

Covert Vulnerability Screening

Pattern Recognition Guide

Overview

Covert presentations are harder to identify than overt ones because they appear humble, sensitive, or victimized. This screening helps identify patterns that may complicate standard approaches.

Distinguishing Features

- Grandiosity expressed through victimhood ("No one has suffered like I have")
- Hypersensitivity to perceived criticism
- Passive-aggressive rather than overtly aggressive
- Envious of others but frames it as being treated unfairly
- Seeks reassurance constantly but never satisfied
- Martyrdom as manipulation ("After all I've done for you")

Screening Questions

- "Tell me about a time when someone criticized you. How did you respond?"
- "How do you typically handle it when you don't get recognition you deserve?"
- "Describe your relationships with people who are more successful than you."
- "What happens in your relationships when your partner has needs that conflict with yours?"

Red Flags in Session

- Consistently positions self as victim in every story
- Unable to identify any personal contribution to relationship problems
- History of relationships ending with the other person portrayed as abuser
- Subtle devaluation of you or previous helpers ("You're the only one who understands")
- Emotional reactions disproportionate to situation

Implications for Practice

- Standard empathy-based approaches may reinforce problematic patterns
- Couples work may need to pause for individual work first
- Partner may need separate support to avoid triangulation
- Progress may be slower; adjust expectations accordingly

