

A Clinimetric approach in Psychological diagnosis: clinical observations

Mento C.^{1*} , Silvestri M.C.²

¹ Department Department of Biomedical, Dental Sciences and Morphofunctional Imaging, University of Messina; Psychiatric unit Policlinico “G. Martino” via Consolare Valeria, 98125, Messina, Italy

² Psy.D. University of Messina, Psychiatric Unit, Policlinico “G. Martino” via Consolare Valeria 1, Italy

ABSTRACT

Objective: The domain of the clinic assessment in psychology, shares the same theoretical and methodological assumptions with the traditional psychometric methods. In this case, the authors will focus on a clinimetric approach, different from the traditional psychometric ones, usually used in assessment practices.

Methods: the authors analysed book by Per Bech “*Klinisk Psycometri*” and the Italian version titled “*l’Assessment in Clinica psicologica: la psicodiagnostica clinimetrica*”, edited by Giovanni Fioriti in 2018.

Results: The book gives an innovative approach in understanding the clinical use of psychological rating scales, in line with a dimensional approach.

Conclusion: The book offers a view on the importance of an assessment in the psychological clinic, which takes into account the nosography conditions of the pathological clinical conditions and the related quality of life and health. The book highlights the possibility of a measurement, which takes the clinical pathological observation, the possibility of comparing different subjects, identifying the link between normal and pathological, psychopathological comorbidity and clinical indications for psychotherapy.

Keywords: *Clinimetric approach, Psychodiagnosis, Assessment, Clinical Psychology*

* *Corresponding author:* Mento Carmela, Department of Biomedical, Dental Sciences and Morphofunctional Imaging, University of Messina, Via Consolare Valeria, 98100, Messina, Italy

E-mail address: cmento@unime.it

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Introduction

Per Bech's book *Klinisk Psycometri* focuses on Clinimetric approach. This was introduced first, to indicate a domain of clinical markers in medical settings but today, it may help expanding in clinical psychology fields, psychosomatics and health settings too. Per Bech (1942-2018), Professor of psychometrics at the University of Copenhagen, presented rating scales and questionnaires for measurement in mental disorders (Fava et al., 2018).

This domain of the psychological clinic assessment shares the same theoretical and methodological assumptions with the traditional psychometric methods. Clinimetrics refers to the psychological measurement of distress and well-being but it describes an approach that is different from traditional psychometrics.

The Italian translation of Per Bech's book "Klinisk Psycometri" titled *l'Assessment in Clinica psicologica: la psicodiagnostica clinimetrica* G. Carrozzino, edited by Giovanni Fioriti in 2018 gives an innovative approach in understanding the clinical use of psychological rating scales for the assessment in clinical trials.

Clinical psychology and diagnosis

The evaluation of the manifestations of the human mind, as well as conceptualized in the context of modern clinimetry, is based on two measurement assumptions. The demonstrability that each symptom inserted in the scales rating conveys in a unique clinical content, measured by a single item. So, within each clinimetric measurement it is essential not only to identify the presence/absence of a symptom, but also to estimate its severity, with the possibility of measuring the clinical intensity of the symptom.

The second element, concerns the possibility of examining the sum of all items included within an assessment scale, i.e. the set of all the symptoms that may correspond to the description of a specific psychopathological framework.

The possibility of measuring the symptom within an interval scale (Likert) is also traceable in the book, through statistical analysis made by authors like Ronald A. Fisher, Rasch and Sidney Siegel.

There is an analysis mode, defined as a Rasg analysis and expressed by a probability index that is used in the evaluation of the prevalence of symptoms and severity of patients' clinical condition.

Historically, it is possible to trace a validated scientific approach both in the psychotherapeutic field and in the clinical psychology context. As can therefore be inferred in the book clinical psychiatric studies have contributed to phenomenal development and symptomatic study of quantitative

analysis: in the book we can find names of authors such as Kraepelin, Hamilton, Pichot, Spearman, Eysenck.

In the book there is a clinical-based measurement approach; Max Hamilton and John Overall use an evaluation practice based on the monitoring of treatment outcomes, for example using BPRS (Brief Psychiatric Rating Scale). Jacob Cohen highlighted the possibility of not identifying the presence of statistical significance, but rather the level of clinical significance, known as “effect size”.

This approach offers the reader the possibility of a reflection on the probabilistic dimension of gravity of the clinical presentation and also the evaluation of the dimension/variable/latent function that opens to the underlying clinical syndrome, of particular relevance in the diagnosis in clinical psychology.

Clinical observations

The implications of clinimetrics and guides the reader through the use of rating scale and the questionnaires in health settings, a clinician-administered rating scale referred to specific clinical phenomena.

In a preview book Bech presents the use of questionnaire and rating scales, brief and easy, important in diagnosis of mental disorders and monitoring of symptoms in treatment (Okkels et al., 2017).

The model derives from the scientific approach to the rating scales and to the twentieth-century drug-trials, in which we can trace an evolutionary line from Kraepelin to the current psychopharmacological treatment.

Thus, we can outline the called triangle-quality of life that is a model centered on the study of interactions between the desired clinical effects of a pharmacological treatment, its potential collateral effects and the relative quality of life reported by the patient. The goal is to use assessment scales starting from patients' symptoms. The clinical implications in the screening for depression and panic attacks in adolescent patients with epilepsy, has been reviewed by Carrozzino et al. (2016).

In a research of psychiatric comorbidity in Parkinson's Disease (PD), the severity of psychiatric symptoms has been evaluated from a clinimetric viewpoint, using the Hopkins Symptom Checklist (SCL-90-R) to show the construct validity focused on a measurement named scalability.

Clinimetric analyzes are useful in clinical practice and in psychological diagnosis, because they bring out not only the obvious symptoms, quantifying them, but also specific secondary psychiatric comorbidities, which at times, as suggested in the literature, are clinically serious markers of impaired daily functions (Willem et al., 2017; Carrozzino et al., 2018).

Conclusion

The assessment of psychological well-being and measurement in mental health, is also developed in the Per Bech's book, highlighting how the subjective concept of psychological well-being, also a subjective phenomenon, is based on an individual and emotional assessment, through which a subject judges his/her level of health. Research studies on the quality of life, usually with rating scales, i.e. MOS SF (36 item short version of the Medical Outcomes Studies (SF 36); WHO-5). The clinimetric approach offers the possibility of updating in psychodiagnosis, with studies and research using both patient-reported scales and clinician-reported scales, in a clinical vision of the "psychometric triangle" to promote the importance of balancing therapeutic and side effect and, also quality of life in a patient.

The clinimetric approach in psychological diagnosis, can highlight those comorbid psychopathological forms, which contribute to the diagnostic complexity of the patient's clinical picture, affecting the overall functioning of the quality of life and can be important elements for the purposes of a correct psychotherapeutic indication.

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