

York College of The City University of New York
Social Work Program
SOCIAL WORK 360:HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Assessment Assignment

Aims

Upon completion of this assignment, the student will demonstrate the following:

- Skill in ordering complex data about individuals and families
- Using a social systems/ecological model of assessment
- Using major theories to describe human behavior
- Using a strengths perspective
- Skill in using APA format in the text and for the reference list.
- Use of basic library research skills.
- Knowledge of the ways of selecting concepts that are most relevant to a problem.

Essential Preparation

This assignment requires an assessment on a client and the client's family. The individual client usually comes to the agency for help, but often the family is also in need of assistance from the social agency. You will have to use your imagination to construct a client/family with certain problems, a social work setting from which the client/family is securing services, a family history, and the complex environment for the ecological transactions. You must consider: personality, class, roles, culture, organizational behavior, environment, biology, etc. All of you have some familiarity with social service agencies. You also know people with problems that might motivate them to secure services at a social service agency. You are now being asked to use this knowledge to develop a *fictionalized* transaction between the agency and the client.

Confidentiality

Social agencies do not have a right to gather information that has little potential use in helping the client. If an agency does so, it may be a violation of confidentiality. When your agency gives you a list of information to gather on a client, make sure you have a clear understanding of the reason for collecting each piece of data. If clients ask you the reason for asking a certain question, you should be able to explain the potential value of this information in the helping process.

Format of Assignment

The paper will be divided into five mini-papers. Each mini-paper will give you practice using the concepts learned in class and from the assigned readings, and applying them to a client assessment. Mini-papers will be read by the instructor and feedback will be provided. **Late mini-papers will not be accepted.** The final paper will be an assessment of your client that includes the mini-papers (re-worked with feedback).

Mini-Paper # 1 Presenting Problem
Length: 1-2 paragraphs
Due: 9/25

Describe the problem the client came for help about. The presenting problem is often the problem that can be spoken of with relatively little strain. Usually, when you explore the presenting problem, you will find that the person has related problems that are more difficult to speak about. Often, the person identified as the person needing help, or the “identified patient”, is not the family member who is experiencing the most severe problems.

Describe the referral source (the client, another agency, etc.). When clients are referred by other agencies, note the way the referral source prepared the client for the services of your agency. Does the client feel coerced into seeking help, or is the request for help voluntary? Clients who are mandated by some other source such as courts or child welfare, are often referred to as “involuntary” clients.

Mini-Paper # 2 Bio-Psycho-Social-Cultural Description of Client
Length: 2 pages
Due: 10/23

There are 4 sources of behavior to consider when making client assessments: Biological, Psychological, Social/Structural, and Cultural. Each of these must be considered simultaneously when developing a client assessment.

A. Biological Systems

In addition to inborn capacities, this domain includes all those elements necessary for the functioning of the organism, such as the skeletal, sensorimotor, respiratory, endocrine, circulatory, waste elimination, sexual-reproductive, digestive, and nervous systems. The biological system is affected by genetic endowments, disease, and accident. Its normal functioning differs across the life span.

Medical History

Explore and describe the client's medical history. If there are medical concerns, assess the impact of these concerns on client functioning. Is the client currently taking prescription drugs? For what condition?

Developmental History (Children and Adolescents)

If you are working with a child, you will need to take a developmental history. Some of the questions you will need to address are: Was the pregnancy planned? Was the pregnancy eventful? With low functioning clients and pregnant teens, you often ask about early medical care during the pregnancy. Birth complications should be explored. Ask about birth weight. Inquire about smoking, drug and alcohol use during pregnancy.

If you are able to secure the developmental history from the parent or caregiver of the child during early life, try to get some sense of the feelings this person had for the infant. You want to know about feeding patterns and problems. Was the child breastfed? How was the infant's health during the first year of life? Developmental milestones are necessary information. When did the child begin to walk and talk? Explore toilet training-when did the process begin? Was it problematic? How were problems handled? Sleeping patterns should also be explored.

B. Psychological Systems

The psychological domain is a group of inter-related subsystems made up of cognitive, motivational-affective, and behavioral states. Some also include a spiritual domain. Be sure to include the following:

The **cognitive subsystem** is comprised of cognitive states and processes-perception, sensation, memory, imagination, judgment, and language, intelligence and other aspects of intellectual functioning such as knowledge, beliefs, and opinions.

The **motivational-affective subsystem** is comprised of states and processes usually concerned with the internal emotional life of individuals-their motives, needs, drives, feelings, sentiments, and interests.

The **behavioral subsystem** is comprised of the ways in which individuals express themselves in action. Behaviors differ from cognitive and affective processes in that they always involve the actual things people say and do. Mannerisms, habits, and interpersonal skills are all behaviors.

Past Psychiatric History

Explore the presence of mental illness for the client and family. If illness is present, is the client receiving treatment? Assess the impact of illness on present functioning. If there is a history, what form of treatment did client receive? Was the client hospitalized? Is the client currently taking medication? Is the client compliant with medication?

Addictions-Alcohol and Other Drug Use (AOD)

Evaluate the both client and family current and past use of alcohol and other drugs. What drugs are/have been used? What is the frequency of use? What is the drug of choice? How are drugs obtained? What is the impact of drug and or alcohol use on daily functioning? Has treatment ever been sought? Describe current and past treatment for chemical dependency.

