

Transforming Social Work Practice:
Social Work Practice: Assessment, Planning, Intervention
and Review

By Gretta Bradley and Jonathan Parker

To be published in June 2003

Price £15

Please note that this material is at first draft stage and has not yet been edited or typeset, thus content and appearance may change in the final published version. No part of this material may be reproduced in any form without prior permission from the authors.

CHAPTER 2: TOOLS AND DIAGRAMMATIC AIDS TO ASSESSMENT

ACHIEVING A SOCIAL WORK DEGREE

This chapter will help you to begin to meet the following National Occupational Standards:

- key role 1: unit 3: Assess needs and options to recommend a course of action;
- key role 2: unit 6: Prepare, produce, implement and evaluate plans with individuals, families, carers, groups, communities and professional colleagues;
- key role 4: unit 12: Assess and manage risks to individuals, families, carers, groups and communities;
- key role 5: unit 16: Manage, present and share records;
- key role 6: unit 18: Research, analyse, evaluate and use current knowledge of best social work practice.

It will also introduce you to the following academic standards (from 3.1.4 Social Work theory) as set out in the Social Work subject benchmark statement:

- models and methods of assessment, including factors underpinning the selection and testing of relevant information, the nature of professional judgement and the processes of risk assessment;
- appropriateness and methods of intervention in a range of community settings, including group care at individual, group and community levels, including factors guiding the choice and evaluation of these.

The subject skills highlighted to demonstrate this knowledge in practice include:

- developing communication and information-gathering skills in a range of ways, such as electronically, face-to-face and from others;
- assessing the reliability of information in complex situations;
- developing assessment and analysis skills that cut across intellectual and practical activities: to choose the right model and approach; to practise in a way that takes different points of view into account; to evaluate ethical issues and the impact of discrimination.

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of aids and activities that can be employed to gather and represent the data social workers may collect in order to complete initial and on-going assessments. In this chapter, we shall consider five particular tools that can help in making assessments and beginning to analyse information collected from service users. These are:

- genograms;
- ecomaps;
- culturagrams;
- flow charts;
- life road maps (the latter two will be considered together).

Making an assessment is not a neutral activity and your prior experiences, thoughts and beliefs will influence the process and your understanding of the information gathered. Therefore, it is helpful to ask yourself the following questions throughout this chapter:

- Why am I collecting this information?
- To what purposes will this information be put?
- How would I react if asked to undertake these activities?

At times throughout the section you will be asked to complete activities about your own family, lifestyle and networks. Undertaking this work may raise issues that you have not thought about before or trigger quite deep-seated feelings. Be prepared for this and, if you are affected, seek some support from colleagues, friends or other trusted people. Remember, assessment is not an emotionally neutral area and professionals are human beings too. If you are challenged in some ways by information about your family and life, consider how much greater these feelings might be for someone who is volunteering this information in a social work relationship.

GENOGRAMS

The uses of genograms

A genogram is a type of family tree. It provides an immediate visual representation of the individual or family being assessed. It is a 'snapshot' of how that person or family is structured and viewed at a particular moment in time. As such, it can be useful in highlighting to social workers those areas that may cause concern and information that is lacking and needs to be sought. It may also identify areas or themes for further exploration with the service user. Furthermore, as it is a family tree, it presents an historical picture or document from which the social worker can gain insight into a variety of patterns regularly occurring within that family unit and that may still influence the way in which that family operates. Thus, as Hartman (1995) states, the genogram can be useful in portraying the family unit across time.

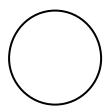
Genograms are not undertaken solely for the benefit of social workers, however. Using genograms is a participative activity that can help you to form a working relationship with service users. This is, of course, beneficial in forming constructive working alliances, and encouraging the development of service users' motivations to work with you. Involvement in an interactive and practical activity, which compiling a genogram can be, may help to reduce nervousness and anxiety by placing something between the service user and yourself as a social work practitioner. This can act as a focus of attention rather than the people compiling the genogram. Being actively involved in the genogram's construction may enable service users to feel better as a result of 'doing something'. This active approach can help to restore confidence in one's ability to take a degree of control in one's life. It has the additional benefit of helping the service user to recognise patterns, to face difficult areas and to consider their family history as a process in which they are intimately involved.

The construction of a genogram is a fairly simple task. However, it can be a very powerful process and may raise a number of varying emotions within those completing the task. The social worker needs to be mindful of this and to be sensitive to the emotions of the subject.

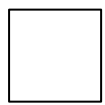
This, of course, can add to the assessment process. An additional benefit of the genogram can be its capacity to engender discussion and to raise important issues that social workers need to deal with and which may not have been recognised or the opportunity to explore would not have arisen if the activity had not been undertaken. However, this cannot be done at the expense of the service user's level of comfort with the process. The pace of the work must take its lead from the service user, and, especially in the case of children and young people, it must take into account the age and development of the service user. People will need time to assimilate information about themselves, their lives and families. The social worker who allows this time is likely to be appreciated by service users for respecting their feelings and situations. This can add to the development of a positive working relationship.

Symbols used in developing genograms

There are a number of almost universally accepted symbols used in the compilation of genograms. These can be found in most books concerning systemic family therapy, but an especially good point of reference is McGoldrick, Gersen and Shellenberger (1999), which details the many different symbols and indicators to be used. The most common symbols are:



female



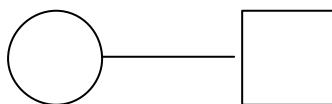
male



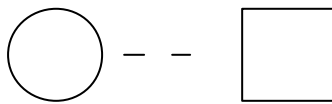
unknown gender (pregnancy)



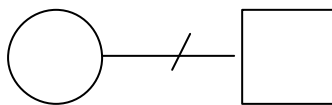
death



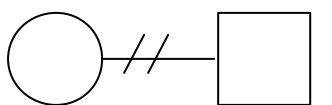
enduring relationship
(marriage/cohabitation)



transitory relationship

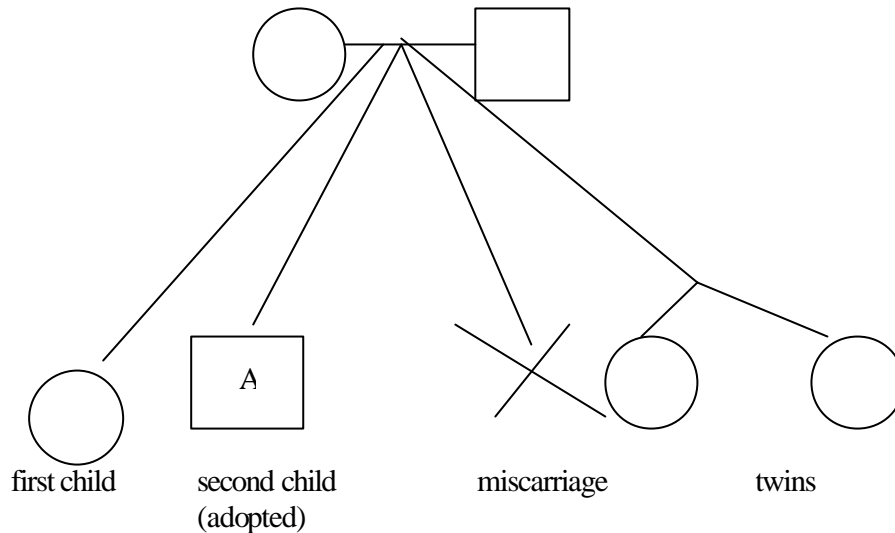


separation

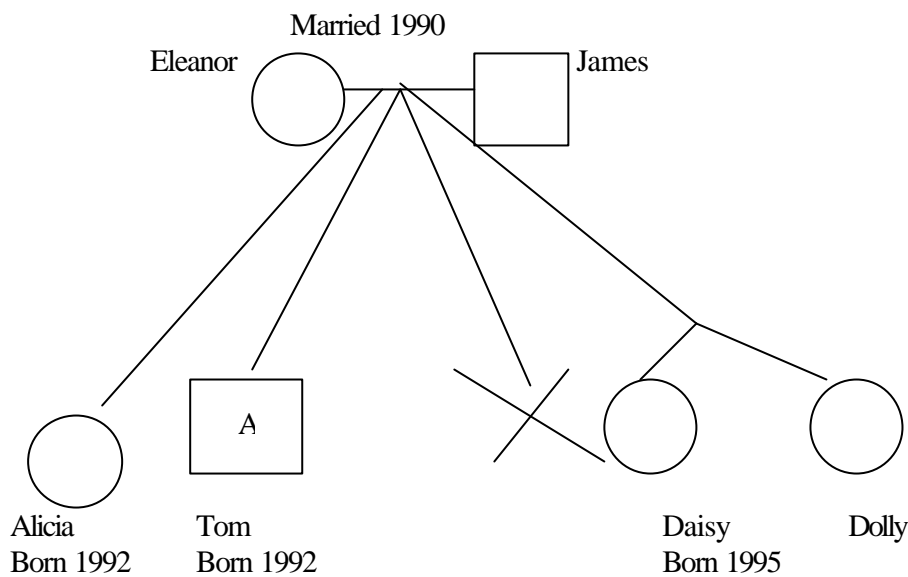


divorce

The relationship between generations is shown by lines connecting parents to children. This is shown in the following diagram that includes further common symbols used in genograms.



