

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SYSTEM FOR CLASSIFYING THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONING PROBLEMS OF CHILDREN

Dr Rika Swanzen ([rika@swanzen.com](mailto:rika@swanzen.com)) Lecturer, Child and Youth Development, Monash University

**ABSTRACT** During 2002-2005 a classification system for categorising the social functioning problems of children (0-18 years) were developed by the author. The system was intended to provide a uniform language for social workers. At the 17<sup>th</sup> Biennial NACCW conference in 2009 with the theme *Complimentary Social Service Professions Integrating to serve children and families*, the author argued that the *ChildPIE*© can possibly serve as a tool to integrate the social service professions. An overview of the development process was given with an orientation towards the benefits linked to the use of a classification system. This would also be the focus of this article.

## INTRODUCTION

The social work profession has its origin from the charity movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century which started in Great Britain and the United States of America. This movement committed itself to the improvement of the conditions under which the poor and disadvantaged of society lived. Together with the provision of basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter, the movement also attempted to relieve the distress of the clients and their families and to address the external forces responsible for the conditions in which they lived. The first social workers became the friendly home visitors, which led to helpers leaving their offices and moving away from the „doctor-patient-model“ (Nichols and Schwartz, 1995: 18).

Similarly the child and youth care profession has its origin in advocating the plight of vulnerable children and their families within often barren communities. As Beukes and (1996) stated that it was said of the “twentieth century as being „The Century of the Child“ and it is true that this century has been one which recognised children as children, and has seen the most important developments in child psychology, child welfare and education. Many writers have added to our knowledge of child development. In the UK in 1946 the Curtis Report made strong recommendations regarding the training of residential workers. Legislation at that time emphasised the importance of the biological family and the effort needed to restore the child to his family”. In the United States the White House Conference on child welfare issues, held every ten years, started in 1909 and during this century has given impetus to all movements concerned with the welfare of children and their families, including the child care movement. One consequence of the 1909 White House Conference on children was the foundation of the Child Welfare League of America. The concept of “milieu treatment” has strongly influenced child care work. August Aichhorn, Bruno Bettelheim and Fritz Redl, through the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, developed ideas of using the total „life space“ of the child to promote emotional health and effect change (Beukes and Gannon, 1996).

It can therefore be argued that the common ground of the social service professions to see the child client within his context instead of from an orientation of dysfunction, can be the adoption of a system that allows communication about the child client across different professions as well as across various fields of practice and methodologies used by practitioners.

The developers of the Person-in-Environment (PIE) classification systems for adults, Karls and Wandrei (1994: 4-5) state that: “*We need to recognize that present diagnostic, legal, and social labels do not describe how people function. Without a consistent vocabulary we can never get to a reasonable application of the case management objective. So long as the definitions of problems are made unilaterally by each helping agent there can be no clarity of boundaries of rational and workable assignment of responsibilities.*” The PIE classification system is meant to capture both the

problems and resources or strengths in (a) social role functioning (the performance of daily activities in family, intimate, interpersonal, occupational, and special roles as well as focusing on the struggles and problems in power relationships, problems of ambivalence, dependence, isolation, and the like) and (b) environmental problems and supports, including the economic/needs-meeting, judicial, educational/training, health, welfare, and safety systems (Saleebey, 2004).

### **THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ChildPIE ©**

The problem with merely using the existing PIE was that it could only be used on adults and because of the strong focus of the South African government on the empowerment of youth, the author received permission from the developers of PIE to develop a version for children and youth. The original developer Prof James Karls acted as external reviewer and examiner of the development. Various theoretical models were used to get to a system which social service practitioners can identify with at face value. The conceptual development can be studied in the author's thesis (see references).