C. Social/Structural Systems

School History (Children and Adolescents)

Explore the following with the parent or caregiver: Age the child started school (head start, day care, nursery school); the child's adjustment to the new environment; separation from parent or caregiver; relationship with peers; academic ability and performance-does the child enjoy learning? Does the child have any aspirations? Is there involvement in extracurricular activities (older children and adolescents)?

Educational/Employment History (Adults)

How many years of formal education does the client have? Gather information about school performance. Did the client complete high school, college? If not, why not? What is the employment history (if any)? What are the vocational goals or aspirations?

Family History

The following concepts should be explored: Family roles, authority, structures; boundaries and subsystems within the family; triangulation; enmeshment; disengagement; scapegoating. Definitions should be clearly stated and referenced from your text(s), as you apply each concept. You should try to consider the personality of your client.

In this section try to reach back in time to the influence of past events on the present. The background of the parents, and the situation of the grandparents on both sides of the family is also important. Try to get a sense of how past experiences are used. You should also obtain an understanding of historical events that influence the development of each family member. Miscarriages and deaths of children should be mentioned in your narrative. In working with older clients, apply the life-course model. Try to get a view of the world in which they lived.

D. Cultural Systems

Ethnicity, Immigrant Status

Consider the client and family system's cultural background. Culture may define the client and practitioner's perspective of the problem and the treatment options. Cultural factors may impact on the interaction between you and your client.

The majority of the population you may be working with will have deep roots in other parts of the country and the world. You may need to supplement your understanding of the culture of your client through readings, but you can also ask the client to educate you.

When people move to an urban environment from other places, there are often problems with the transition. Explore some of the stresses and hopes, and describe problems of making cultural transitions to a new environment.

Mini-Paper # 3 Social Systems/Ecological Approach
Length: 1-2 pages
Due: 11/6

A systems approach is an orienting framework rather than a specific theory of human behavior. It operates from 2 underlying assumptions:

1. Systems must be understood in an ecological context. The state or condition of a system, at any one point in time, is a function of the interaction between it and the environment in which it operates.
2. Systems are always emerging, and therefore change and conflict are always evident in them.

Using a systems approach, describe your client's systems using the terminology learned in class. Be sure to describe the client and his or her environment as systems. Refer to the following terms:

Social Systems Theory (biological domain, psychological domain, wholeness, open system, closed system, homeostasis)

Ecological Theory (steady state, niche, habitat, holon, dyad, boundaries, coping/adaptation, stress)

Mini-Paper # 4 Strengths Perspective
Length: 1-2 pages
Due: 11/20

A Strengths Perspective in social work involves identifying personal strengths and resources of clients and building on the existing abilities and resources of clients and their social environment.

While keeping the focus on the primary concerns of the client, assess the strengths/resources and obstacles that are present that impact on the client's functioning and the fit of client/environment. Strengths/resources are used in a broad sense to include ego-strengths, athletic ability, good health, good looks, adequate income, etc. Obstacles might include the client's lack of impulse control, poor judgment, low intelligence, lack of adequate housing, poor schools, lack of understanding of the client's special needs by social agencies.

Mini-Paper # 5 **Major Theories**
Length: **1-2 pages**
Due: **12/4**

A theory is a logical system of concepts that provides a framework for organizing and understanding observations. Theories can be useful tools for formulating an understanding of a client's problem. Each theory has a set of assumptions about the causes of the presenting problem and its resolution. Whatever the choice of theory, a social worker's actions are not random, but tend to reflect theories that he or she accepts and uses.

Using assigned readings and drawing on class lectures, **choose one major theory** that will describe your client's behavior. In this mini-paper, you will:

- A. Name the theory and the person associated with the theory
- B. Give a history of the theory
- C. Describe the major components of the theory
- D. Explain the client's behavior using the theory

Final Paper **Assessment of Client**
Length: **6-8 pages (does not include cover and reference list)**
Due: **12/11**

Your final paper should consist of each of the five mini-papers, re-worked into a final, comprehensive client assessment. You may use sub-headings to organize your paper.

* **Add a conclusion to your paper, giving a summary of your client.**

References (Minimum of 5)

Your assessments will most likely include some problems of which you have relatively little knowledge. For example, you might have included: cancer, heart ailments, developmental disability, chemical dependency, HIV, mental illness, sexual abuse, etc. No social worker is familiar with all of the difficulties that people encounter. Therefore, social workers should repeatedly seek library resources to add to our fund of knowledge.

This part of the assignment requires you to seek information from the Encyclopedia of Social Work, books, and at least 2 social work journal articles published within the last 3 years. YOUR REFERENCES MUST BE RELATED TO YOUR CLIENT'S PROBLEM AN/OR DEVELOPMENTAL LIFE STAGE (i.e., teenage alcoholics or depression in older adults). Make sure that you have read the material that you have referenced. This will assist you in learning how to use library resources, including databases, to find suitable journal articles.

APA Style

The text of the paper, quotations, and the reference list must be done in APA style. Leave plenty of time for this last step. Try to incorporate it as you write. Use the APA manual for any aspect of the composition of the paper on which you have questions. APA style should be used for paragraph indentations, margins, pagination, citations in the text and for your reference list. Attach the pages with a stapler. It is not necessary to use folders. Place a cover sheet on the front of your paper. Include *only* your name, the name of the assignment, semester, and date. Pages should be numbered in the upper right corner. Refer to the APA manual regarding margins and headings.