When collecting the information and compiling the genogram with the service user, it is important that you collect full names, dates of birth, and the exact dates of significant events within the family life history. Asking service users for the dates when their parents married, divorced, or when grandparents died, the dates of separations and divorces, dates of marriages, or having children helps to map out significant historical events and contextualises them. This is important for the social worker and equally important for the subjects of the genogram. However, it is not always easy to ask questions about the intimate details of a person's life or family. Sometimes using a genogram can help the social worker overcome these difficulties and ensure that a comprehensive assessment has been undertaken. Assume, for instance, that you are working with the Pritchard family and their concerns about Tom, their second child, who is adopted. Eleanor and James Pritchard are worried that Tom is not settling in with the family. You have been asked to make an assessment of their current situation and have begun to compile a genogram. You have explained to the family that in order to help with their situation in the best possible way you will need to look widely at the family, its history, composition and present situation. Eleanor and James agreed, being aware of assessments from their adoption of Tom. Constructing a genogram can be an interactive activity that helps families and social workers engage with one another. Therefore, you might ask James and Eleanor to draw their family situation. Let us consider that the following information is provided:

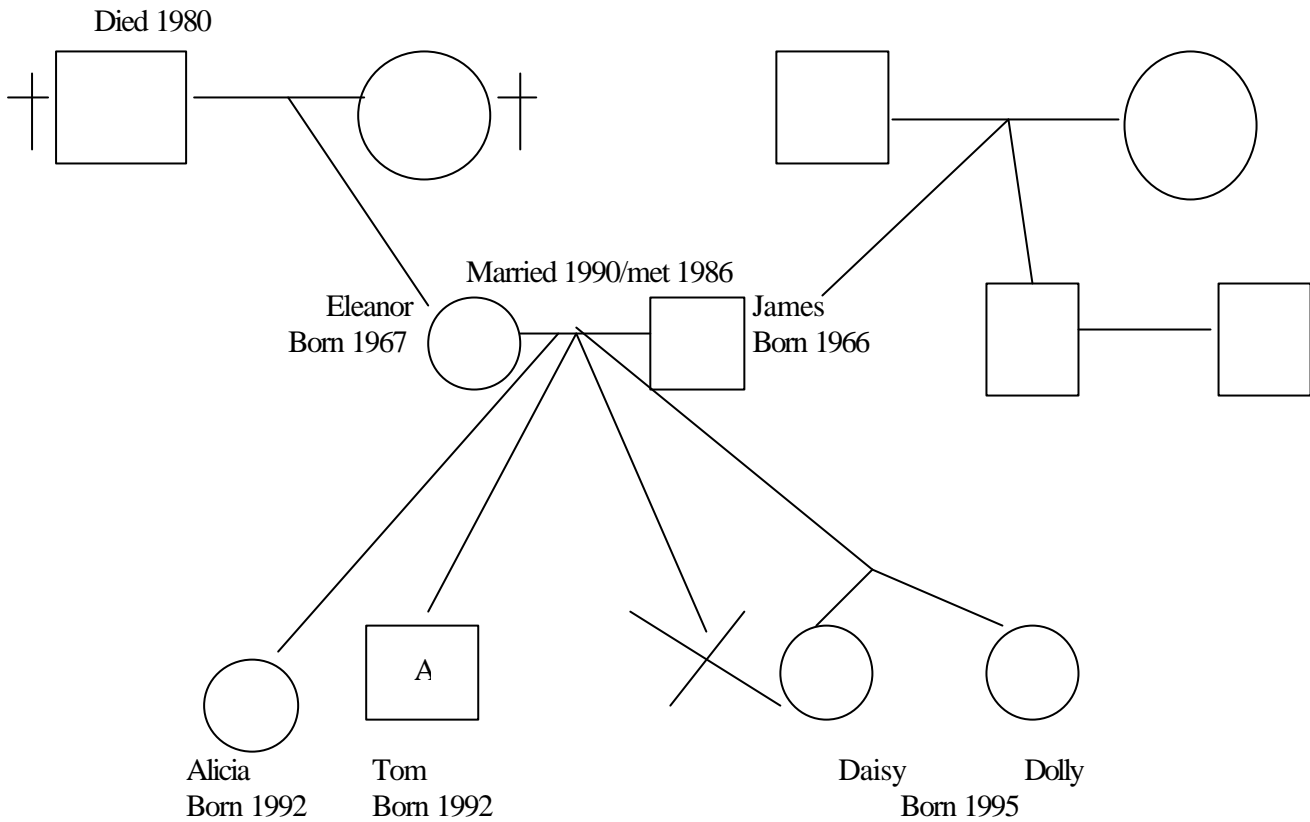


You note that the date of Tom’s adoption is not mentioned nor is the date of the miscarriage. Also, there is no information about James’ or Eleanor’s parents or siblings or, indeed, dates of birth. In identifying this missing information you are formulating possible further questions to ask or avenues to explore. In this case it would be helpful to point to some of the missing information. Perhaps you might say “I see you have put down Tom’s year of birth, and it is the same as Alicia’s. However, I wonder if you could tell me when he was adopted?” You may also wish to ask directly if James and Eleanor have any brothers or sisters, and about their parents. In asking for this factual information you will be then in a position to search more deeply: to look at the involvement of grandparents, uncles, and aunts in the life of the family. This depends on the information being gathered and as a social worker you need to develop the skills to determine where, when and how questions should be asked. As a start, the genogram allows you to identify gaps in information and clarify your understanding.

It can be hard to ask difficult and personal questions but harder still to answer them. Remembering this when making an assessment will help. It is useful to acknowledge how difficult it might be to answer a question when asking it. If, for instance, you wanted to know a little more about Eleanor’s miscarriage and how it might have impacted on the family, you might ask “I recognise that this might be a difficult thing to talk about, but you have included having a miscarriage in your genogram. Could you tell me when that happened?” Depending on the answer, and how it was conveyed, you may wish to explore matters further.

Imagine that your questions provided the following information: Eleanor had a miscarriage in 1993, and her parents both died in a car crash in 1980 when she was thirteen. This was six years before she and James met in 1986 when she was nineteen and he was twenty years old. Eleanor was an only child. James’s parents were still alive and were involved in the family. However, since Tom’s adoption in 1999 they had tended to argue more with James and Eleanor, and were convinced that they were ‘storing up trouble’ by adopting Tom. His difficulties settling down at home and reports of unacceptable behaviour at school

confirmed their view to James' parents. James' brother and partner were described as very supportive. The genogram had brought more information to light that could be used to help Tom settle into the family. The genogram itself now looked like this:



Research summary: Genograms in family therapy

Burnham (1986) and Hartman (1995), working from a systemic perspective, are extremely relevant to this discussion. The use of the genogram is debated in these texts. Barker (1986) places genograms in the context of assessment prior to intervening with whole families in a therapeutic context. He places the genogram in the wider perspective of family assessment. In his work, he reviews one of the key models family workers have employed in assessing the functioning of families - the circumplex model, which examines how cohesive or adaptable family members are. Barker (1986) also considers a range of different assessment models. The genogram contributes to whichever model of assessment is employed. It is now considered central to working in child and family social work, when undertaking comprehensive assessments.

Given the range of emotions that may surface and the potential for uncovering previously unconsidered patterns in one's family history, it is important for the social worker to have some idea of how this may feel for service users. By completing the following activity, you will have a chance to explore some of these emotions.

Activity 2.1

Using the symbols outlined above, construct your own genogram. Do this for at least for three generations in your family. You can place yourself at any generational level depending upon your circumstances. For instance, if you are the child in your genogram, you will need to include grandparents and parents. If you are a parent you might be 'sandwiched' between your parents and your children. However, if you place yourself at the grandparent level please include a fourth level to indicate your parents. This will give a sense of change over history.

When you have completed your genogram examine it closely for patterns or norms of behaviour or event. Some examples may help here:

- If there are no separations or divorces in your family history does this suggest an unspoken rule about commitment to relationships?
- If daughters tend not to marry/cohabit until late does this explain the hostility to your sister leaving home to live with a partner at the age of eighteen?
- Might the family approach to death and bereavement be influenced by the fact that males have tended to die in their early 60s, whilst females have lived until their late 80s?