The research method used by the author fell under Applied Research and the primary model used was Design and Development (by Rothman and Thomas, 1994). Developmental research is born from the need for technology, which is the technical means by which a profession achieves its objectives (De Vos, Schurink and Strydom 1998: 9). The study had both qualitative and quantitative attributes, literature and feedback from colleagues played a huge role in the development and data gathered from the interrater study gave information on the reliability of the tool. Creswell's (1994) in De Vos (1998: 360) calls this a mixed methodology approach.

One of the most important steps during the development was to operationalise concepts into categories or elements that can be observed in practice. Annexure 1 demonstrates these operationalised categories and subcategories. From these descriptions or definitions for each category were created that represented the meaning found in literature – indicators that will alert the social worker to the presence of the social functioning problem in the child. The author then had to apply the categories to a format (appearance) similar to that of the PIE classification system for adults. Annexure 2 shows what the first part of this tool looks like. The tool and definitions becomes a manual for use by practitioners and sufficient training is needed before it can be used.

In field-testing the classification system (to prove that it is a valid tool for use in practice) the researcher used snowball sampling to be referred to people viewed as experts in the field of measurement and/or services to children. She trained a group of 5 social workers between the ages of 30 and 35 in the use of the system who then administered it on 16 case studies (on the same day), and 3 of these workers also participated in the second pilot study where they applied it to 25 case studies (in their own time). Their findings were compared to determine *interrater-reliability* – meaning the agreement among the ratings were statistically determined. The author also gave the sample a questionnaire to obtain feedback on their experience with the system. Suggestions for change from PANEL discussions, interrater-reliability results and the questionnaire were incorporated and the system was improved to allow for the second testing.

With regard to reliability, which refers to accuracy – the degree of consistency or agreement between two independently derived sets of scores (Hudson, 1981 in De Vos and Fouche, 1998: 83 & 85), the author had to determine whether the raters agreed 80% or more (70% might be acceptable) in their ratings. If so, one can assume that the amount of random error in the measurement is not excessive (Rubin and Babbie, 1993: 170). The results showed that the social roles had 80% interrater reliability which is sufficient to accept that the constructs used are reliable, but the problem

types scored 2% below 70% and therefore some changes were made to these to increase the likelihood of two raters getting to the same result when evaluating the same case study.

## **BENEFITS OF USING A CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM**

The following is a list of benefits in using a system like the ChildPIE © as proven from more than 20 years of use of the adult version (the original PIE):

- It can be implemented across a variety of practice settings, from mental health to community work.
- It cuts across a various theoretical orientations.
- It is culturally friendly – the adult version has been implemented in a number of countries like Korea, Netherlands, South Africa, Canada, USA and Hungary.
- It is a classification system and does not use diagnosis but rather assists with problem descriptions.
- Considers many systems in which human development occurs and the role the individual plays in them = interaction.
- It identifies strengths / coping ability.
- It improves the time spend on and quality of referrals among various social service professionals.

## **SUMMARY**

To prove the argument that this tool can be a bridge between the social service professions, broader research and field testing is necessary. It does however offer an alternative to professional competition and can help the professions make use of existing resources instead of trying to re-invent the wheel. A prolific move in the direction of further development is its inclusion in the curriculum of the Child and Youth Development major at Monash University which will have its first intake of students in January 2010. Practitioners interested in this tool can contact the author.

## REFERENCES:

Beukes, K. and Gannon, B. (1996) *An Orientation to Child and Youth Care (Second Edition, revised 1999)*. Cape Town: National Association of Child Care Workers <http://www.cyc-net.org/reference/refs-history%20-%20beukesgannon.html>

De Vos, A.S. (1998) *Combined quantitative and qualitative approach* IN: De Vos, A.S. (Ed), 1998. **Research at grassroots. A primer for the caring professions**, Pretoria: Van Schaik

De Vos, A.S. and Fouchè, C.B. (1998) *General introduction to research design, data collection methods and data analysis* IN: De Vos, A.S. (Ed) 1998 **Research at grassroots. A primer for the caring professions**, Pretoria: Van Schaik

