

# Assessing Situations of Psychic Disability

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**Abstract** A national research on the assessment of situations of disability of psychic origin in France, in 15 of the 100 French districts, involved more than 300 persons. Based on ICF, the results show the weight of the environments, the relevance of a triple expertise (persons-close relations-professionals), the dynamic process of assessment and the limits of the assessment tools to reflect the dynamic and interactive process of assessment.

## Introduction

Even if the French frame-law (ACT 2005-102 "Equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship of disabled persons") does not define the notion of "psychic disability", it officially established that, in the person's environment, a « psychic impairment » could lead to limitations of activities or restrictions of social participation that constitute "a situation of disability of psychic origin".

Such disability situations are entitled to compensation measures, as part of the right to disability compensation established by the law. However these situations are **difficult to assess** due to the multiple characteristics of psychic impairments, to the changeability and unpredictability of the phases of mental diseases.

The National Fund of Solidarity for Independent Living (Caisse Nationale de Solidarité pour l'Autonomie /CNSA) issued a request for proposals to explore possible solutions targeted at those specific situations, as part of an assessment program of the needs of the people in situations of disability.

Our survey lasted over **30** months (2007-2009) and took place in **15** of the 100 French districts (covering about 16 million inhabitants). 7 researchers, **300** social or health care professionals, users and personal assistants/carers) took part in it. The survey focused on an in-depth analysis of **120** situations of psychic disability (80 adults and 40 children) and **42** interviews.

The situations taken into account in the survey were limited to the persons who had applied for a disability compensation plan at the local offices for disabled persons, on the basis of a medical certificate of mental health disorder. The survey did not include the numerous situations of persons who did not claim anything. Further work should be done on this population to complete the current results.

## Methods & Materials

Previous to the field survey, a review of the main tools used in the English-speaking and French-speaking world (32 tools) was implemented. This review contains a methodological proposal on the "assessment process of situations of disability of psychic origin".

In each district, the researchers worked with the assessment team of the local office for persons with disabilities and with a mental health team.

The assessment tool used by the local offices is the **multidimensional assessment guide** (GEVA) based on ICF. (Weblink to GEVA: [http://www.cnsa.fr/rubrique.php3?id\\_rubrique=131](http://www.cnsa.fr/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=131)).

The **main parts** are

- the individual life plan
- the impact of the disease or disorder on activities, taking into account the changeability and remissions of those
  - the performance of activities in the different life domains participating in social well-being, and their possible limitations or restrictions
  - environmental facilitators and barriers (material, human, cultural and social).

5 days of work over eight months in each district (8 situations in each district) allowed to collect information among the concerned persons, their close relations and professionals involved in each situation and to develop individualized compensation plans.

40 interviews with the persons and/or their close relations focused on their own perception of the situation and of the assessment process.

The research team provided syntheses of each stage of the survey, submitted to a national steering committee composed of concerned persons', families', ministries', CNSA's representatives and other qualified persons.

A technical seminar gathered then sixty members of the survey.

## Results

**The weight of environments:** The social and home contexts, the life and housing conditions, the availability of health and social care services make the difference between the various situations, whatever the mental disorder is.

**A dynamic process:** The personal life plan as well as the assessment are processes that are built progressively according to "inter relations" weaving or not between the "actors".

**Limits of the tools:** GEVA or ICF categories are insufficient and inadequate to take in account the changeability of disorders and their intermittent repercussions: what we need to know to understand activity limitations is not the capacity but the performance. It is the interaction between disorders and environments that builds up the situation of disability.

## Conclusions

- The development of an individualized life plan and the assessment of the situation are **interactive processes** embedded in time and relational dynamics.
- The relevance of a global assessment rests on the **collated assessments triptych**: the one by the concerned persons, the one by close relations, and the one by professionals.
- The assessment process cannot be isolated from the local **organization of resources**.
- The different needs and provisions are **interdependent** and require the possibility of linking them (accommodation, accompaniment, care, financial resources, activities, protection).
- Situations of disability of psychic origin (more than any other situation of disability) require **flexibility and reactivity** in order to assess and accompany the persons. This flexibility and this reactivity included in a continuous assessment underline the necessity of a careful attention and watch on the territory. The research has underscored such requirements. The results confirm also the importance of the "**mutual assistance groups**", (self-help groups of persons with mental health disorders, without professionals and supported by public funds).