Application of psychology to everyday life

Lesson 7.1.1 | A Level issues, debates and methods

Core ideas

Application means using psychological evidence to understand, predict, prevent or improve behaviour in real situations.

Psychological applications can support work in schools, healthcare, policing, workplaces, families, media and public policy.

A strong application names a specific finding and shows exactly how it could guide a decision or intervention.

Controlled studies can suggest useful applications, but real-life settings may include stress, culture, cost, ethics and individual differences.

Specialist options often make application explicit, such as improving workplace safety, designing better job roles or supporting healthier behaviour.

Good evaluation explains both the practical value of an application and the limits of transferring evidence to a new context.

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Key terms

Everyday life: Real situations outside the research setting.

Intervention: An action designed to change, prevent or improve behaviour.

Practical value: The usefulness of research beyond describing a finding.

Transfer: Using evidence from one setting, sample or task in another context.

Ecological validity: How well research reflects real-world behaviour.

Generalisability: How far findings apply beyond the original participants or setting.

Policy: A rule, plan or decision made by an organisation or authority.

Further detail and evidence

Application is a justified use of a finding, theory or method in a real setting. State the psychological mechanism, the change proposed, the intended beneficiary and the outcome to be measured. A sensible suggestion is not proof that the intervention already works.

Clinical: telephone-assisted ERP can reduce travel demands. Consumer: a product comparison tool may support compensatory decisions. Health: a specific immunisation prompt addresses a different barrier from access support. Organisational: clear safety reporting can reveal near misses that accident totals omit.

Transfer depends on matching the original evidence to the new population, task and context. Compare cost, acceptability, feasibility, equity and unintended effects alongside effectiveness. The four specialist options share methods but make different claims about behaviour.

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Applying the ideas

Lovell's format included initial/final meetings and safeguards. Applying it means preserving the tested package's important features while evaluating access and outcomes in the new setting. It does not support replacing all professional contact with unsupported calls.

Worked example: A school wants to reduce exam anxiety and asks for one psychology-based idea. Which kind of evidence could be applied, and what caution should the school keep in mind? The school could apply evidence from health or clinical psychology on stress management, such as relaxation, imagery or coping strategies, to design support sessions before exams. The application is practical because it turns research on managing anxiety into an intervention for students. The school should be cautious because evidence from one sample or treatment setting may not work equally well for all ages, cultures or levels of anxiety.

Worked example: In a hospital, managers use research on rotating shifts to change night-work schedules. Why is this a good example of application to everyday life? This is a good application because research on shiftwork, sleep disruption and accidents is being used to change a real workplace schedule. The aim is to reduce tiredness and improve safety for staff and patients. It still needs evaluation because hospital staffing needs, worker preferences and local accident data may affect whether the change works in that setting.

Evaluation and connections

A laboratory effect can suggest an application without demonstrating its effectiveness in the field. Follow-up and suitable comparison groups help assess maintenance. Avoid treating larger spending, higher productivity or reduced service use as automatically better for every person. Identify whose outcome matters.