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Putting ‘personality’ back into Personality Disorder with ICD-11: Report from the WPA Section of Personality Disorder.

Years of development in the field of personality disorder research and practice culminated in the publishing of the ICD-11 in 2019, and its implementation from 2022. It was a radical change, with the replacement of old categories and clusters of personality disorders to a dimensional model which introduces for the first time into diagnostic requirements the core concept of personality functioning. Initially a psychodynamic concept, one’s level of personality functioning expresses our capacities to sustain a broad range of mutually satisfying relationships, have a stable sense of our own identity, regulate our emotions and behaviors, and to corral our emotional and material resources towards the pursuit of our goals. The ICD-11 diagnostician now makes an assessment of the level of distress, impairment, and danger (as we have always done) associated with one’s personality functioning, as either having no personality dysfunction, the subthreshold ‘Personality Difficulty’, then through to Mild, Moderate and finally Severe Personality Disorder. Five descriptors of the ‘flavor’ of the personality problems which are for all intents and purposes analogous to the well-established Big-5 Personality Traits, can be further added to the level of severity diagnosis. This concept has gained increasing recognition as not only being more empirically valid, cross-culturally consistent, but also probably less stigmatizing, and more helpful for clinicians. (Swales, 2022; Hansen et al., 2019) It is an approach which acknowledges that our level of personality functioning can change dynamically over time, and accommodates the fact that we all have a personality, with strengths and weaknesses, whether or not we also have a co-occurring mental or physical health problem.

Recent work from colleagues invested in the DSM classification system implies that they will shortly follow suit with the ICD-11’s dimensional approach (Sharp et al., 2025), and given that DSM diagnoses (with some caveats) are underwritten by ICD codes in the United States there is the growing opinion that ICD-11 become the new international standard (Kim et al., 2026). Additionally, future epidemiological efforts are expected to examine the global burden of personality disorder using ICD-11 severity classifications, potentially reshaping how prevalence and impact are understood. (Shadid et al., 2025)

It is now the job of the WPA Section of Personality Disorders to support the steady implementation of the ICD-11 framework by WHO member states.

DEVELOPMENTS IN PERSONALITY DISORDER RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Interest in the ICD-11 diagnostic classification appears widespread among both clinicians and researchers. But its implementation in both of these arenas is not without challenge, to clinical systems, and to research methodologies. Although the extent of preparation for implementation across all WHO member states remains uncertain, emerging indicators suggest strong global engagement. For example, Scotland is currently implementing and using the ICD-11, while Finland and Sweden are preparing for implementation by 2027, and in countries such as Denmark, Norway, and Germany, the implementation will take place somewhat later due to the extensive reorganization of digitalized coding systems. However, independent of the formal implementation, we hear of clinical departments in several countries worldwide having already initiated the clinical use of ICD-11 personality disorder classification.

The recent introductions of ICD-11 based assessment tools mark an important step in the efforts for standardizing assessment practices internationally. One notable example is the Personality Disorder Severity scale for ICD-11 (PDS-ICD-11), a self-administered tool for measuring level of personality functioning, which has now been translated into 32 languages. A recent multi-national study (Natoli et al. [unpublished]) provides encouraging support for its psychometric robustness across a highly diverse set of countries spanning Africa,

the Americas, Asia, and Europe. Complementing this, additional studies using the PDS-ICD-11 have been conducted in a wide range of clinical contexts—including general psychiatry, forensic populations, and adolescent samples—further reinforcing its applicability. This growing evidence base has laid the groundwork for the forthcoming Diagnostic Interview for Personality Pathology based on ICD-11 (DIPP-11), a clinician-administered interview, scheduled for release later this year.

Worldwide pressing topics in the field include overprescribing and polypharmacy among people with PD, the development of psychological therapies, which could be more helpful or more scalable, and the interactions of personality with other psychopathologies on their trajectory and treatment response. Indeed, there is ongoing theoretical and practical research on the application and assessment of the new ICD-11 classification particularly in forensic, CAMHS and psychotherapy services.

UPDATES FROM THE SECTION OF PERSONALITY DISORDERS

The triennial plan of the section continues into 2026 with its main objective of supporting the implementation of the ICD-11 classification system worldwide. This includes supporting the development of national level personality disorder special interest groups, most notably in the UK, and we are working with member states to develop an understanding of the specific barriers to implementation in their nations.

Membership of the section has grown this year to include people working at the cutting edge of the field, now representing 30 countries. We have started a four-monthly research-in-review update sent out to the membership showcasing recent research advances. Alongside section members, our Early Career and Student membership list will now also receive these updates.

Education, including the dissemination of educational materials to both patients and professionals, has been central to the work of the WPA section for some time (Simonsen et al, 2008). Following on from the State of the Art symposium at the World Congress in Prague 2025, this year's Stockholm 2026 congress will feature a pre-conference training course on assessing Personality Disorder in ICD-11, focusing on the new DIPP-11 interviewer-rated assessment tool. In the future the section hopes to provide further courses at co-sponsored WPA conferences, along with other Sections. Those interested in the work of the Section of Personality Disorders are invited to get in touch.

CITATIONS

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