Chapter 13
Psychosocial Interventions for Individuals With Intellectual Disability

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ABSTRACT

People with intellectual disabilities are prone to various challenges in relation to self-care, emotional regulation, and decision making. Sometimes due to their cognitive and adaptive skill limitations, they display challenging behavior that further impacts on their quality of life. This chapter presents the concept of applied behavior analysis (ABA) and a discussion on the principles of applied behavior analysis (ABA) in prevention and treatment of challenging behaviors of individuals with intellectual disability. Functional behavior analysis (FBA) and its stages are described with examples for the future practitioners. As ABA has a major contribution in the treatment of challenging behaviors in individuals with intellectual disability, research supported treatment strategies are presented. This chapter also explained strategies for improving the adaptive behaviors of individuals with intellectual disability.

INTRODUCTION

In the recent years, there has been an increased interest and focus on improving the quality of life of individuals with disabilities. In the year 2006, the United Nations drafted the Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) aimed at securing and protecting the human rights of persons with disabilities. As of now, about 160 countries have become signatories of this convention and many countries are working towards making legislations consistent with the CRPD to protect the human rights of individuals with disabilities (UN Convention on the Rights of the Persons with Disabilities, 2015). Among the developed nations, Australia has made it illegal to discriminate people based on their
disabilities in 1992 by enacting disability discrimination act (DDA), people with a disability must be treated on the same basis as people without disabilities (Basser, & Jones, 2002). The DDA (1992) has shown positive impact on the lives of people with disabilities particularly in accessing school education (Dempsey, 2003).

Individuals with intellectual disabilities often face increased challenges in self-care, emotional regulation and decision making due to their cognitive and adaptive skill limitations, which further impacts on their quality of life (Emerson, 2001a). A large proportion of population with intellectual disability display several forms of challenging behaviours including aggressive behaviours, self-harm, stereotypical behaviours and sexual misconducts (Crocker, Mercier, Lachapelle, Brunet, Morin & Roy 2006; Emerson et al., 2001b; Poppes, Putten, & Vlaskamp, 2010). Poppes et al. (2010) found a prevalence of self-harm and stereotypical behaviour in 82% of their participants with profound intellectual and multiple disabilities (PIMD) and 45% of their study participants displayed aggressive and destructive behaviours. Challenging behaviour appears to be a central theme in intellectual disability and its treatment. Applied Behaviour Analysis is considered the most science-based prevention and treatment of challenging behaviours as well as improving the adaptive behaviours of individuals with intellectual disability.

**Applied Behaviour Analysis and Challenging Behaviours**

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is the practice of applying behaviourism, which focus on principle of stimulus-response, in a systematic way to solve challenging behaviours and teach functional life skills. ABA considers that all behaviours are learned through interaction with the environment. It is science concerned and backed by the principle that behaviour can be explained without the internal mental states or consciousness. Cooper, Heron and Heward (2007) defined ABA as, “Applied behaviour analysis is a scientific approach for discovering environmental variable that reliably influence socially significant behaviours and for developing a technology of behaviour change that takes practical advantage of those discoveries”. In a nutshell, the ABA practitioners are interested in discovering the functional relationships between behaviour and environmental variables rather than searching for causes of challenging behaviours in intra-psychic or other abstract mental concepts such as, mental conflict, ego, unconscious forces, self-concept or self-esteem. Baer, Wolf, and Risley (1968) proposed seven dimensions of ABA. These seven dimensions are considered as the defining features of ABA (Cooper et al., 2007).

1. **Applied:** The ‘applied’ dimension of ABA refers to commitment of the discipline of ABA to improve the socially significant behaviours to enhance the quality of life of people
2. **Behavioural:** ‘Behavioural’ dimension seeks to stay focused on what the individual does rather what he or she thinks or feels. Behaviours are seen as physical or environmental events that can be measured in terms of frequency, duration, latency, and intensity or other physical measurement.
3. **Analytic:** ‘Analytic’ dimension seeks to establish a predictive and functional relationship between independent and dependent variable; presence or absence of independent variable reliably determines the changes in dependent variables
4. **Technological:** ‘Technological’ dimension of ABA requires that all interventional procedures are to be identified and described with optimal details to facilitate an easy use or replication of the intervention procedures by readers or other practitioners and get the same or similar results when intervention procedures are implemented with integrity.