**Ethical and Methodological Issues in Forensic Psychology**

# Introduction

Forensic psychologists often deal with people experiencing anxiety disorders, which is quite a common emotional and psychological issue in the modern world. The psychologist needs to use their expertise in applying various measures in the practice while navigating through ethical and methodological issues in the victims' evaluation and treatment. Anxiety disorders manifest in different forms, usually triggered by a heightened physical or emotional reaction such as racing thoughts, stomach upsets, shortness of breath, trembling, rapid heartbeats, etc. Anxiety has several subtypes, which include Post-traumatic disorders (PTSD), Social anxiety disorder, specific social phobias, panic disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), and generalized anxiety disorder.

Forensic psychology is an emerging trend in the criminal justice system that aims to profile perpetrators by giving elaborate personalities and behavioral descriptions. The APA defines forensic psychology as clinical specialties to the legal field since it uses psychology in a forensic setting. The field tools are becoming increasingly significant, especially while dealing with frustrated people in modern society. The crimes, especially homicides and other forms of violent offenses, are somewhat getting linked to social disorders, including the effect of anxiety on offenders. Therefore, the psychologist needs to maintain the ethical backgrounds dictated by the psychology field to apply legal questions. Although the area requires both law and psychology training, prominently, it relies on clinical skills such as assessment, reporting, and case evaluation in the presentation. This paper aims to show the ethical and methodological implications of forensic psychology in evaluating patients with anxiety disorders using GAD-7 and DSM-5 measures.

# Ethical and Methodological Implications

Usually, every field of science has rules, regulations, codes, and policies which act as a guide to how practitioners perform their duties. These protocols must be followed to the latter, and several measures are always in place to ensure that practitioners of science do adhere to them at all times. Moreover, there is still an established body that ensures that professionals in any given setting adhere to ethics and policies as dictated. The American Psychological Association (APA) is the professional body that ensures ethics are maintained while dealing and treating a person with mental or social disorders. Violators of statutes and codes to which they were sworn are severely punished to the extent of revocation of their practicing licenses. Furthermore, the rules and policies in the care for patients dealing with anxiety disorders extend to protect the psychologist from harassment to disclose important confidential information without cause and consent.

The psychologist is given the utmost power to determine the best method to approach a case without violating APA guidelines. They are given the law mandate to disclose information in some specified scenarios, such as when the victim is a danger to themselves or society. Ethics protects the psychologist, especially forensic psychologist, from manipulation from government or third parties wishing to get information about a disturbed person. In past cases, there have been instances where psychologists have inappropriate used confidential information in litigation, especially in scenarios where a patient probably threw tantrums from aggression.

Unlike clinical therapists, forensic psychologists are linked to law and typically work with criminals or suspects from various crimes to establish behavioral characteristics that tie the offender to a crime. However, before disclosing the information to the courtroom or other departments in the legal system, they must assess the patient thoroughly and rule without a doubt that the data acquired is directly tied to the crime investigated and not in any way contrary to professional ethics. Violation of the APA set ethics in practice will result in the psychologist penalizing and nullifying the entire litigation process.

The GAD-7 is a treatment measure applied for individuals experiencing anxiety disorders. Either licensed therapists and psychiatrists generally use the GAD-7, which is a tool to screen symptoms and assess the severity of specific stress disorders. The test is used to test scales of PTSD, OCD, social phobia, and panic disorders. The severity of the condition increases as the score increases in the GAD-7, which has a sensitivity of between 70% to 90%. DSM-5, on the other hand, follows symptoms as classified in the fifth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. It looks for excessive worry, difficulty controlling emotions, and other physical symptoms exhibited by the patient. The forensic psychologist can use either of the tests in context to the legal framework provided to ensure proper diagnosis of the degree of anxiety. The psychologist must ensure the appropriate use of the testing instrument during the examination process. The test must not be unadministered until a proper testing strategy has been evaluated to ensure the process's rigidity. Ethical duties start with the reliability of psychologists in the field, administration, scoring, and analysis of the outcome. Forensic psychology limits the ability to give any form of information written or otherwise about an individual before conducting an examination and defending the conclusion's scope based on the sources used.

