

## **The Z codes: diagnosis of inequity in Psychosocial and Contextual Factors**

For the last 35 years it has been possible, if little known, to diagnose context rather than people. Any mental health practitioner (including social workers, psychologists, nurses etc.) can use diagnostic codes from DSM V or ICD 10 to describe a person's situation/presentation.

These diagnoses used to be reported on Axis IV in DSM IV as V codes. In DSM V, for the purpose of diagnosis, they are now referred to as Z codes. Z-codes are a set of formal diagnoses that can be used to diagnose the contextual or situational factors impacting on a person and can be found on pp. 715-727. They are the same as those located in chapter 21 of the ICD-10-CM.

They have been heavily expanded from the previous V codes and now include:

- Child affected by parental relationship distress
- Problem related to current military deployment status
- Homelessness
- Social exclusion or rejection
- Target of adverse discrimination or persecution










The use of these diagnoses re-draws attention to the meta evidence that socio economic inequity is the major cause of mental health needs and invites a focus on interventions which address the cause (inequity) not just the effects (mental health symptoms). Using formal diagnostic criteria to do this makes it more difficult for the connection to be invisibilised and more likely that it will become of political concern.

There are over 130 Z codes covering:

- Educational or occupational problems
- Housing and economic problems
- Other problems related to the social environment
- Problems related to crime or legal system
- Problems related to other psychosocial or personal and environmental circumstances
- Other health service encounters for counselling and medical advice
- Other circumstances of personal history

The broad categories of Z codes are listed below.

### **Persons with potential health hazards related to socioeconomic and psychosocial circumstances (Z55-Z65)**

- [Z55](#)  Problems related to education and literacy
- [Z56](#)  Problems related to employment and unemployment
- [Z57](#)  Occupational exposure to risk factors
- [Z59](#)  Problems related to housing and economic circumstances
  - ▶ [Z59.0](#) Homelessness
  - ▶ [Z59.1](#) Inadequate housing
  - ▶ [Z59.2](#) Discord with neighbors, lodgers and landlord
  - ▶ [Z59.3](#) Problems related to living in residential institution
  - ▶ [Z59.4](#) Lack of adequate food and safe drinking water
  - ▶ [Z59.5](#) Extreme poverty
  - ▶ [Z59.6](#) Low income
  - ▶ [Z59.7](#) Insufficient social insurance and welfare support
  - ▶ [Z59.8](#) Other problems related to housing and economic circumstances
  - ▶ [Z59.9](#) Problem related to housing and economic circumstances, unspecified
- [Z60](#)  Problems related to social environment
- [Z62](#)  Problems related to upbringing
- [Z63](#)  Other problems related to primary support group, including family circumstances
- [Z64](#)  Problems related to certain psychosocial circumstances
- [Z65](#)  Problems related to other psychosocial circumstances