

The Psychology Couch Newsletter

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Psychology Honours Graduate
(Wits)

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CREATURES OF HABIT

Cultivating your best self through habit formation and destruction

By Lynn Murape

Psychology Honours Graduate
(Wits)

January is the month of new beginnings. Whether you're trying to get in shape, learn a new language, or quit smoking, habits are the building blocks of progress. However, our desire for immediate gratification often causes us to forget that habits take time to form. They require dedication and discipline. Setting unrealistic expectations can lead to frustration and failure so, the key is to start small when forming a new habit. This involves identifying one small change that you can make in your routine that could lead to a bigger change.

We can't talk about forming new habits without a word on breaking old ones. Doing so can be as equally challenging, as they're often deeply ingrained in our behaviour. It's important to remember that habits are an evolutionary advantage that allows our brains to automate certain actions, freeing up our attention for new tasks. Thus, in order to break a habit, it's crucial to replace it with a better one.

That being said, willpower is a limited resource, so it's best to use it intentionally. Trying to establish too many new habits at once can lead to burnout, so it's best to start with one small change and build from there. It's also helpful to incorporate the new habit into an existing routine to make it easier to stick with.

Forming a new habit takes time, practice, and repetition. Creating a running streak, or doing something consecutively for an extended period of time, can help solidify the habit. However, even once a habit is formed, it's important to continue practising it daily to reinforce the behaviour.

It's inevitable that we'll fall off the wagon from time to time, but the lesson lies in our ability to get back on track and not let setbacks discourage us. Having the right mindset and cultivating motivation can help us stay focused on our goals and maintain our desired routine. Remember, success is built on small changes over time.

**"HABITS ARE NOT A FINISH LINE TO BE CROSSED, THEY ARE A LIFESTYLE TO BE BELIEVED."
– JAMES CLEAR**

Ethics Journal Club

PRACTITIONER DEBRIEFS AT THE COUCH

3 ETHICS
POINTS
HAVE BEEN
GRANTED

Welcome to the Ethics Journal Club. This unique platform is designed exclusively for registered practitioners who are committed to upholding the highest standards of ethical conduct in their professional endeavors.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

Our Ethics Journal Club offers a dynamic and engaging environment where a multidisciplinary team of practitioners come together to explore complex ethical dilemmas, share diverse perspectives, and collectively deepen their understanding of ethical principles within mental health care.

WHEN: Thursday, 29 February

TIME: 18:00-20:00

COST: R400

To RSVP or for more information, contact us:

☎ 011 234 0741

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37 Homestead Road, Corner 12th
Avenue, Edenburg, Sandton

🌐 www.thepsychologycouch.com



OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY: A VITAL TOOL IN MENTAL HEALTH PRACTICES

By Tara Terzic
Psychology Honours
Graduate

Occupational therapy (OT) plays a crucial role in mental health practices, offering unique and valuable benefits that complement traditional therapy approaches. OT is becoming increasingly important in mental healthcare, and it is for this reason that one should consider this invaluable resource.

What is OT?

Occupational Therapy is a healthcare profession concerned with promoting health and well-being through occupation.

“Occupation” refers to meaningful activities that we carry out every day!

This includes many activities from daily self-care routines (such as brushing your teeth or sleeping well) to social interaction, or even higher order cognition.

The primary goal of occupational therapy is to enable individuals to participate in the activities of everyday life, with greater ease and efficacy. Occupational therapists work with the patients to achieve this by enhancing their ability to engage in the occupations they want to, need to, or are expected to do, or by modifying the occupation or the environment to better support their occupational engagement.



UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION

By Ismaaeel Adam (Psychology Honours Graduate)

When we think about addiction, the mind often goes to drug use. Many official definitions echo this focus on substances. For instance:

- Addiction is described as the uncontrollable and compulsive use of habit-forming drugs.
- An addict is someone hooked on a habit, especially one tied to a specific drug.
- An addict is someone who consistently uses and craves a drug uncontrollably.
- Addiction is seen as a state of regular or chronic intoxication resulting from repeated use of a drug, whether natural or synthetic.

However, our understanding of addiction is evolving in today's world. More and more, various behaviours are being recognized as potentially addictive, even if they don't involve taking a drug. These behaviours range widely, from gambling and overeating to activities like sex, exercise, video game playing, love, internet use, and work. This broad spectrum has prompted the creation of new, all-encompassing definitions for addictive behaviour.

