

Psychological Diagnoses and Functional Impact

What Really Matters in Legal Cases

→ A Diagnosis Alone Tells You Nothing

Psychological diagnosis does not explain severity, functional impact, or relevance to the case. Courts focus on real-world consequences, not just clinical labels.

Legal Contexts Where This Matters:

- **Parenting Capacity** – Does the condition affect their ability to provide a safe, stable home?
- **Personal Injury** – Does PTSD or depression impact work, social life, or daily tasks?
- **Criminal Cases** – Does a cognitive condition affect decision-making or behavioural control?

→ Why Functional Impact Matters More Than the Diagnosis

Courts need to know: How does this diagnosis impact the person's life?

- A diagnosis of PTSD must be linked to work or daily impairments for compensation.
- A diagnosis of depression alone does not indicate whether a parent can meet a child's needs.
- A cognitive disorder must be assessed for its impact on legal responsibility.

→ Red Flags to Watch For in Psychological Reports

- Diagnosis listed without discussion of impact.
- Over-reliance on self-reports without objective measures.
- Vague conclusions with no real-world consequences.
- No alternative explanations considered.

→ What a Strong Psychological Report Should Include

- **Specific Impairments** – e.g., "Intrusive flashbacks prevent driving."
- **Objective Evidence** – Standardised assessments, workplace evaluations, collateral reports.
- **The Link Between Symptoms & Functionality** – Not just "anxiety" but how it disrupts tasks.
- **Consideration of Context** – Does the impairment fluctuate? Is it situational or persistent?

→ Key Questions for Lawyers to Ask

- Has the diagnosis been linked to functional impairments?
- Is the impact clearly described with objective evidence?
- Has the psychologist ruled out alternative explanations?
- Does the report connect symptoms to the legal issue?