status as a diverse and scientifically grounded discipline, clinical psychology has continually adapted to meet the evolving needs of individuals and society.

