

# Societal case formulation

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This is in the form of a teaching example but should also be helpful in working in psychological consultations as a corrective to the individualistic assumptions of orthodox 'clinical case formulation'. The approach is based directly on the framework in Peter Leonard's 1984 book, *Personality and Ideology: Towards a Materialist Understanding of the Individual* London: Macmillan.



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***Choose a person with whom you have recently been working. Try to answer the following questions:  
For each section make a note of any difficulties you had in providing the information requested.***

1. The individual in the economy.

- What paid work does the person do? How has this changed over the life span?
- What unpaid work does the person do? How has this changed over the life span?
- How well off / poor is the person materially? How has this changed over the life span?
- How pressured is the person in terms of their time - to what extent do they have time of their own? How has this changed over the life span?

- What are the person's patterns of commodity consumption: in what ways does the person construct their own identity through consumption of goods from the market? How has this changed over the life span?

Summary: *the economy* structures this person's experiences, actions, and identity in these ways: .....

Difficulties in completing this section.

2. The person in the family

- What has been this person's experience of family life?
  
- What is the person's position in terms of gender and age hierarchies? What is their relative power at home? How has this changed over the life span?
  
- How has the person's socialisation within the family contributed to their expectations, beliefs, values, skills, actions? How has this changed over the life span (e.g. have they accepted this or rebelled against it)?
  
- How does the person's past and present experience of family life affect their beliefs about the desirability and inevitability of present social arrangements, their view of the (just / unjust) world?

Summary: experience of *the family* structures this person's experiences, actions, and identity in these ways: .....

Difficulties in completing this section.

3. The person and the state.

- How does the person relate to dominant definitions of what is 'normal' and what is 'deviant'? Has this led to significant experiences in relation to mental health, social services, criminal justice, or educational systems?
- How has the person been treated by the educational system in relation to gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, or impairments?
- How has the person been treated by the workplace, welfare, criminal justice, and health systems in relation to gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, or impairments?
- Has, or does, the person experience any particular dependence on the state or its agencies (e.g. through social security)? Does this impose a low level of resources or otherwise limit autonomy?
- How does the person see the state, its agencies, and its officials? (e.g. is the person awed by professionals and other functionaries, or cynical, disrespectful?)

Summary: experience of *the state* structures this person's experiences, actions, and identity in these ways: .....

Difficulties in completing this section.

Now consider how the above factors combine. Consider how the person has incorporated and resisted the various societal determinants. How has this created them as a unique individual?

Consider how you have previously understood the determination of the person's presenting problems. Consider to what extent you might modify (reject, amend, transform, qualify, explain) that psychological formulation in societal - psychological terms.

Difficulties in completing this section.

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