De Vos, A.S., Schurink, E.M., and Strydom, H. (1998) *The nature of research in the caring professions* IN: De Vos, A.S. (Ed) 1998 **Research at grassroots. A primer for the caring professions**, Pretoria: Van Schaik

Faul, A.C. (1995) **Scale development in social work**, Aucklandpark: Rand Afrikaans University (doctoral thesis)

Karls J.M. and Wandrei, K.E. (1994) *PIE: A system for describing and classifying problems of social functioning* IN: Karls, J.M. and Wandrei, K.E. (1994) **Person-in-environment System: The PIE classification system for social functioning problems**, Washington DC: NASW Press

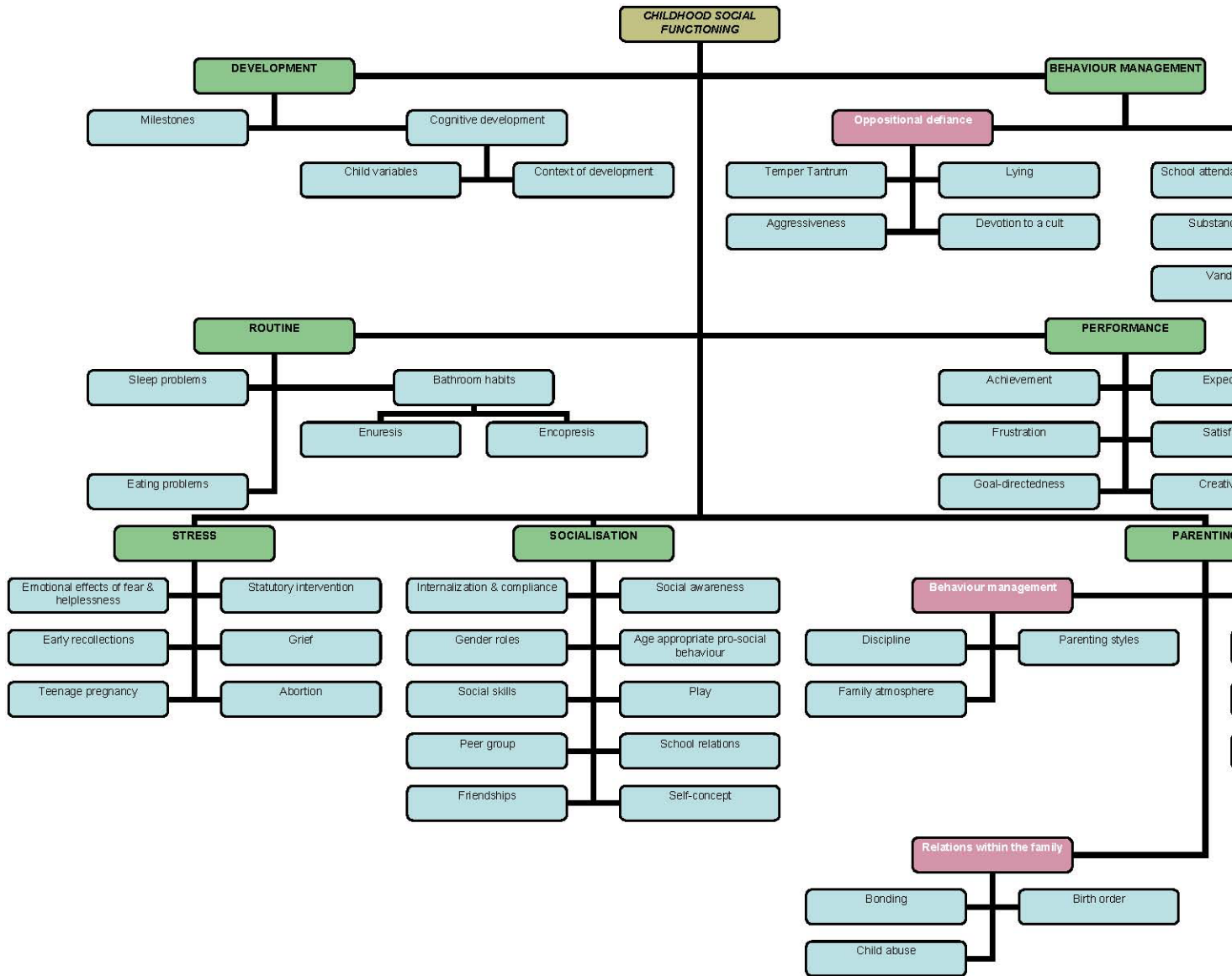
Nichols, M.P. and Schwartz, R.C. (1995) **Family Therapy: Concepts and Methods** (third edition), Boston: Allyn & Bacon