One such definition is that addictive behaviour refers to a repetitive habit pattern that increases the risk of disease and/or associated personal and social problems. People experiencing addictive behaviours often feel a 'loss of control' – the behaviour persists despite their attempts to stop or cut back. These habits are typically marked by immediate rewards (short-term gains) but may come with delayed negative effects (long-term costs). Efforts to change addictive behaviour, whether through treatment or self-initiated, often face high relapse rates.

Addiction is like solving a puzzle – lots of pieces coming together to create the big picture. It's not just a random thing; it happens because of many factors. Think of it as a mix of biology (like your genes and brain chemistry), psychology (your personality, hidden motivations, attitudes, and beliefs), and your social surroundings (the situations you're in). It's not just one thing causing addiction; it's the combo of all these elements.

Addiction isn't a simple disease or personal choice. It's a complicated condition shaped by a bunch of biological, psychological, and social factors.

There are biological factors. This includes genes, brain chemistry, and existing mental health conditions can make someone more likely to develop an addiction.

There are psychological factors: stress, anxiety, depression, and impulsivity can lead to addictive behaviours, often as a way to cope with tough feelings.

Social factors are in the mix too. Peer pressure, family dynamics, how much money you have, and cultural norms all play a big role in how people view addiction and might influence them to use substances.

These factors aren't on their isolated. They mix and mingle, affecting each other. This combination creates a unique situation for each person – either making them more prone or more resistant to addiction.

When it comes to treatment, it's not a one-size-fits-all deal. Knowing that addiction is this multi-layered thing means we need a full-on approach. Therapy, medication, support groups, and lifestyle changes – it's about tailoring the solution to fit each person's specific needs and situation.

EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONS

By Psychology Honours Graduate
Lelani Mbukwane

Executive function can be explained as a set of mental skills such as impulse control, working memory and flexible thinking. These skills are used daily in managing daily life, learning, home life and work. If one is having trouble with executive function, they may find it challenging to focus, handle their emotions, complete tasks etc.

The three main aspects of executive function are:

1. Inhibitory Control: (which means the ability to control one's behaviour, emotions and/or thoughts.)
2. Cognitive flexibility: (which can be understood as the brain's ability to adapt to new, changing, and unplanned events.)
3. Working memory: (this is a skill that allows us to work with information without losing track of the task at hand.)

Executive functioning is responsible for:

- Organizing, planning, prioritizing
- Regulating emotions
- Understanding different points of view
- Monitoring the self (keeping track of yourself)
- Paying attention and maintaining focus
- Starting and completing tasks

Executive function skills normally develop quickly in early childhood and into the teen years. However, they keep developing into the mid-20s. As with all developmental phases, some may lag behind.

Signs of executive function challenges

- Trouble managing emotions/impulses
- Short-term memory issues
- Inability to balance tasks
- Socially inappropriate behaviour
- Difficulty solving problems
- Difficulty learning or processing new information



Problems with executive function may lead to:

- Affected performance at work / school
- Low self-esteem
- Mood regulation issues
- Avoidance of difficult/challenging tasks
- Low motivation / loss of interest in activities

Treatment of executive disfunction

There is no diagnosis called executive function disorder, however, there are specific tests that assess a wide range of executive skills. These skills are:

- Attention
- Inhibitory control
- Working memory
- Organization and planning
- Concept formation
- Set shifting (the ability to shift from one task to another)
- Word and idea generation

Assessments should be conducted as a part of a fuller evaluation that assesses several areas of learning. Some treatments and approaches

Behaviour therapy and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)

Behavioural therapy helps people replace negative behaviours with positive ones. CBT helps people deal with thoughts and feelings and manage behaviour.

Farewell to Zuki

Embarking on a new journey, Zukiswa Mkatshwa bids farewell to The Couch. Your years of dedication, warmth, and contributions have left an inerasable mark on our team. Wishing you every success in your next chapter!



- *The Couch*



Thank you for your dedication to
The Couch.

Thank you for being a part of our Couch Community. Stay tuned for next time as we share the February Edition of the Psychology Couch Newsletter.

Until next time, as always, our wish for you is to heal, learn and grow.

Get involved and stay in touch via our social media platforms:



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The Couch



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(Practice of
Psychology
and Psychiatry)



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