

Social Approach in Psychology (AS Level 9990)

Definition

The social approach in psychology explains behaviour in terms of social interaction, social context, and the influence of other people. It focuses on how individuals' thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are shaped by groups, culture, social roles, and relationships.

The approach emphasises that behaviour cannot be fully understood by studying individuals in isolation; instead, it must be studied within a social environment.

Core Assumptions of the Social Approach

Key Areas Studied in the Social Approach

1. Social influence

Includes:

- **Conformity – adjusting behaviour to match group norms**
 - **Obedience – following orders from authority figures**
 - **Compliance – agreeing to a request**
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2. Social identity

Individuals define themselves partly through group membership (e.g., gender, nationality, school, religion), which influences behaviour and attitudes toward others.

3. Interpersonal relationships

The approach studies:

- **Formation of friendships**
 - **Attraction**
 - **Group behaviour**
 - **Prejudice and discrimination**
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Research Methods Used in the Social Approach

Strengths of the Social Approach

- 1. High real-world relevance**
 - **Explains everyday behaviours such as peer pressure, prejudice, teamwork, and leadership.**
 - 2. Strong practical applications**
 - **Used in education, workplaces, law enforcement, advertising, and social policy.**
 - 3. Scientific research methods**
 - **Controlled experiments allow testing of cause-and-effect relationships.**
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Limitations of the Social Approach

- 1. Ethical issues**
 - **Social experiments may involve deception, distress, or lack of informed consent.**
 - 2. Underestimates individual differences**
 - **May ignore personality, biology, and cognition.**
 - 3. Cultural bias**
 - **Many studies are conducted in Western cultures, limiting generalisability.**
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Conclusion

The social approach provides a valuable explanation of behaviour by highlighting the power of social influences. It demonstrates that human behaviour is not only the result of internal processes but also shaped by groups, norms, roles, and social situations. However, it should be used alongside other approaches to achieve a complete understanding of behaviour.