

Token Economies

Token economies:

- Form of behavioural therapy where desirable behaviours are encouraged by the use of selective reinforcement.
- Patients are given tokens as secondary reinforcers when they engage in socially desirable behaviours.
- Tokens can be exchanged for primary reinforcers like favourite foods or privileges.
- Used to manage the behaviour of schizophrenia patients who have developed maladaptive behaviour through spending long periods in psychiatric hospitals (institutionalisation).
- Attempt to challenge negative symptoms.
- Modifying bad habits does not cure schizophrenia but improves the patient's quality of life and makes it more likely that they can live outside of a hospital setting.

Tokens:

- Tokens are given immediately to patients when they have carried out a desirable behaviour that has been targeted for reinforcement.
- This could be getting dressed or making their bed.
- This immediacy of a reward is important because it prevents delay discounting – the reduced effect of a delayed reward.

Rewards:

- Tokens have no value in themselves but are later swapped for more tangible rewards.
- Token economies are behavioural therapy based on operant conditioning.
- Tokens are secondary enforcers because they only have value once the patient learns they can be used to obtain rewards.

Token economies: evaluation

Cannot cure:

- This psychological treatment of schizophrenia aim to improve quality of life but cannot cure schizophrenia.
- Token economies help by making patients' behaviour more socially acceptable so they can better reintegrate into society.
- These is valuable. However, a failure to cure symptoms is a weakness of token economies.

Ethical issues:

- Token economy systems have proved controversial.
- The major issue is that privileges become more available to patients with milder symptoms and less so for schizophrenics with severe symptoms, which prevent them from carrying out desirable behaviour.
- Most severely ill patients suffer discrimination in addition to other symptoms and families have challenged the legality of this.