

# Psychiatric assessment: A word to the WISE

**M**ost clinicians can easily identify the biological and psychological aspects of mental illness, but the social components often are overlooked.<sup>1</sup> These include a negative life event, familial or interpersonal stressor, environmental difficulty or deficiency, or inadequate social support.<sup>2</sup>

We have found that these significant psychosocial factors listed in DSM-IV-TR<sup>2</sup> can be easily assessed using the mnemonic, “Family and friends with a WISE HALO.”

**Family and friends.** Stressful events include family disruption by divorce or separation; illness or death of family members; neglect; emotional, physical or sexual abuse; remarriage of a parent; or birth or adoption of a new sibling.

**Work.** Stressors associated with work include actual or perceived job loss, difficult working conditions, irregular schedules, difficulty getting along with superiors or coworkers, and job dissatisfaction.

**Income.** Poverty and inadequate finances can influence the patient’s mental health.

**Social environment.** Problems with living alone, poor support, difficulty with acculturation, and discrimination are some possible difficulties.

**Education.** Learning problems, conflicts with teachers and classmates, bullying, and illiteracy could harm your patient’s mental health.

**Housing.** Stressors include homelessness, unsafe neighborhoods, and problems with a landlord.

**Access to health care services.** Inadequate access to health care, lack of medical insurance, and absence of transportation can influence your patient’s care.

**Legal.** Arrest, incarceration, ongoing lawsuits, and being the perpetrator or victim of a crime are included here.

**Others.** This catchall category includes exposure to disasters or wars and unavailability of social services.

After identifying the psychosocial issues affecting your patient, assimilate this information into a biopsychosocial formulation and treatment plan. Interventions could include referrals for individual and family therapy, bereavement and support groups, recreational therapy, or to subsidized housing programs or job training.

## References

1. Campbell WH, Rohrbach RM. *The biopsychosocial formulation manual. A guide for mental health professionals*. New York: Routledge; 2006:63-70.
2. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, 4<sup>th</sup> ed, text rev.* Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association; 2000.

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