Think about how the process of constructing the genogram made you feel. Was it sometimes an emotional and painful experience? In what ways was this painful, exciting or simply informative and interesting? Can you think of some ways in which some of the emotions associated with constructing a genogram can be ameliorated? Did you discover things about your family and your own attitudes and values that now seem more understandable? How does this make you feel?

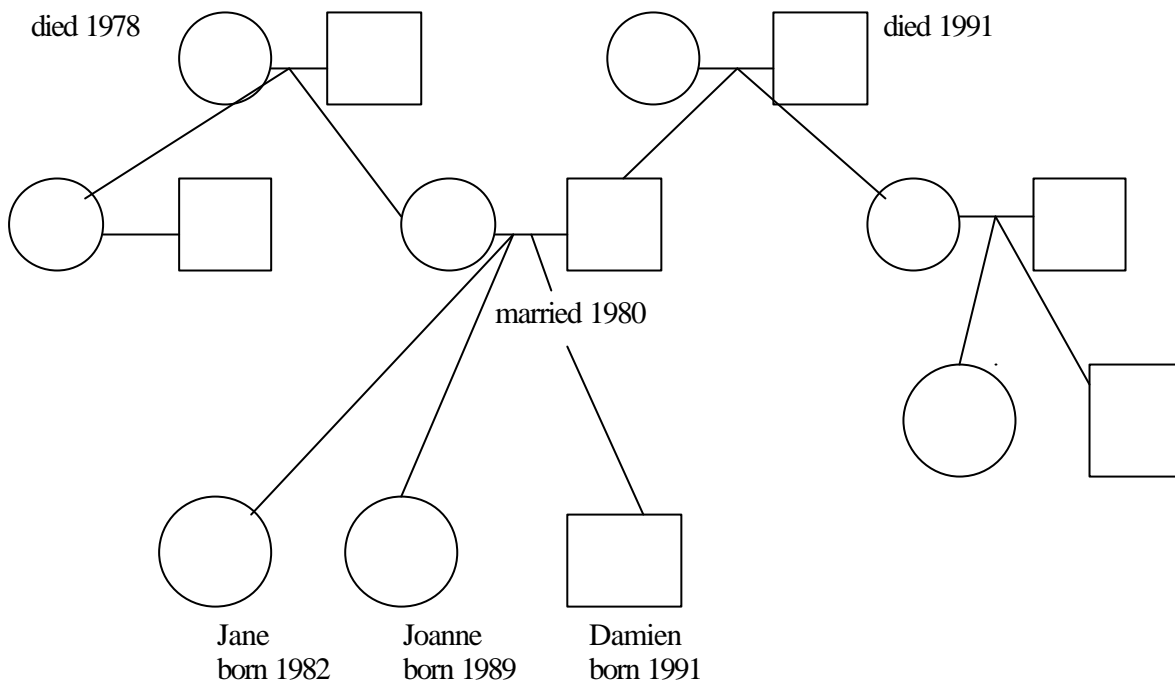
Common reactions and thoughts often reflect a mix of sadness when thinking of relatives who may have died or relationships that have ended as well as enjoyment and fascination when learning things about one's own family. Perhaps some of the ways in which painful memories can be ameliorated include having another person with you to share feelings with, by writing down thoughts about losses, by slowing the pace or by leaving aside aspects of one's family history until feeling more comfortable.

By attempting this activity you may learn ways of using genograms in sensitive and empowering ways with service users, as well as for the professional purpose of collecting and analysing information. You may wish to write down your answers and add to them as you complete this chapter.

The following case study demonstrates some of the uses of a genogram in both collecting information and beginning to establish an understanding of situations in which people find themselves. This is a precursor to being able to plan and intervene to effect change.

Damien Jones was referred by his mother who was concerned that he seemed to spend long periods on his own and was not developing in the same way as her other two children. Given this scant information it was necessary to make arrangements to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the situation. At the first interview a social and personal history was taken. Part of this process was achieved by the compilation of a genogram. In the first instance this was done to help elucidate the composition of

the family. It was explained to Mrs Jones that it was important to see the family as a whole and to consider how Damien fitted in.



During the course of the interview it transpired that Mrs Jones was, in fact, concerned that her mother-in-law appeared to favour the other two children and to ignore Damien. The genogram helped the social worker to question in a focused manner and to make a hypothesis relating to the death of Damien's grandfather in 1991 and his birth. It is not always the case that such hypotheses work. However, in this particular case it was found that Damien was born only one week after the death of his grandfather. This had led to several ramifications in an otherwise fairly well functioning family. Mrs Jones had enjoyed a good relationship with her mother-in-law who had helped with the care of Jane and Joanne over a number of years, especially during the pregnancy with Damien. During this pregnancy Mrs Jones had been quite ill and, at times was incapacitated. Mr Jones' mother helped out when it was not possible for him to take time off from work. Unfortunately, Mr Jones' father became ill and, after only a short illness, died. Mrs Jones' mother-in-law now blamed her for being ill when her husband was ill, and Damien served as a constant reminder of her bereavement. As a result Mrs Jones no longer received help from her mother-in-law, and when she did visit she ignored Damien whilst lavishing attention on Jane and Joanne. The increased demands on her time meant that Mrs Jones herself could not spend as much time with Damien as she had with her other two children, and, upon further exploration, she felt guilty about this.

The genogram taken in this case study provided useful visual information, an opportunity to form a working hypothesis, and it created an atmosphere conducive to frank and open discussion. It did not say anything directly about the networks of support available and

utilised by the family, however. This information had to be sought, initially, from careful questioning. A way of gathering such information in a visual way is contained in the ecomap. It is to this particular assessment tool that we will now turn.

Research summary: The genogram interview

McGoldrick, Gersen and Shellenberger (1999) provide a useful outline model for an interview in which information for a genogram is gathered or in which a genogram is compiled together with a family. The information is gathered is purposive and concerns interactions as well as relationships within families. They suggest that social workers start with the presenting problem and move on to consider the current living situation of family members and family history. They suggest the following questions are helpful:

- Why are they coming for help now?
- When did the problem begin?
- Who noticed it?
- How does each person view it?
- How has each responded?
- What were relations like prior to the problem?
- Has the problem changed? How?
- What will happen if it continues?

During the interview, social workers will explore the rituals, beliefs and expectations within those families with whom they are working. McGoldrick et al. (1999) see the genogram as part of the process of working towards change and include service user strengths to enable an analysis of the information and potential for change. Other suggested questions include the following:

- Who lives in the household (names, ages, gender)?
- How is each related?
- Where do other members live?
- Were there any similar problems in the family before?
- What solutions were tried in the past (therapy, treatment, hospitalisation etc)?
- What has been happening recently in the family?
- Have there been any recent changes or stressors?