In some instances, there have been cases of psychologists involving in ambiguous situations, which have led to questioning their morality in practice. The patient confidentially must be maintained at all times, and under no circumstance is the psychologist or secondary party supposed to misuse the patient data. Psychologists must ensure that human rights are preserved and that the patient's rights under health care are honored. Several measures have been put in place to manage the situation by reducing the impact of a violation of ethical codes or the chances of a leak of information. Therefore, the psychologist has a right to deny information about a particular case contrary to the legal, ethical, or civic rights of people and refuse to aid parties that might use acquired data, which might lead to violation of the human rights of the victim. The forensic psychologist is at times torn between their civic duty to the law and the need to respect and uphold the human rights of a suspect as constrained in ethical codes. Their responsibility to help the victim in a clinical setting will likely be prevailing in most cases.

The psychologist must competently discharge their duties to their patients in the constraints of their training, educational background, experience in study or profession, and APA boundaries. A licensed practicing forensic psychologist is adequately enabled in judicial and administrative regulations when they discharge to the public. Such psychologists' competence considers the complexity and nature of service provided relevant to the patient and the legal perspective of the matter. They will depend on their preparation and available information in scholarly research pertinent to the circumstance. Today's world has many people suffering from general anxiety, which manifests in various activities that might put the patient in police custody and probably in a setting that might lead them to battle a court battle. It is estimated that the number of anxiety disorders has increased from several issues, especially in employment settings. They have the right to consultations as inscribed by the professional ethics can happen regarding a specific case to ensure the psychologist has reliable information to relay on. The forensic psychologist has an ethical duty to disclose sources used to make decisions that will be presented to counter various questions. However, that does not guarantee the psychologist the ability to misuse sensitive information about particular individuals to pursue legal and professional goals.

Forensic psychologists' work must be based on scientific and professional knowledge and agreed currently trending research. The score of the GAD-7 scale determines the severity of the condition of anxious people. The psychologist needs to evaluate all the necessary symptoms depicted by the patient, which might have rendered them committing the crime. Some severe cases of PTSD can cause a person to inflict harm to other people unintentionally. Therefore, in-depth analysis to determine the score accurately should be carried out. After analyzing the existing literature in the sector, the decision should be made and ensure that data obtained meets the threshold for the conclusion. The process will have violated the rights of the individual under scrutiny if the psychologist is biased in the application of existing literature. The psychologist must apply their expertise in the legal and clinical scope of the matter to give the best decision that will maintain the reputation of the process in the scientific and professional view. Anxiety is usually hard to diagnose and may sometimes be mistaken for patients intentionally wanting to act salvage against other people. Therefore, the decision that the forensic psychologist's conclusion must be abiding and satisfactory to the legal process. APA ensures that the psychologist is protected from manipulation and harassment to make quick decisions to hasten the litigation process.

The psychologist must ensure they cause no harm to patients or other entities involved in the process deliberately. Anxious people are usually delicate and can involve themselves with life-threatening activities, especially when manipulated. A psychologist might intentionally offer advice that might render the subject harming themselves or cause permanent harm to those involved. APA received cases severally where psychologists unintentionally or intentionally hurt others. The possible prolonged damage of the information obtained is evaluated by the forensic psychologist before handing out information. Anxious people usually tend to be violent and may have unintentionally hurt other people while having a treatable episode. In such scenarios that might attract death sentences to the offender, the forensic psychologist must ensure that they present credible data that will probably outline why the offender is committing the crime. Execution is a cause of harm to human life, which psychology aims to protect. Therefore, a psychologist must assess all the materials and data acquired to ensure the state of the mind that the patient was in is justified to the penalty they receive. When the damage caused by the offender was significant not to warrant them to coexist with the society, the forensic psychologist might give alternatives like a life sentence in place of execution.

