

The PIE System

Structure of the PIE System

PIE provides a systematic approach to assessing the social functioning problems and strengths experienced by the clients of social workers and other human service practitioners. When used in practice, it can produce descriptions that are concise, uniform, and easily understood by both clients and practitioners. The PIE system requires that every client be described on each of several dimensions called “factors.” Each factor refers to a different class of information. For a classification system to have maximum usefulness, there must be sufficient data to provide an adequate picture of the client, but not so much as to overwhelm or befuddle those who would use the system to plan interventions.

There are four factors in the PIE system. The first two factors constitute the core social work description. The second two factors identify mental and physical health problems using classification systems from other professions. All four factors are needed to provide a comprehensive picture of a client’s problems. A Strengths component is also included for each factor. Wherever there is a problem, looking for strengths often can be used as a starting point for intervention. Identification of client strengths may foster hope by focusing on what is or has been successful for the client.

The PIE system describes the client’s problem complex in the following format:

Factor I Social Functioning Problems: type, severity, duration, coping ability and strengths

Factor II Environmental Problems: severity, duration and resources or strengths

Factor III Mental Health Problems and Strengths
Factor IV Physical Health Problems and Strengths

On Factor I the practitioner identifies the client’s social role problems. There can be and usually are more than one Factor I problem. The practitioner also identifies each problem’s type, the severity of the disruption caused by the problem, the duration of the problem, the client’s coping capacity for dealing with each problem and notable or possible client strengths.

On Factor II the practitioner identifies not only the environmental conditions or problems affecting Factor I problems, but also the severity of the disruption caused by each problem and each problem’s duration. There can also be more than one Factor II problem. It is also important to identify community strengths or resources.

Factors I and II form the core description of a client’s social functioning problems and strengths and generally are the primary focus of social work intervention.

Factors III and IV describe the client’s mental and physical health condition. These may affect social functioning but are not necessarily the direct focus of the social work practitioner, although many social work practitioners are trained and licensed to treat mental disorders.

This separation of problems into four factors and the primacy given to social role and environmental problems are intended to emphasize the importance of the client’s social functioning—a focus that frequently is difficult to maintain when attention is directed to the usually more vivid Factors III and IV. Thus, the social worker’s emphasis is on the social role or environmental problems of a client who may also have a mental or physical disorder. Although the primary focus of PIE is not on the mental and physical problems, interventions may and often do include medical and psychological treatment.

Factor III permits the practitioner to indicate any current mental, personality, or developmental disorder or condition that is potentially relevant to the understanding of or intervention with the individual. These conditions are listed on Axes I and II of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition-text revision* (DSM-IV-TR) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). It is assumed that the practitioner is familiar with the use of DSM-IV TR or can obtain consultation on assessing mental disorders. Thus, the use of DSM-IV TR is not discussed in detail in this manual.

Factor IV permits the practitioner to indicate any current physical disorder or condition that is potentially relevant to the understanding or management of the social role or environmental problems of a client. Factor IV is equivalent to Axis III in DSM-IV-TR. These are the conditions exclusive of the mental disorders section of the *International Classification of Diseases-10 Revision-Clinical Modification* (ICD-10-CM) (World Health Organization, 2005). Some practitioners may wish to use the newly developing International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) (World Health Organization, 2007), which complements the ICD-10. The social worker should inquire routinely about any significant physical problems and record the results of this inquiry on Factor IV. As a professional who is not licensed to make physical diagnoses, the social worker should note the source of the information. For example, the worker might record the results of an intake evaluation and note on

Factor IV "Diabetes (by report of the client)," or "Asthma (diagnosed by Dr. X)," or "Client reports no physical problems."

In some instances, a client's physical condition may be an important source of social role or environmental problems (for example, AIDS in a client with a Lover Role Problem, loss type). In another instance the physical disorder may not be the source of the client's problems, but it may be important in planning an overall intervention strategy (for example, genital herpes in a person with a Spouse Role Problem, ambivalence type). In yet another instance, the practitioner may wish to note significant associated physical findings (for example, history of heart attacks in a client with a Worker Role Problem, loss type). The practitioner should refer to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10) for further information pertaining to coding on this factor. If ICD-10 is unavailable, the practitioner may describe the physical disorder in lay language (for example, severe asthma as reported by client).

REFERENCES

American Psychiatric Association. (2000). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (4th ed.-text rev.). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.

World Health Organization. (2007). *International classification of diseases-10 revision-clinical modification* Available at: <http://www.who.int/classifications/apps/icd/icd10online/>

World Health Organization. (2001). *International classification of functioning, disability and health*. Available from: www.disableitaincifre.it/documenti/ICF_18.pdf.

