

Clinical Interviewing

Dr. Indu Kumari

Assistant Professor

PG Department of Psychology

M.B.R.R.V.Pd.S. College, Ara

PG- Semester - 4

EC – 1

Clinical Interviewing

Introduction

Clinical interviewing is the foundation of psychological assessment and diagnosis. It is a systematic, purposeful, and professional interaction between a trained clinician and a client aimed at understanding the client's psychological problems, emotional state, behavioral patterns, personality traits, social functioning, and life history.

In clinical psychology, interviewing is not merely asking questions, but a scientific and therapeutic process that integrates observation, communication, empathy, and clinical judgment. The quality of information obtained during clinical interviewing directly influences diagnosis, treatment planning, prognosis, and therapeutic outcomes.

Clinical interviewing is used across mental health settings, including hospitals, clinics, counseling centers, rehabilitation centers, schools, forensic settings, and community mental health programs.

Definition of Clinical Interviewing

Clinical interviewing is a structured or semi-structured professional conversation between a clinician and a client, conducted to collect relevant psychological, emotional, behavioral, and social information for assessment, diagnosis, and treatment planning.

Nature and Characteristics of Clinical Interviewing

1. **Goal-directed** – Conducted with clear clinical objectives.
2. **Systematic and planned** – Follows organized procedures.
3. **Flexible** – Adapted according to client needs.
4. **Confidential** – Information is ethically protected.
5. **Interpersonal process** – Builds therapeutic alliance.
6. **Scientific** – Based on psychological principles.
7. **Dynamic** – Changes with client responses.

Objectives of Clinical Interviewing

1. To understand **presenting problems**
2. To collect **case history**
3. To make **clinical diagnosis**
4. To assess **mental status and personality**
5. To evaluate **emotional, cognitive, and behavioral functioning**
6. To plan **psychological treatment and interventions**
7. To assess **risk factors** (suicide, violence, abuse, substance use)
8. To establish **rapport and trust**

Types of Clinical Interviews

1. Structured Interview

- Predetermined set of standardized questions
- High reliability
- Less flexibility
- Used in research and diagnosis

Examples: SCID, DIS

2. Semi-Structured Interview

- Combination of structured format and flexibility
- Most commonly used
- Allows probing

3. Unstructured Interview

- Free-flowing conversation
- High flexibility
- Low standardization

4. Diagnostic Interview

- Focused on identifying mental disorders

5. Intake Interview

- First interview
- Focus on background and presenting problems

6. Mental Status Examination (MSE)

Assessment of:

- Appearance
- Behavior
- Speech
- Mood & affect
- Thought
- Perception
- Cognition
- Insight & judgment

Phases / Steps of Clinical Interviewing

1. Preparation Phase

- Review referral
- Plan interview goals
- Arrange comfortable environment
- Ensure privacy

2. Rapport Building Phase

- Warm greeting
- Explain purpose
- Ensure confidentiality
- Encourage openness

3. Information Gathering Phase

A. Identification Data

Name, age, sex, education, occupation, marital status

B. Presenting Complaints

Nature, duration, severity, onset

C. History of Present Illness

D. Past Psychiatric History

E. Family History

F. Personal History

Birth, development, childhood, education, occupation, relationships

G. Medical History

H. Social and Occupational Functioning

4. Mental Status Examination (MSE)

Detailed assessment of current functioning.

5. Closing Phase

- Summarize
- Clarify doubts
- Provide support
- Explain next steps

Essential Interviewing Skills

1. Active listening
2. Empathy
3. Genuineness
4. Warmth
5. Open-ended questioning
6. Reflection
7. Clarification
8. Probing
9. Observation
10. Silence

Interview Techniques

- Open-ended questions
- Closed-ended questions
- Probing

- Clarification
- Summarization
- Reflection
- Confrontation
- Interpretation

Content Areas of Clinical Interview

- Emotional functioning
- Cognitive functioning
- Behavioral patterns
- Personality traits
- Interpersonal relationships
- Coping strategies
- Stressors
- Strengths and resources

Advantages of Clinical Interviewing

1. Rich qualitative data
2. Flexible and adaptable
3. Builds therapeutic alliance
4. Immediate clarification
5. Personalized assessment

Limitations of Clinical Interviewing

1. Subjectivity
2. Interviewer bias
3. Low reliability
4. Time-consuming
5. Social desirability bias
6. Client resistance

Ethical Issues in Clinical Interviewing

- Confidentiality
- Informed consent
- Respect
- Non-judgment
- Cultural sensitivity
- Professional competence
- Privacy

Cultural Factors in Clinical Interviewing

- Language
- Beliefs
- Family involvement
- Stigma
- Religious views
- Socioeconomic background

Role of Clinical Interviewing in Diagnosis

- Differential diagnosis
- Symptom evaluation
- Severity assessment
- Functional impairment analysis

Clinical Interview vs Psychological Testing

Clinical Interview

Qualitative

Flexible

Subjective

Interactive

Psychological Testing

Quantitative

Standardized

Objective

Structured

Conclusion

Clinical interviewing is the heart of clinical psychology practice. It integrates scientific knowledge with interpersonal skills to understand human behavior deeply. A well-conducted clinical interview leads to accurate diagnosis, effective treatment planning, and improved therapeutic outcomes. Therefore, mastering clinical interviewing skills is essential for every mental health professional.