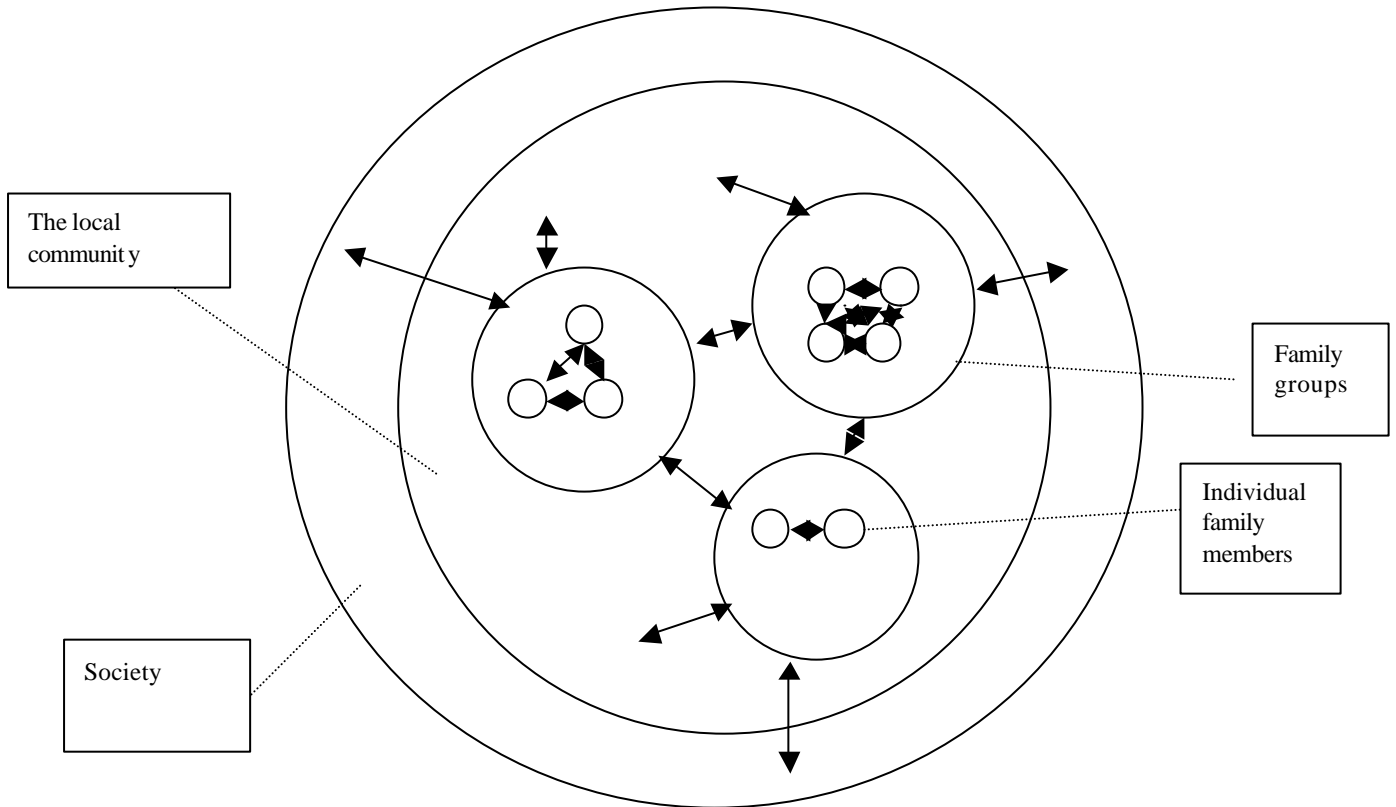
ECOMAPS

The genogram placed the family in a temporal context demonstrating its links with history and connections across and between generations. The ecomap is another visual representation useful in assessment and analysis but locates the family and/or individual members within it in a spatial context; it looks at the networks available in the environment in which the service user lives. These networks may represent individuals or organisations and agencies with whom service users interact.

Based as it is upon systems thinking, the ecomap seeks to show the various connections and interrelations between a range of systems and sub-systems involved with the family and/or individual members. This means that an ecomap seeks to show how family members act and react to each other and how the family as a whole relates to other families, groups and

organisations in society. It also can be used to demonstrate interrelations between various levels within environmental living systems. A visual representation of the way systems and sub-systems interact may be helpful here.

Figure 2.1 Systems and the ways they might relate



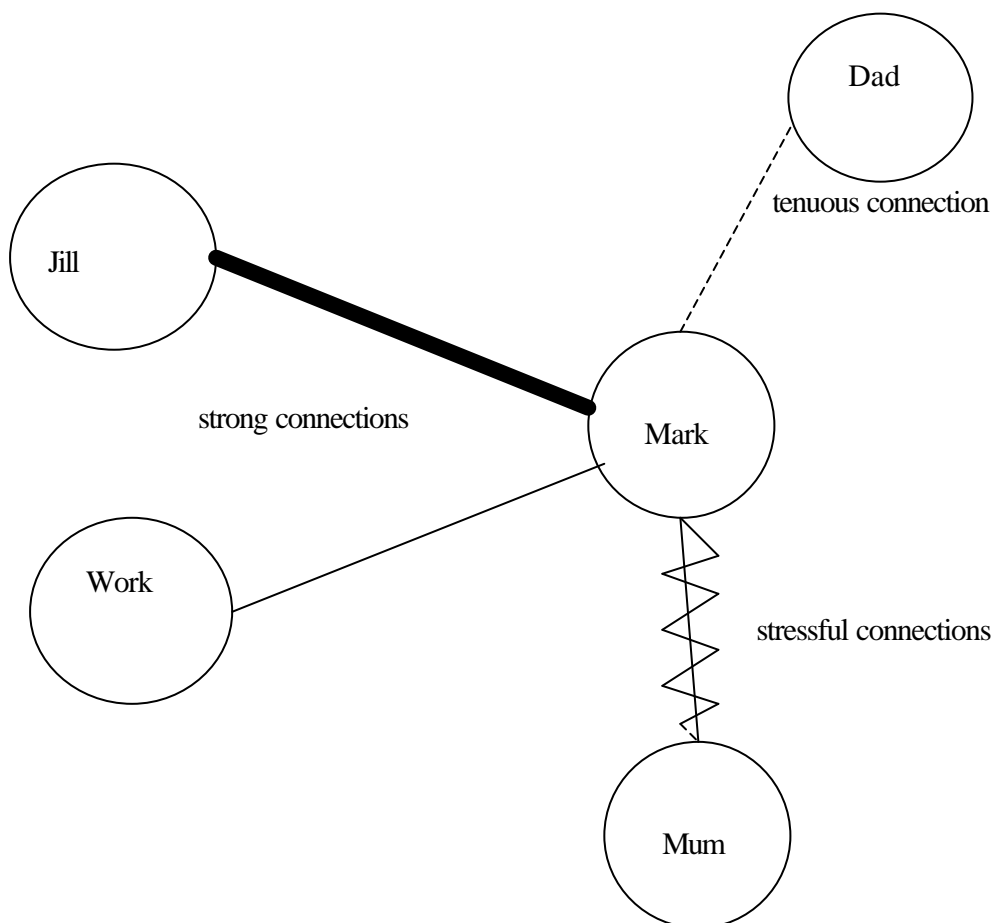
This diagram may look, at first glance, very complex. However, it shows the different levels at which individuals and families interact on an everyday basis, considering the influences that come from individuals and families and in return have an impact upon them. For instance, individual family members have a mutual or reciprocal influence on one another, but in turn each family member is influenced by and has an influence on other individuals, families and organisations with whom they have contact. They are also influenced by wider society, portrayals of issues in the media and social policy issues of the day. Part of this wider social view itself stems from the collective influence that individuals have on each other and on the development of wider 'common-sense' or shared understandings.

In the same way that genograms can help the process of engagement with families, so too can the use of ecomaps. Ecomaps provide an 'at-a-glance' perspective, showing who is involved with whom and in what ways. They are participative and can foster constructive discussion during their compilation if undertaken together. For instance, the following question may result from using ecomaps with families *Why is it that one member of the family feels that the next-door-neighbour represents their strongest support whilst other*

members of the family believe her support comes with a high degree of stress? Compiling ecomaps as a family unit can also encourage debate and discussion concerning beliefs and disagreements between members that can be used to deal with issues arising. It must be remembered, however, that just as constructing an ecomap can foster positive debate and discussion it may give rise to matters that evoke strong feeling and conflict between family members. You need to be aware of this when working with families in this way and consider ways in which you may lessen tension arising from disagreements whilst acknowledging the value of each person's contribution and understanding. Setting some ground rules first may help. Acknowledge that there may be disagreements and state that this is healthy and should be allowed. By making people aware of possible differences and encouraging participants to discuss them you may find a greater willingness to explore issues in more depth.

How to construct an ecomap

Ecomaps are fairly easy to construct. On a large sheet of paper draw a circle in the middle and place the family or individual member's name within it. Following this, a series of smaller circles can be placed around this circle. In each of these place the name of the organisation, institution, social group, family or individual with which the family has connections. The nature of the relationship between the individual and 'circle' can be made clear by the line linking the two. Thick lines indicate strong connections, broken lines indicate weak connections and wavy or crossed lines indicate stress associated with the connection. The following ecomap concerning Mark provides an example:



The ecomap is valuable because of its direct and immediate visual impact. A wealth of information is presented concerning relationships and perceptions of these. Whilst it was originally developed as a tool to aid social workers' and family therapists' assessments of family situations it has, as noted above, value in creating a working partnership in which the service user takes an active role in the assessment. The result of this has been that shared insight has aided planning and subsequent interventions are located firmly within the living-space of the service user. The first composition may help the initial assessment but, as we know, human life is never static and changes occur continually. Therefore, constructing further ecomaps at various points throughout the interventive phase can help social workers and service users to evaluate outcomes together. It can also identify possible sources of support to assist the family or individual in working towards change. It is important to note, however, that an ecomap leaves out certain information. For instance, in the above, we are not told his age, where he lives or anything about his family history or life experience. These are questions that can be asked during the construction of the ecomap. However, by combining the ecomap with the genogram we begin to get a more rounded picture of an individual's or family's life and relationships. Hartman (1995) describes the development, construction and uses of ecomaps in social work settings.

