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Many definitions of abnormality have been used over the years but no one has won universal acceptance. Most of the definitions have certain common features, also called the 'four Ds': deviance, distress, dysfunction, and danger. Therefore, psychological disorders are deviant (different, extreme, unusual, even bizarre), distressing (unpleasant and upsetting to the person and to others), dysfunctional (interfering with the person's capability to take out daily works in a constructive way), and dangerous (to the person or to others).

Literally the meaning of the abnormality can be considered as 'away from the normal'. Abnormality in behavior is deviation from some clearly defined norms or standard of particular society.

Many psychologists have suggested that 'abnormal' is simply a label that is given to a behavior which is deviant from social expectations.

Abnormal behavior, emotions and thoughts are those features that differ from a society's ideas of proper functioning. Each society constructs or designs its own norms, which are suggested to each individual of that society for proper conduct. The society's norms grow up from its particular culture - its history, values, skills, habits, institutions, technology, and arts. For instance, if society whose values competition and assertiveness accept the aggressive behavior then it will be the normal behavior for that society. While on the other hand society emphasises cooperation and family values (such as in India) may accept aggressive behavior as abnormal.

It is based on assumption that socially accepted behavior is not abnormal, and that normality is nothing more than conformity to social norms.