PERSON-IN-ENVIRONMENT (PIE)

Studies in social work are developed around the generalist practice approach based on systems theory and ecosystems perspective. We work necessarily and inevitably with people in their environments. In other words, it is impossible to understand a person truly without developing an understanding of that person's relationship with any given number of environments.

The most basic systems theory of generalist social work practice is Person-In-Environment or "PIE." By considering the various relationships and communities that a person has (e.g., school, family, church, etc.), social workers gain an understanding of how the person and his or her environments affect each other through their interactions.

Here's an example of how Person-In-Environment theory might be applied.
A college freshman (person) moves from home into a dorm (environment) to begin the long-awaited college experience. The freshman has a roommate who is rigid about having quiet study time from 10 p.m. to midnight. The freshman soon learns to respect and follow the study time. At mid-term the freshman finds that having respected and participated in their roommate's study time, they have an "A" average in the majority of their courses.

In this example, one can see the positive outcome the person's environment had on his experience of learning. Negative outcomes can also be observed by applying Person-In-Environment theory. Addiction is one of many examples, where the person's environment (friends, community) may affect the person in a negative way.

Person-In-Environment theory is a basic way to examine and evaluate client situations in generalist practice. A generalist social worker uses systems theory as a tool working with clients on a daily basis.

Instructions for the opposite side: *Using the "PIE chart," consider how each of the surrounding environments both positively and negatively impacts the central person (whether this is you or someone you are working with).*

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