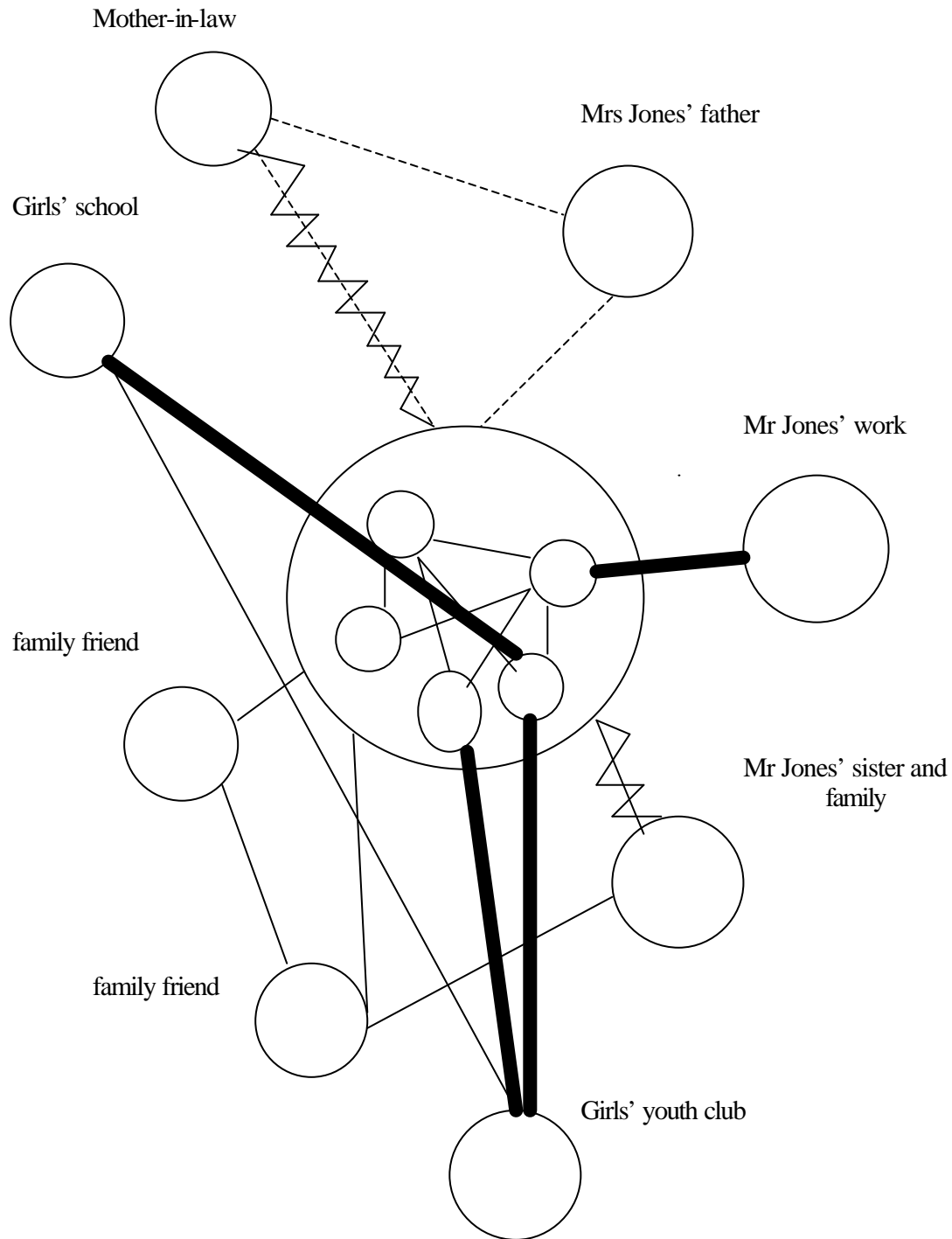
It is important to gain an understanding of some of the possible implications and impacts of the models and tools used to make an assessment. This helps us to tailor the tools to particular circumstances and to ensure that issues arising from the process are effectively dealt with. The following activity gives you an opportunity to compile your own ecomap.

Activity 2.2

Take a piece of flip chart paper and place your name in a circle at the centre of it. Draw circles around the outside of your circle and place the names of family, friends, acquaintances and clubs or organisations with whom you are involved. In this way you will begin to construct your own map. Consider carefully the relationships and connections you have with the various organisations, agencies, groups, families and individuals that you have placed in the outer circles. By using a combination of different lines, thicknesses and comments, show the strength of these relationships and your feelings towards them. You may be able to compile a retrospective ecomap that may help, in some way, to demonstrate changes that have occurred throughout your life. Of course, when drawing such retrospectively you are open to interpreting the past in the light of the present. However, for experiential purposes it forms a useful exercise. Keep your ecomap for later consultation and adaptation if you wish. It may be useful to compare the ecomap with your genogram and to see how they fit together, what different information each map includes and what each says about you. Ask yourself how these tools might add to an effective assessment when working as a social worker.

The genogram was extremely useful in the case study of Mrs Jones and her concerns with regard to Damien. The case study continues below to demonstrate what additional information could be gained from an ecomap.

At a later assessment session it was agreed to construct an ecomap. The intention was to find out exactly what levels of support Mrs Jones now had, how she felt about the support and how this compared with the support she had enjoyed previously. It was also thought likely that in the compilation of the ecomap it may be that further sources of support would be discussed, identified, and an interventive strategy determined.



It quickly became apparent that Mr and Mrs Jones had mutual friends, Mr Jones enjoyed his work, and the girls enjoyed good relations with their school and youth club. Mrs Jones, however, had little if anything to occupy herself outside of the family unit. In fact, since the deterioration in her relationship with her mother-in-law she had little support within the family. Her father had not seen her for some years. She described her relationship with him as stormy in the past. On further exploration it seemed that they disagreed on most things since the death of her mother. This culminated in her marriage two years after to Mr Jones. They had been seeing one another for some time but Mrs Jones' father had never approved of the relationship. When she married Mr Jones her father kept infrequent contact until this ceased some years ago. A source of support and friendship in Mr Jones' sister had been lost after an argument following the death of Mr Jones' father.

The ecomap proved extremely useful in presenting a visual and pictorial display of relationships and isolation. It gave rise, also to the beginning formulation of an interventive strategy aimed at securing positive and supportive connections for Mrs Jones outside of the family environment and within her control.

CULTURAGRAMS

A relatively new assessment tool that is similar to the ecomap and genogram has recently added to the social work repertoire: that of the culturagram. As the name suggests it is designed to assist social workers in the analysis of the meaning and impact of culture in the life of those families and individuals being assessed. This is an important tool in developing a culturally sensitive approach to social work. Service users are acknowledged as being the experts on their own lives and situations rather than social workers assuming that they know best.

The tool is sensitive to the culture and ethnic background of individuals. Congress (1994) states that the culturagram was developed specifically in response to increasing needs arising from cultural diversity and the crucial importance of ethnically-sensitive practice. It was developed in the USA and is equally applicable to the multiethnic and multicultural composition of contemporary British society. There is a growing need to develop such practice with people who are refugees or asylum seekers and this assessment tool allows a social worker to gather information on the impact of the move for individuals involved and to gain the story of people at first hand (see Parker, 2000).