How to Use PIE in Practice

Ideally we conduct and record an assessment that covers all the major aspects of a client's functioning. This task consumes time and can feel burdensome, especially for the conscientious. The PIE System helps to sort and classify the complex data our client may present in a timely and efficient way so necessary in the hurried atmosphere of today's workplace.

Do not be put off by the PIE System's length and complexity. The small amount of time spent learning to use it will soon be paid back, with the benefit of thorough and professional results.

General Guidelines

The following are the general guidelines, the practitioner needs to consider when using the PIE System.

Return to Optimal Social Functioning. In the philosophy underlying the PIE System, the primary goal is to help clients live their lives as fully as possible—to function as well as possible and deal effectively with environmental and physical and mental health conditions. The PIE system helps both you and your client achieve a clear, comprehensive picture of what is needed to reach this goal. Also, the PIE system helps reduce the power barrier between client and social worker by placing the social worker in the role of partner or guide.

Terms and Concepts. Before recording case findings, be certain you understand the terms and concepts used in the PIE system. Consult the PIE Manual for descriptions and definitions of the terms used. The PIE Book can be consulted if you have questions about the concepts and theories utilized in the PIE system.

Hands-Free Interviews. In most cases, findings are recorded **after** the initial assessment interview(s),

which may be conducted in the practitioner's personal style. This allows for a freer presentation by the client and less distraction for the clinician.

PIE is NOT an Interview Guide. Neither the PIE Worksheet nor the CompuPIE software program should be used as an interview guide. Work with your client in your usual style using the theoretical framework that suits you best.

Unrestricted Problem Identification. You may record as many problems as are identified in the assessment. In most cases more than one problem will be found. However, there need not be a problem on each factor.

Strengths Perspective. PIE encourages practitioners to look beyond problems to identify the client's coping capacities and strengths as well as assets and resources in the environment. This will help you to evaluate the client's potential for helping himself/herself and for using environmental resources.

Planning Interventions. The PIE System includes an element for recording proposed interventions and expected outcomes useful in case management or for evidence based practice. The manual provides a partial list of common interventions to facilitate planning.

Adult Version. This edition of the PIE System is for use with adults, defined as people 18 years old or older or an emancipated minor under 18. Assessment of children's conditions is often facilitated by using a PIE assessment with the parent or guardian of the child.

Tools for Recording

The CompuPIE software program and the PIE Worksheet will help you record the findings of your assessment.

1. CompuPIE is a copyrighted software program for recording assessments based on the PIE system.

The CompuPIE software compiles findings into a PIE Assessment Summary more easily than is possible manually. CompuPIE requires the availability of Microsoft Access.

2. The PIE System Worksheet is a printed form that contains all the elements of the PIE System. It is used to record findings manually. The PIE System Worksheet is not copyrighted and may be reproduced as many times as necessary. (See pages 34-46)

The Assessment Process Using the PIE System

As described in chapter 1 a PIE System assessment encompasses four areas called "Factors"

- Factor I Social Role and Relationship Functioning
- Factor II Environmental Conditions affecting Client Functioning (Social Support Systems)
- Factor III Mental Health Functioning
- Factor IV Physical Health Functioning

For each PIE factor there are four steps in the assessment:

- (1) Problem Identification
- (2) Identification of Strengths and Resources
- (3) Intervention Plan
- (4) Assessment Summary

The succinct formula of Problem Identification, Strengths Identification, and Recommended Intervention applied to each of the four PIE factors will help clarify your thinking about your client and the client's environment and the effects of mental and physical health conditions. And, when you are familiar with the terms and concepts, you will be able to record an assessment in record time using the CompuPIE software or slightly longer using the manual PIE System Worksheet. You will be pleased with how complete and clear your assessment is and how easily colleagues and clients can understand it.

The description of the assessment process that follows gives a step-by-step picture of the process. Because the steps are similar in each Factor there is some repetition. To do a thorough assessment you will need to take these steps. Once you have learned the procedure the process will run quickly and smoothly. The items in

parentheses after each question refer to the locale in the PIE Worksheet and CompuPIE where the finding is recorded

Factor I: Social Role and Relationship Functioning

Step 1: Problem Identification

Factor I identifies the problem(s) that the client is experiencing in social role and relationship functioning. The PIE system asks you to identify:

- (1) In what social role(s) or relationship(s) is the client having a problem (Role)?
- (2) What kind of problem is it (Type)?
- (3) How significant is the problem (Severity)?
- (4) How long has the problem existed (Duration)?

