

# Structured Clinical Interview For Dsm Iv Dissociative Disorders

## Regular Articles

### Use of the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Dissociative Disorders for Systematic Assessment of Dissociative Symptoms in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

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**Objective:** This study compared dissociative symptom areas in Vietnam combat veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and in Vietnam combat veterans without PTSD. **Method:** The Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Dissociative Disorders (SCID-D) was used to compare dissociative symptoms in 40 Vietnam combat veterans with PTSD and 15 Vietnam combat veterans without PTSD. The SCID-D yields a total score and scores in five symptom areas: amnesia, depersonalization, derealization, identity confusion, and identity alteration. **Results:** The PTSD patients had more severe dissociative symptoms in each of the five symptom areas of the SCID-D and higher total symptom scores. Amnesia was the symptom area with the greatest difference in scores between the PTSD patients ( $\text{mean}=3.68$ ,  $\text{SD}=0.73$ ) and the non-PTSD veterans ( $\text{mean}=1.06$ ,  $\text{SD}=0.26$ ). **Conclusions:** The finding of higher levels of dissociative symptoms in Vietnam combat veterans with PTSD than in Vietnam veterans without PTSD is consistent with a level of dissociative symptoms in PTSD similar to that in dissociative disorders. (Am J Psychiatry 1993; 150:1011-1014)

Since the time of the first world war there have been reports of dissociative symptoms in veterans exposed to combat-related trauma (1-13). Over the last decade the relationship between dissociation and severe trauma, such as combat, has become increasingly appreciated (14-16). This relationship appears to be generalizable to traumas other than combat, such as childhood abuse (17). In addition, psychiatric disorders other than posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), in-

cluding borderline personality disorder (18) and the dissociative disorders (19-22), appear to be associated with trauma.

Several studies (23-25) have provided evidence for high levels of dissociative symptoms in combat veterans with PTSD. In one study (26), Vietnam combat veterans with PTSD reported higher levels of dissociative symptoms, as measured with the Dissociative Experiences Scale, than did Vietnam combat veterans without PTSD. This study did not assess the severity of symptoms in discrete areas of dissociation. In addition, the study did not answer the question of whether high levels of dissociative symptoms are specific to PTSD.

The development of diagnostic instruments such as the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Dissociative Disorders (SCID-D) (27, 28) has made possible the assessment of specific dissociative symptoms. The SCID-D is a semistructured diagnostic interview for the systematic assessment of five dissociative symptoms: amnesia, depersonalization, derealization, identity confusion, and identity alteration. It also allows for the di-

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## Structured Clinical Interview for DSM IV Dissociative Disorders

The Structured Clinical Interview for DSM IV (SCID) is a comprehensive tool used by mental health professionals to assess and diagnose various psychiatric disorders according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM-IV). Among the range of disorders assessed, dissociative disorders hold a unique place due to their complex nature and the significant impact they have on an individual's functioning. This article delves into the specifics of the SCID as it relates to dissociative disorders, examining its structure, application, and implications for practice.

# Understanding Dissociative Disorders

Dissociative disorders are characterized by a disconnection between thoughts, identity, consciousness, and memory. They often arise as a psychological response to traumatic experiences. The DSM-IV categorizes dissociative disorders into three primary types:

1. **Dissociative Amnesia:** The inability to recall important autobiographical information, usually following a traumatic or stressful event.
2. **Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID):** Previously known as multiple personality disorder, this condition involves the presence of two or more distinct personality states or an experience of possession, accompanied by recurrent gaps in the recall of everyday events.
3. **Depersonalization/Derealization Disorder:** A dissociative disorder where individuals experience persistent or recurrent episodes of depersonalization, a feeling of detachment from oneself, or derealization, a sense of unreality regarding the external world.

Understanding these disorders is crucial for accurate diagnosis and treatment planning, making the SCID an invaluable tool for clinicians.

## Overview of the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM IV

The SCID is a semi-structured interview designed to systematically assess the presence of DSM-IV disorders. It provides a framework for clinicians to explore a patient's history, symptoms, and functioning in a structured manner. The interview is divided into modules, each targeting different groups of disorders, including mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and, notably, dissociative disorders.

### Structure of the SCID

The SCID for dissociative disorders includes specific questions designed to gather detailed information about the patient's symptoms and experiences. Key components of the SCID include:

- **Introductory Section:** Establishes rapport with the patient and explains the interview's purpose.
- **Dissociative Disorders Module:** Focuses specifically on symptoms related to dissociative disorders, including:
  - Questions about memory loss and amnesia.
  - Inquiries regarding identity confusion or alteration.
  - Assessment of depersonalization and derealization experiences.
- **Diagnostic Criteria:** Each question is tied directly to the DSM-IV

diagnostic criteria, ensuring that the clinician can make informed decisions based on standardized definitions.