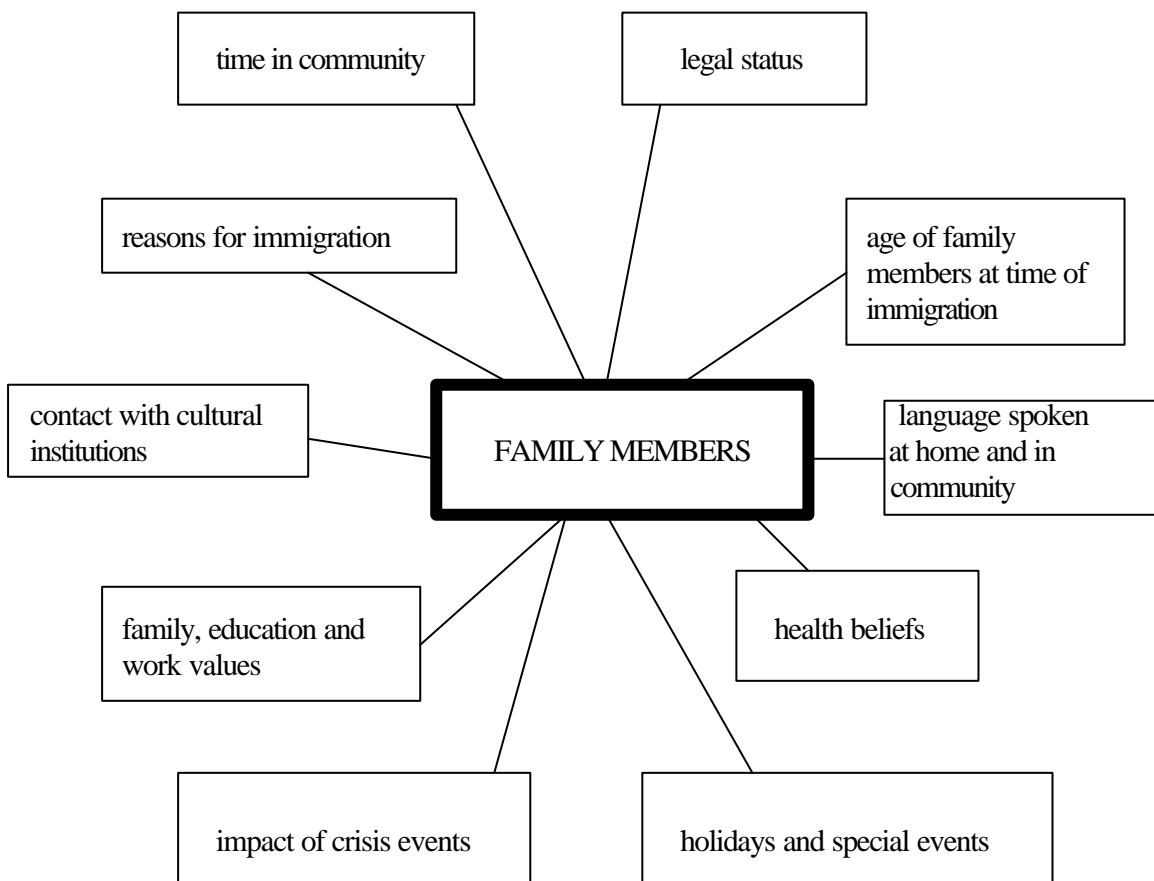
There are ten important factors about which information is gathered in the culturagram. These are:

- the reasons for immigration;
- length of time in the community;
- legal or undocumented status;
- age at time of immigration;
- language spoken at home and in the community;
- contact with cultural institutions;
- health beliefs;
- holidays and special events;

- the impact of crisis and significant events;
- values held about family, education and work.

Constructing a culturagram involves a skilled use of communication skills. Asking sensitive questions is not easy in any situation. Where people may be suspicious of authority figures asking questions, sometimes because of particularly traumatic past experiences, great sensitivity is required. Social workers must explain very clearly why such information is needed, what it will be used for and who will have access to it. This may slow the process of assessment but it is important if the information is going to be used in the most effective ways. Rushing or pushing too hard may result in spurious information being given or may indeed impede the development of constructive working relationships. Sometimes working at the pace of service users will involve you developing and using skills of assertion within social work teams, especially when you are being pressed to achieve objectives and targets within specified timeframes.

It is also important to be mindful of language and communication issues, especially where English is a second language. Social workers will need to ask careful, concrete questions and be prepared to repeat or put certain questions to one side. Summaries of discussion, paraphrasing and sharing written copies of the information can help in developing good practice. The information gathered in response to the ten areas highlighted above is drawn together to form a culturagram in a diagram similar to the ecomap:



The use of the culturagram is important to the social worker in demonstrating the significant differences raised between family members that may have an impact on acculturation and family functioning. The diversity of beliefs among family members may become very clear. This knowledge can be used to understand and reconcile differences between family members.

Congress (1994) believes that the use of the culturagram may empower family members by helping them to see their cultural background as important and may point to areas within the family and to external social institutions that need social work involvement and support. The following case study exemplifies some of the uses such an assessment may have.

Baljinder was eighteen years old and was hoping to study law at University in the coming year. She had been asked by her mother to visit her uncle and brothers in a small village in Bangladesh in the summer before going to University. Baljinder was nervous about this request and although her mother had promised her that it was just a visit, she did not wish to go. This nervousness stemmed from the experience a friend of hers had the previous summer. Baljinder's friend had been forced into marriage, escaping later in the year, returning to England and now having few friends within her family or community. Baljinder's mother promised her she would not ask her to marry against her will. A social worker from the local area working specifically with the Bangladeshi community assisted Baljinder and her mother to work through these anxieties. By compiling a culturagram, Baljinder was able to see the process of her family moving to England, the importance of consultation within her family and the strong Islamic faith that guided family decisions. As a result of this, Baljinder was convinced that her mother was indeed proposing a family trip and was able to go and enjoy this summer prior to University.

As Congress (1994) states:

The culturagram is a powerful tool for helping social workers assess and intervene appropriately with culturally diverse families. It is rooted in a model of cultural pluralism which stresses the intrinsic value of culturally diverse families pursuing their own styles, customs, values and language while recognising that different degrees of acculturation do occur... (p. 538)

The following case example demonstrates how culturagrams can identify changing attitudes and influences of culture between generations.

Baljinder's mother was pleased that her daughter could see that she would not be forced into marriage. The move to England in the 1970s to gain work and support her husband's mother and father back in Bangladesh was significant to her. Completing the culturagram allowed her to see the changes in attitudes between her and her daughter's generation. The expectation that she would move and that her husband would support his parents was never questioned at the time. Whilst she would not have changed her move to England or the reasons for it she was convinced that her desire to support her daughter in what she wanted came in part from her own experiences. It was the completion of the culturagram that helped her to understand this.

It must be remembered that events do not always work out so well. Compiling a culturagram can raise conflicts and tensions within families. It is important that social workers do not fall into the trap of working through conflicts in a way that reflects their own cultural values and position but to work at the pace of service users and show respect for their value systems.

Research summary: Culturagrams in working with abuse

Culturagrams have been employed in the sensitive area of elder abuse and domestic violence (Brownell, 1997; Brownell and Congress, 1998). It is possible to use a culturagram as a screening instrument to assess and detect abuse and to promote culturally sensitive practice. Brownell (1997) suggests that it is adjunct to professional assessment that allows the social worker to gain a clearer understanding of cultural values, belief systems and experiences and so to intervene more effectively in a person-centred way rather than one based on an appreciation of one's own values. She reports on a number of case examples including the Chinese American community, the Polish community, Latin American and Indian/South Asian communities. The culturagram helped to identify particular aspects of culture and values that were important in planning further work and developing culturally sensitive approaches to practice.

Activity 2.3

Often, our own culture becomes taken for granted because we live within it and reproduce it from day-to-day. In this activity you are asked to compile your own culturagram and to examine how this tool can bring to the fore aspects of your life and culture that were perhaps buried beneath the surface or taken-for-granted.

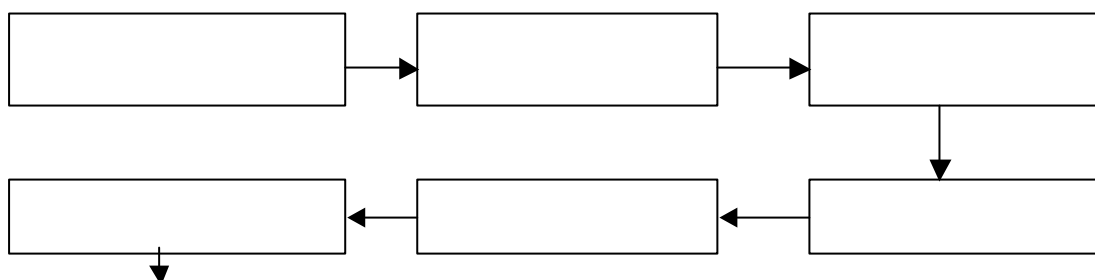
Using the areas identified in the diagram above, construct a culturagram for your family. Pick out key points and issues. It may be that you have not moved country but perhaps moved town or county. This too can demonstrate cultural issues that are important to the way you see the world and respond to it. For instance, the terms we use for the meals we eat differ across different parts of the UK. Other aspects of language may be specific to a region. These all help to identify us and can lead to assumptions being made about who we are. By identifying our own cultural values we can begin to recognise the importance of everyday rituals in others.

FLOW DIAGRAMS AND LIFE ROAD MAPS

The previous assessment tools can provide a wealth of information concerning the ecological location of the individual and family, family histories, patterns and norms. The flow diagram and the life road map stand at a mid-point between the person's living system and the patterns and norms that develop within families. They can be used to provide a chronological history of significant events and moves in the family's and/or individuals' lives. These tools also serve to locate the person in space and time in the present; giving a snapshot look at how the individual came to be where they are and what experiences they have had an impact in making them so. Like the genogram, flow diagrams and life road maps can demonstrate the various routes a person has taken to where they are today, and like the ecomap they firmly locate the person or family unit in a specific context in place and history. It demonstrates matters of importance to individual service users.