Step 2: Identification of Strengths and Resources

In the course of the assessment the practitioner using the PIE System will have identified strengths and resources in two areas:

- (1) the client's ability to cope with each problem identified and
- (2) the presence of positive social roles or relationships. (For example, there may be **somewhat inadequate** ability to cope with a problem in the occupational role but **outstanding** functioning in relationship with a spouse or family member)

In regard to Strengths and Resources the PIE system asks you to identify:

- (1) how well the client can cope with each social role problem at the present time (Coping Ability)
- (2) in what social role or relationship is the client showing a strength that may be useful in working on the presenting problem(s) (Other Strengths)

Step 3: Intervention Plan

In following the PIE System format you will have entered, either using the CompuPIE software or the PIE Worksheet, a recommended intervention and other data for each problem or condition you identified on Factor I. You will have recorded:

- (1) A possible goal related to this problem (for example, reconciliation, return to employment)
- (2) What intervention you recommend (Intervention)?
- (3) Who is to work with the client (Refer to)?
- (4) What is the expected outcome? (Outcome)

Step 4: Assessment Summary

A crucial next step consists of transferring the problems and conditions identified in Factors I to the Assessment Summary and Intervention Plan part of the PIE System Worksheet (refer to the accompanying PIE Assessment Worksheet for the specifics on this). You will have answered:

- (1) How many and what kind of social role and relationship problems have been identified?
- (2) What strengths have been identified?
- (3) What interventions are recommended?
- (4) What practitioner or agency is expected to work with the client?
- (5) What is the goal of the intervention and the expected outcome?

Factor II: Environmental Situations (Social Support Systems)

Step 1: Problem Identification

In PIE the term “environment” or “environmental situations” refers to natural helping networks, social support systems, and social institutions that exist in most communities.

Factor II identifies problems the client is experiencing within any of the six System Types used in PIE (Basic Needs; Education and Training; Judicial and Legal; Health, Safety, and Social Services; Voluntary Association; and Affectional Support). These are problems in the client’s **current** environment that affect social functioning. In Step 1 the PIE System asks:

- (1) Is the client experiencing a problem in any of the environmental systems? Which system is it? Basic Needs; Education and Training; Judicial and Legal; Health, Safety, and Social Services; Voluntary Association; or Affectional Support? In what part or aspect of the system is the problem located? (Type)
- (2) What kind of problem is it? (Type) Is it absence of shelter, lack of education facilities, lack of confi-

dence in police services, inaccessible health services, no community support groups, or other type listed in the PIE Manual and on the PIE Worksheet?

- (3) How significant is the problem (Severity)
- (4) How long has this situation been a factor in the client’s life (Duration)?
- (5) Is the client having problems in environmental situations because of who they are or their status in society (Discrimination).

Discrimination in the community social support system due to age, sexual orientation, disability status, and so forth, is a special category in Factor II. When discrimination is detected in any of the situations in Factor II, it is recorded in the Factor II statement along with a recommended intervention. Refer to the Discrimination Index for a list of types of discrimination.

Step 2: Resources

In Step 2 the PIE System identifies the agencies, institutions or social support systems that can provide resources or opportunities to the client (Resources). It determines whether there are services in the community that can help with the client’s current problems. Using the type listings on the PIE System Worksheet you can identify a community resource and can provide detailed information about it in the Narrative and Comments Section of the PIE Worksheet. For example, a well functioning housing program can help with the client who is homeless and would be entered on the Worksheet as Basic Needs, Shelter. An accessible mental health service would be entered as Health/Mental Health. An accessible religious group can provide for a client’s spiritual needs and would be entered under Voluntary Associations, Religious Groups.

The PIE System question addressed is:

- (1) In which of the systems in Factor II are there resources/strengths to address the client’s situation? (Resources)

Step 3: Intervention Plan

As in Factor I, following the PIE System format, you will have entered, either on the PIE Worksheet or the CompuPIE software, a recommended intervention and other case management data that might be used for each problem or condition you identified on Factor II. You will have recorded:

- (1) What is the recommended intervention (Intervention)?
- (2) Who is to work with the client (Refer to)?
- (3) What is the goal of the intervention (Goal)?
- (4) What is the expected outcome? (Outcome)

Step 4: Assessment Summary

Problems and situations identified in Factor II are transferred to the Assessment Summary and Intervention Plan part of the PIE System Worksheet. Practitioner findings answer the questions:

- (1) How many and what kind of Environmental Situation problems have been identified?
- (2) What community resources potentially useful in helping the client have been identified?
- (3) What interventions are recommended?
- (4) What practitioner or agency is expected to work with the client?
- (5) What is the goal of the intervention
- (6) What is the expected outcome?