The psychologist should state confidentiality at the outset and alter the circumstance, especially when the psychologist is required by law to serve multiple legal proceedings. The psychologist's relationships with the case or parties involved in the offense committed must be precisely highlighted to ensure that the patient understands the implications of dealing in the process. The psychologist must detach themselves from the case if they hold personal interest, which might inhabit their competence, objectivity, or effectiveness in their assessment duty. The dilemma of multiple relations must be avoided to ensure the legitimacy of the entire process. The psychologist must be sure of the genuine relationship they establish with the individual in question. In cases where the psychologist assumed the therapist's role to the perpetrator instead of a forensic psychologist, complaints are raised questioning the process's competence and validity. The psychologist must state the role they play in the context of the scenario to discern if the process's nature is therapeutic or forensic. People with anxiety disorders might result in the forensic psychologist changing their clinical relations with the patient, which might hamper the legal proceeding and further render the question of the process's competency. A forensic question can not play a therapist's role and maintain the legal representation in the case. The decision will have been influenced by therapeutic sympathy, usually shown to people experiencing social stress disorders.

The forensics and psychology dictate that the person involved not to be exploited. A psychologist might be tempted to solicit clients into obliging to offense from threats or frightening individuals receiving services. Anxious people are easily manipulated and can be exploited intentionally, incriminating themselves for the psychologists' selfish gains either from a personal perspective or form influence from parties involved in the legal proceeding. Therefore, it is a breach of ethical codes when psychologists exploit clients, patients, or other people involved in the offense's legal framework. Failure to refrain themselves from the process could result in the psychologist facing a legal suit. APA ensures that licensed practitioners in forensic psychology understand their mandate, as stated in the law.

The disclosure of information acquired in the process must seek consent from the individual involved and the representing council. The person concerned must be represented by an attorney in instances when they are incapable of making an informed decision for the consent. Such are cases when the person is still undergoing treatment or dealing with a significant breakdown that might disqualify them from approval or being a signatory in the legal document. The psychologist must ensure that the representation that the offender gets is credible. The payment for services and other personal or professional relations which might hinder the process must be addressed in the initial stages, as stated by APA. Conflicting interest should be avoided at all costs to prevent possible misrepresentation of facts and sources. The consent must be an extension of collateral data that might impact conclusive representation.

The forensic psychologist's duty should extend to ensure that the validity of the data presented is correct. Any alteration or distortion of relevant information that might result in the ambiguity of evidence should be avoided at any cost to ensure data viability. The psychologist must be familiar with the forensic methodology and reporting strategies. The psychologist must advocate their conclusion with might once the processes are concluded. They must show how they reached a conclusion while considering the condition the patient was dealing with in a concise manner that represents their specialty and expertise.

Confidentiality is the paramount precaution taken by the psychologist to protect the client. The consent to disclose information about the patient should be considered with caution and ensure that the patient is adequately aware of the decision's implication. APA highlights how the psychologist can disclose the information acquired and the extent to which the data can be applied in a legal proceeding or disclosed to the public.

Most psychological decision attributes case studies, surveys, scholarly disciplinary methods, and sometimes applying a unique psychologist's understanding. The forensic psychologist will add the legal aspect of their practice to ensure that a suitable decision is reached. The aim ensures that the process followed all the set guidelines and ethical codes are upheld for diligence. The psychologist needs to understand the implication of the decision they present to the legal counsel.

## Conclusion

The legitimacy of psychological processes involving persons experiencing social anxiety disorder is hugely based on the forensic psychologist's competency. They are persons cross to share the ethical codes constrained in the criminal justice system's legal and clinical scope. These psychologists are mandated by the law to learn and assist the legal proceeding by analyzing the perpetrator's conditions to decide their credibility in the judicial process. The suspect's rights are protected in the venture to ensure that the psychologist upholds the APA set guideline and values to human rights. They are supposed to ensure that the suspect or offender is adequately represented before they can consent to allow confidential information to be used to aid or against them in the legal proceeding. Several measures are considered in cases where there is a violation of ethical codes to resolve or minimize the impact of the mistake. APA and other professional bodies ensure that psychologists who do not abide by the ethical codes are severely punished through suspension and revocation of their practice licenses.

References