The number of movements that a family or individual has in a given space of time may be

of great significance to understanding the particular situation for which they are now seeking help from a social worker. This information may also identify patterns and events that were not consciously considered by service users. One interactive way of charting movements that can be employed with adults and equally so with children is the construction of a flow diagram. Starting from birth or, indeed, some other specified and agreed point, the individual or family is asked to complete a box for every place where they have lived. It is important to include dates as the length of time spent in places can be of the utmost significance. If possible, it is useful to provide information about the family composition at these various stages to consider the expected and unexpected transitions that the family may have undergone. In this way, the compilation of a flow diagram can be undertaken alongside the construction of a genogram. The boxes of the flow diagram are connected to one another until the present in terms of time and location is reached.



Again, like genograms, ecomaps and culturagrams, the flow-diagram has a great potential for visual impact. It can locate times of turbulence and upset, times of change, consistencies and inconsistencies in a family's pattern of life. This can have an immediate impact on service users when completing the flow diagram. They may be encouraged, by seeing the results of their diagram, to express a range of issues and concerns connected with these moves and their own histories. The patterns that emerge can help explain how and why the person is located where they are today. At the very least, the flow diagram allows for the formation and further exploration of hypotheses. As such it is a valuable assessment tool in the social worker's repertoire.

Activity 2.4

Take a large piece of paper and draw as many boxes as you think you might need to detail your moves. Complete a flow diagram representing all the house moves you have experienced by filling in the date and place of move in each of the boxes. Wherever possible add information that you remember from the move. For instance, who was with you when you moved and did anyone stay behind? You might have moved because of your parents' jobs, or perhaps moved in to a place of your own for the first time. What roles did each person involved in the move have? This could relate to a parental role, a partner or child amongst others.

Try to think about the experiences associated with these moves and the people who were involved, what changes there have been in your family or living group composition and your associated feelings. Again, this activity can evoke strong feelings and reactions. These may appear when using such techniques with service users and being aware of this yourself is good preparation for an understanding and sensitive response.

Repeat this activity for someone you have worked with or someone you know well from your past. (Remember to ensure the anonymity of the person.) Does the diagram assist in your understanding of their present situation? It may bring to light points for further exploration. For instance, a reasonable hypothesis to make about a homesick person who has experienced very few moves during their life but has just begun a University course away from home may be that the homesickness is connected. Of course, this need not necessarily be the case and you would need to ask further questions to check this idea, but seeing the pattern can help you forge these questions.

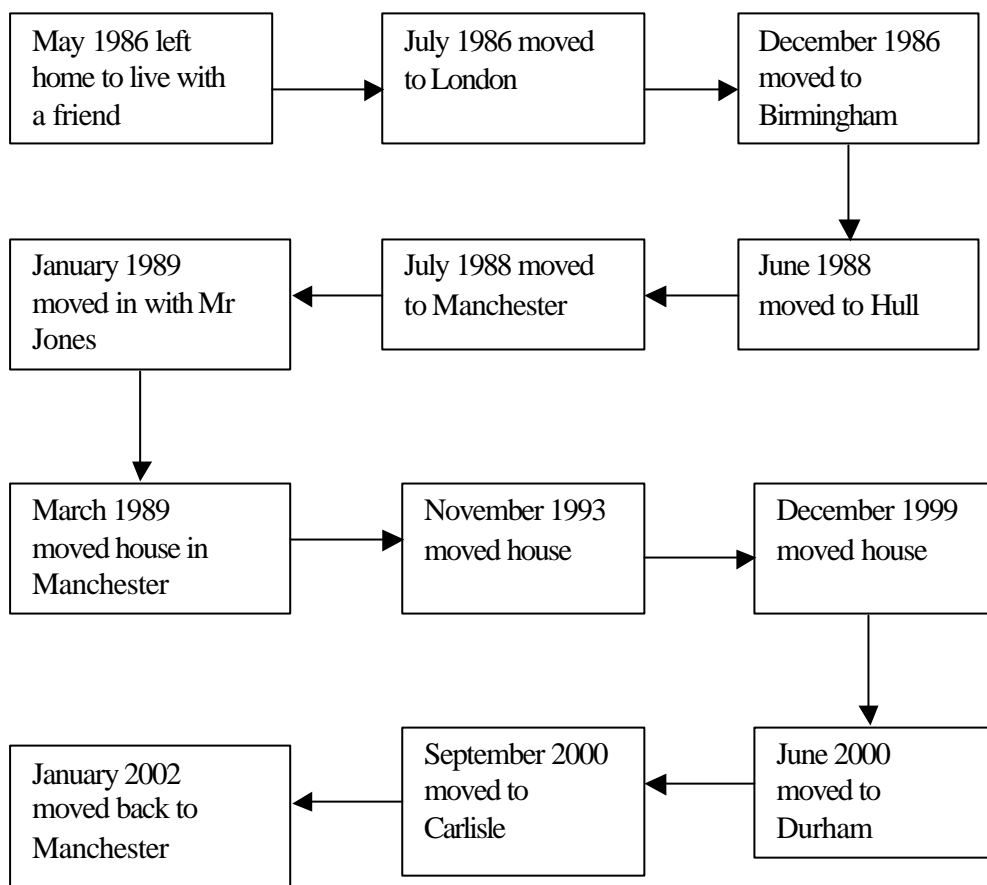
What information did completion of this activity provide you with that you were not aware of before this activity? You have possibly found out something about your own life and moves or those of the other person you have considered. Think about the possible ways in which the completion of a life road map may help you in formulating questions to extend the depth of an assessment.

We can see how the use of a flow diagram assisted in the continuing assessment of the Jones family case study.

A flow diagram was undertaken with Mrs Jones and her present family. This indicated that in the two years prior to the death of her mother she had moved frequently living in a variety of locations in the country. It was at this time that she met her present husband and began to lose more contact with her father. She expressed a belief that her father blamed her for not being with her mother during her last two years of life. This seemed to have some substance but more importantly it brought up an issue warranting further exploration.

There was a further period of frequent moves that seemed to the social worker to have significance. In the year immediately after the death of Mr Jones' father and the birth of Damien the family moved three times because of Mr Jones' job. Since that time, however, they have settled in one place.

The information collected provided the social worker with areas to explore further. It gave Mrs Jones a level of insight and understanding into her life that she had not had before and the process helped establish a working relationship between her and the social worker.



Two significant points were raised by this exercise. First, it was apparent that Mrs Jones' stormy relationship with her father and disagreements with him were long lived, and, in fact, began some time before the death of her mother and before she met and began living with Mr Jones. Also, it seemed potentially significant that there were so many moves in the year following Mr Jones' father's death. This provided opportunities for further discussion and exploration. Prior to such a focussed consideration of her life's events and chronology Mrs Jones did not realise the potential significance of these. As she said "I was so wrapped up in the events themselves that I paid little attention to the details."

Using road maps

Chronicling the number and dates of moves, and gathering information concerning family patterns, changes and norms by the completion of a genogram provides useful data for the analysis of families and from which to begin to develop interventions. However, it is not only moves and family compositions, histories and transitions that are perceived as significant by people. To gain a more comprehensive picture of the situation, the social worker may compile a 'life road map' with the service user.

A life road map is a pictorial representation of the major events and occurrences, rather than just moves, in the life of the service user. It portrays these events as perceived by service users. This can be valuable in keeping a person's attention and may seem a little more exciting than a simple flow diagram. Undertaking a life road map, therefore, validates the

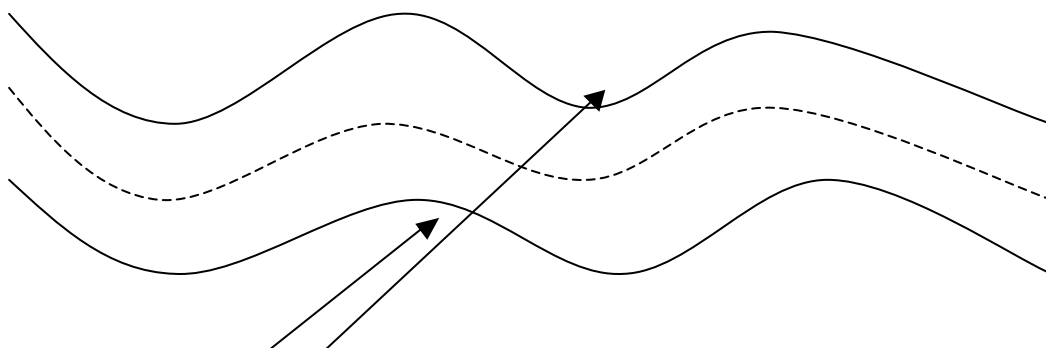
perceptions of service users who decide on the importance of events to include. This demonstrates respect for their self-worth and their active participation in the process of assessment and intervention. It is helpful for social workers to remember at all times during the assessment process that service users are expert on their own lives and experiences.