## **Administration of the SCID**

Administering the SCID requires careful attention to the following:

- **Training:** Clinicians should undergo training to familiarize themselves with the SCID format and the specific questions related to dissociative disorders.
- **Environment:** Conduct the interview in a quiet, private setting to ensure the patient feels safe and comfortable.
- **Flexibility:** While the SCID is structured, clinicians should be flexible in their approach, allowing for follow-up questions that may arise based on the patient's responses.

## **Importance of the SCID in Diagnosing Dissociative Disorders**

The SCID plays a crucial role in the accurate diagnosis of dissociative disorders for several reasons:

### **1. Standardization**

- The SCID provides a standardized approach to assessment, which enhances reliability across different clinicians and settings.
- This standardization is particularly important in dissociative disorders, where symptoms can be subtle and easily misdiagnosed.

### **2. Comprehensive Assessment**

- The SCID allows clinicians to gather extensive information about a patient's history and current functioning.
- This comprehensive approach is essential for understanding the complex nature of dissociative disorders and their interplay with other mental health conditions.

### **3. Differential Diagnosis**

- Dissociative disorders can present similarly to other psychiatric conditions, such as PTSD or mood disorders.
- The SCID facilitates differential diagnosis by exploring specific symptoms

and their duration, thereby aiding in distinguishing between disorders.

## **4. Treatment Planning**

- A thorough assessment using the SCID can inform treatment planning.
- Understanding the specific nature of a patient's dissociative symptoms can guide interventions, ranging from psychotherapy to pharmacological approaches.

## **Challenges in Using the SCID for Dissociative Disorders**

Despite its strengths, there are challenges associated with using the SCID for diagnosing dissociative disorders:

### **1. Subjectivity of Symptoms**

- Dissociative symptoms can be subjective and vary widely among individuals.
- Patients may have difficulty articulating their experiences, leading to underreporting or misinterpretation of symptoms.

### **2. Stigma and Misunderstanding**

- There is often a stigma attached to dissociative disorders, which may impede open discussion during the interview.
- Clinicians must be sensitive to these issues to foster a trusting environment.

### **3. Time Constraints**

- The SCID can be time-consuming, particularly when exploring complex dissociative symptoms.
- Clinicians must balance thoroughness with the practicalities of their practice settings.

## **Conclusion**

The Structured Clinical Interview for DSM IV is a vital tool in the

assessment of dissociative disorders, providing a structured yet flexible approach to diagnosis. By focusing on the nuanced experiences of patients, the SCID helps clinicians accurately identify dissociative disorders and differentiate them from other psychiatric conditions. While challenges exist, particularly regarding the subjective nature of symptoms and the stigma surrounding these disorders, the SCID remains an essential component of a comprehensive mental health assessment. As awareness of dissociative disorders grows, the importance of accurate diagnosis and effective treatment becomes increasingly clear, underscoring the relevance of structured clinical interviews in contemporary psychiatric practice.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Dissociative Disorders (SCID-D)?**

The SCID-D is a semi-structured interview designed to assess dissociative disorders according to DSM-IV criteria, providing clinicians with a systematic approach to diagnose conditions such as Dissociative Identity Disorder and Depersonalization Disorder.

### **How does the SCID-D differ from other clinical interviews?**

Unlike other clinical interviews, the SCID-D specifically targets the symptoms and diagnostic criteria of dissociative disorders, incorporating detailed questions that help differentiate these disorders from other mental health conditions.

### **What are the primary dissociative disorders assessed by the SCID-D?**

The SCID-D primarily assesses Dissociative Identity Disorder, Dissociative Amnesia, Depersonalization Disorder, and Other Specified Dissociative Disorder, ensuring a comprehensive evaluation of dissociative symptoms.

### **What is the significance of using the SCID-D in clinical practice?**

Using the SCID-D in clinical practice enhances diagnostic accuracy, facilitates effective treatment planning, and improves communication between mental health professionals by providing a standardized framework for assessing dissociative disorders.

### **What training is required to administer the SCID-D?**

To administer the SCID-D effectively, clinicians typically require specialized training in the interview process, as well as a strong

understanding of DSM-IV criteria and dissociative disorders.

## **Are there any limitations to the SCID-D?**

Yes, potential limitations of the SCID-D include the reliance on patient self-reporting, which can be influenced by factors such as denial or lack of insight, as well as the need for trained personnel to interpret the results accurately.

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