Factor III: Mental Health Functioning

Factor III describes the client's Mental Health Functioning using either the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) or other mental health diagnostic systems such as the International Classification of Diseases or International Classification of Functioning to describe the client's mental health condition.

Step 1: Problem Identification

The PIE System asks:

- (1) Is there a clinical syndrome? What is the DSM Axis or other diagnostic system diagnosis? (Diagnosis)
- (2) Is there an enduring characteristic? Is there a personality disorder and/or mental retardation using the DSM Axis II or other diagnostic system diagnosis? (Diagnosis)
- (3) How significant is the problem? (Severity)
- (4) How long has the client had this condition? (Duration)

Step 2: Strengths

The PIE System asks:

- (1) How well does the client cope with the mental health condition? (Coping)
- (2) Are there notable mental health strengths (for example, intelligence, resilience, self identity, spiritual awareness) (Other Strengths)

Step 3: Intervention Plan

The PIE System asks:

- (1) What is the goal of the intervention (Goal)?
- (2) What is the recommended intervention (Intervention)?
- (3) Who is to work with the client (Refer to)?
- (4) What is the expected outcome (Outcome)?

Step 4: Assessment Summary

Problems and situations identified in Factors III are transferred to the Assessment Summary and Intervention Plan part of the PIE System Worksheet. Practitioner findings answer the questions:

- (1) How many and what kind of mental health conditions have been identified?
- (2) How severe is each?
- (3) How long has the client had the condition?
- (4) What is the goal of the intervention
- (5) What interventions are recommended?
- (6) What practitioner or agency is expected to work with the client?
- (7) What is the expected outcome?

Factor IV: Physical Health Functioning

Factor IV describes the client's Physical Health Functioning by enumerating the physical health problems identified by the client or others.

Step 1: Problem Identification

The PIE System asks:

- (1) Is there a medical condition as diagnosed by a physician or other licensed medical practitioner (Diagnosed Condition)?
- (2) What additional health conditions does the client or others report? (Other conditions)

- (3) How significant is each condition? (Severity)
- (4) How long has the client had each condition? (Duration)

Step 2: Strengths and Resources

The PIE System asks:

- (1) How well does the client cope with each physical health condition(s) (Coping)?
- (2) Are there notable physical health strengths (for example, vigor, stamina) (Strength)?

Step 3: Intervention

The PIE System asks:

- (1) What is the recommended intervention for each condition (Intervention)?
- (2) Who is to work with the client (Refer to)?
- (3) What is the goal of the intervention (Goal)?
- (4) What is the expected outcome (Outcome)?

Step 4: Assessment Summary

Problems and situations identified in Factors IV are transferred to the Assessment Summary and Intervention Plan part of the PIE System Worksheet. Practitioner findings answer the questions:

- (1) How many and what kind of physical health conditions have been identified?
- (2) What interventions are recommended?
- (3) What practitioner or agency is expected to work with the client?
- (4) What is the goal of the interventions?
- (5) What is the expected outcome?

Summing It All Up

The Assessment Summary and Intervention Plan

The combined findings from all four factors provide you with the comprehensive picture that is the goal of the PIE

assessment process. The beauty of the PIE System is in its helping you take a mass of complex client information, sort it out, and then create a succinct yet comprehensive picture of the client's situation. With a clearer focus on problems, strengths, resources, and possible interventions, the task of deciding how, when, and where to begin constructive work with the client is that much easier. You will be able to decide more clearly the issues that can be dealt with by the client without practitioner help, those that you or your agency can address, and those that might be referred to others. Both the PIE Worksheet and the CompuPIE software lend themselves to modifying findings as new information is received about the client's condition or situation

To create a comprehensive yet succinct summary of assessment findings you use the "Assessment Summary and Intervention Plan" document (p.xx in the manual). Enter your findings on the worksheet or on the CompuPIE program. The resulting document becomes both the case record and the plan for proceeding in work with the client or, in the case of Factor II, with the environment.

Setting priorities for intervention can be facilitated by using the severity and duration indicators. PIE helps the practitioner plan interventions more effectively by identifying those problems or conditions that are of high priority and those less urgent. A problem of recent onset with high severity is usually of higher priority than a problem of long duration and of low severity. Assessing strengths can be an important tool for mobilizing capacities and competences in both the individual and his/her environment.

Case History, Dynamics, and Comments

Because of the succinctness of the PIE Summary and Intervention plan, some practitioners find it useful to provide background history, explain the dynamics in the situation from their theoretical perspective, or note issues to explore in future work with the client. The worksheet provides space for this under the title: Clinical Notes, Case Analysis, and Interpretation of Findings.