Originally, the life road map was developed as a technique for use with children in care settings, and especially those engaged in the process of life story work prior to placement in substitute families. It is still important in completing this crucial work with children who have been in the looked after system and social workers can use this technique effectively, as with other tools, to establish positive working relationships. However, the use of life road maps can be much wider. It has been used successfully with a range of service users, adults and older people as well as young people and children.

It is useful to take a little time to consider some of the ways the use of life road maps can contribute to the compilation of a life story book. For instance, can you think of possible dangers and limitations in using this technique? Are there likely to be differences between completing a life road map as an adolescent or as an older adult other than the length of time that can be covered?

It is clear that focusing on major events in a person's life will provide rich material that forms the backcloth against which that individual may view his or her life. It can form an immediate visual display that can itself be included in the life story book and can identify events to be explored in more depth. It may be, however, that the activity raises very painful memories and social workers must be aware of the need for sensitivity and able to work with distress. It may be also the case that some aspects of a person's life have been forgotten or mistaken and it is again important that people feel comfortable enough to leave out areas of their lives. This may present some differences depending on the age and developmental stage of the individual completing the life road map.

A life road map is fairly simple to construct. The social worker asks the service user to draw a 'road' on a large piece of paper. The road will have a number of bends and turns in it. The social workers then asks the service user to write a brief comment about an event in their life that they themselves perceive as significant at each turn and twist in the road. As events are being written on to the road, the social worker and service user may talk about them and weigh up together the significance of each. This will help to identify further areas for exploration and clarify other points.



Insert perceived significant events where the road turns

It is not strictly necessary that events are written in chronological order but the idea of a road may lend itself to this. When seen as part of a larger assessment, it may be more useful to link data from each session and activity. If this were to be the case then a chronological account would be preferable. However, it is, in the end, the information gathered for the assessment that is of paramount importance whatever service user group you are working with, or whatever the purpose of your assessment. In this instance the information relates to the perceptions of the service user and tells you something about their construction of the world, how they perceive it working, and how they themselves interact with it. This material can be used, again, to stimulate conversation and analysis of issues, to gain insight for the service user, and to prepare the ground for intervention. Bear in mind the following questions when completing a life road map with service users:

- What is it that service users want to change?
- What is of concern to social welfare institutions?
- Is there anything within the assessment we can use as a basis for, or to measure change?

Activity 2.5

Again, it will be useful to your development and for your understanding of the process of undertaking an assessment using these techniques for you to compile a life road map representing some of the significant events that you have experienced. Remember the 'significance' is based upon your perception of events and not what you think might be considered significant by others. Try to think about the experiences associated with these experiences and the people, times and settings involved. If you need to use more than one piece of paper to complete your map this is all right. It can provide a useful learning experience for applying the technique later with service users.

How might you employ this technique in a practice situation?

You would need to be prepared with paper, pens and perhaps some ideas for starting the map. Depending on the age and understanding of the person involved, you could use the time drawing the 'road' to build a relationship and to put the individual at ease. With an older person the process could take a more matter of fact approach. As with all techniques, a clear explanation of the task and its purpose is essential.

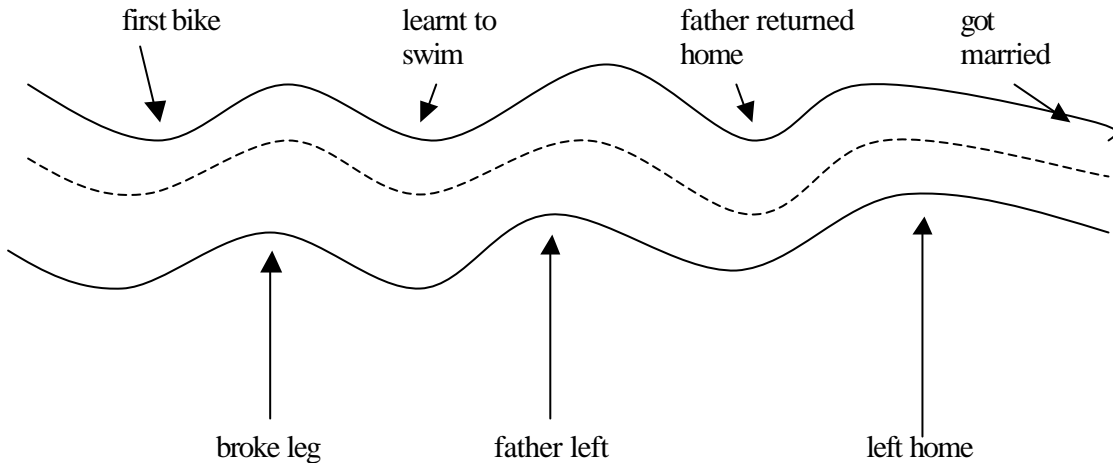
List some of the ways a life road map may help in identifying areas to work upon following the assessment.

You might include the identification of strengths, individuals important to the person completing the map or specific events that have occurred in the life of that individual in your list.

In our continuing case study we see how Mrs Jones used the life road map to explore events and issues in her life.

In order to complement and add to the data collected from Mrs Jones and her family she completed a life road map with the social worker. This brought to the fore a number of issues not previously mentioned. The genogram presented her family history as reasonably stable. However, when completing the life road map it was clear that a significant event for Mrs Jones was that her father left her mother for a period of a year when she was 11. Not surprisingly, her illness during the

pregnancy with Damien figured highly in her perceptions of significant events. Apart from this little other data emerged. However, even the incidental material has value; it demonstrates the feelings invested in certain things and events add to the overall picture of the subject of the assessment.



This conflated view of part of the life road map drawn by Mrs Jones demonstrates some of important events that help the social worker make sense of who she is and what is important to her. The map is interesting. Mrs Jones included the positively perceived aspects of her life towards the top of the map and the negative ones towards the bottom. Whilst too much significance can be read into this, life roads maps can be used in ways to discuss the significance of events and the value attached to them.

SUMMARY

Assessment is a skilled professional process. The collection of information is integral to the completion of an effective assessment. The manner of the assessment and the methods employed to gather information, to synthesise it and to begin to form hypotheses for further exploration are all important factors to take into account. This is recognised in the educational requirements for social work. Models and tools must be chosen with sensitivity and with a clear purpose in mind. It is useful to bear in mind the following questions:

- Why do you want to collect this information?
- For what purpose(s) will it be used?
- Who will see the information?

The five tools we have discussed in this chapter help to structure the process of assessment. Not only do they provide an interactive and participative way of collecting information but they also elicit important topics to explore further and to determine the focus of future assessment. Using these tools can also provide key insights for service users completing them. Although insight into one's situation is unlikely to promote change in itself, it can encourage motivation to work towards change and by doing so assist in planning and

implementing effective implementation strategies.

These tools and techniques form a useful adjunct to the use of interpersonal or communication skills, such as exploration, questioning, and probing. It must be remembered that they form part of an overall and comprehensive approach to assessment that will also take into account case files, reports, third party statements, verbal and written communications from others involved, and full and candid discussion with the subjects of the assessment.

It is imperative that social work is seen to be a discipline that is effective. It should do what it claims to be able to do (whilst allowing for human changeability). Essential to this is promoting a model of practice that is research-minded and that evaluates the effects of its interventions. The use of these techniques to collect data at a cross-section in the life of the family or member of that unit enables the social worker and the subject to monitor change in some small way. This is integral to the development of good social work practice.

Assessment is and should be purposeful as we saw in chapter one. It is undertaken in order to determine targets and goals for change to improve the quality of life of those involved. The tools introduced here are important in providing data to enable the planning and implementation of social work interventions designed to achieve desired and agreed change. We saw the tools being used with Mrs Jones and her family. A genogram assisted in beginning to compile information about the family's history and highlighted other information that may have been important, especially Mrs Jones' relationship with her mother-in-law. In later sessions an ecomap was used to look at support and other family relationships and the completion of a flow diagram and life road map highlighted other significant aspects of her life. All the activities undertaken helped the worker to engage with Mrs Jones and her family, to encourage participation in the assessment and to begin to focus on areas of concern and issues that could become targets and goals for intervention. They provided also a baseline from which change could be measured. This could not be done in a rigorous scientific and quantitative way. However, qualitative change could be measured and alterations to her and her family's life space, patterns and development could be explored, discussed and promoted.

Before we consider planning, intervention and review we will set the context of social work assessment in the next chapter, looking at mental health, community care and child and family social work.