Rothman, J. (1994) *Planning of intervention research* IN: Rothman, J. and Thomas, E. J. (1994) **Intervention research: Design and development for human service**, Binghamton: Haworth Press, Inc

Saleebey, D. (2004) "**The Power of Place**"1: **Another Look at the Environment** IN: *Families in Society* 85 (1): 7-17

Swanzen, R. (2006) **A classification system for categorising problems in childhood social functioning**, Doctoral thesis, Aucklandpark: University of Johannesburg

# ANNEXURE 1: CHILDHOOD SOCIAL FUNCTIONING CONCEPTS AND SUB CATEGORIES



Broad category      Sub-category

## ANNEXURE 2: A PIE CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM FOR CHILDREN

### FACTOR 1: CHILD SOCIAL FUNCTIONING PROBLEMS

INDICATE CHILD'S DEVELOPMENTAL STAGE

#### 01. FAMILIAL ROLES

CODE	PROBLEM TYPE	ABUSE TYPE	DURATION	STRENGTH	RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION
<input type="checkbox"/> Natural child	11				
<input type="checkbox"/> Surrogate child	12				
<input type="checkbox"/> Sibling	13				
<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver (role reversal)	14				
<input type="checkbox"/> Relative	15				
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)	16				

#### 02. OTHER INTERPERSONAL ROLES

CODE	PROBLEM TYPE	ABUSE TYPE	DURATION	STRENGTH	RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION
<input type="checkbox"/> Playmate	21				
<input type="checkbox"/> Friend	22				
<input type="checkbox"/> Partner (girl/boyfriend)	23				
<input type="checkbox"/> Peer	24				
<input type="checkbox"/> Pupil	25				
<input type="checkbox"/> Member	26				
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)	27				

#### 03. SPECIAL LIFE SITUATION ROLES

CODE	PROBLEM TYPE	ABUSE TYPE	DURATION	STRENGTH	RECOMMENDED INTERVENTION
<input type="checkbox"/> Client	31				
<input type="checkbox"/> Special care recipient	32				
<input type="checkbox"/> Juvenile	33				
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)	34				

AA Infant to two years BB Three to Six years CC Seven to twelve years DD Thirteen to eighteen years

© 2005 ChildPIE Rika Swanzen

PRIORITY CODE:

P-Primary S-Secondary R-Relevant

COPING STRENGTHS

1 Outstanding average

2 Above average

3 Adequate

4 Somewhat inadequate

5 Inadequate No coping strengths

DURATION OF PROBLEM

6

1 More than five years

2 One to five years

3 Six months to one year

4 One to six months

5 Two weeks to one

month

6 Less than two weeks

TYPE OF ABUSE

1 No Maltreatment evident

- 2 Ineffective discipline
- 3 Inappropriate exposure
- 4 Neglect
- 5 Emotional insult & threats
- 6 Intimidation by peers
- 7 Physical harm
- 8 Sexual Violation

TYPE OF SOCIAL INTERACTION  
PROBLEM

- 01 Milestone delay 02 Routine
- 03 Inhibition 04 Pro-sociality
- 05 Performance 06 Frustration
- 07 Loss 08 Opposition / Defiance
- 09 Conduct disturbance 1 0 Other  
(specify)