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A Review of Psychological Assessment Practice in the Philippines: What Do Some Practitioners Say?

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This paper reviews the practice of psychological assessment in the Philippines guided by Bornstein's (2017) framework of evidence-based psychological assessment (EBPA). One hundred fifty-one (N = 151) respondents, majority of whom are registered psychometricians, answered a survey on their current practices, knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Part 1 of the study presented practitioners' training and practice, and their knowledge, skills, and perceptions about psychological assessment. Part 2 considered current assessment practices, from test selection to delivering test results. Thematic analysis was conducted on respondents' answers to open-ended questions in the survey to explore the challenges, best practices, and needs of practitioners. Despite the limitations of the sample, the initial findings of this survey provide baseline data on how some assessment practitioners perceive the state of the practimthe

process, and development of local tools. Both the quantitative and qualitative data show that some of the current practices in assessment are aligned with EBPA components although there is still a need for practitioners to adhere more consistently to an evidence-based practice in assessment.

Keywords: assessment practitioners, registered psychometricians, psychological assessment, psychological tests

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The International Declaration on Core Competences in Professional Psychology (IPCP, 2016) identifes the conduct of psychological assessments and evaluations as among the competencies of practicing psychologists, alongside setting relevant goals, conducting psychological interventions, and communicating efectively and appropriately. Following the guidelines of the American Psychological Association (APA), Bornstein (2017) defned profciency in assessment as the ability of practitioners to do the following: evaluate the construct validity of psychological assessment tools, construct an assessment battery, administer and score individual measures, interpret the results of these measures, integrate data from different instruments, and communicate assessment fndings. These standards invite psychological assessment practitioners to review and refect on their assessment practices. Previous surveys have been conducted on practices pertaining to psychotherapy and counseling in the Philippines (e.g., Tarroja, Catipon, Dey, & Garcia, 2013; Teh, 2003; Tuason, Fernandez, Catipon, Dey, & Carandang, 2012), but there has yet to be a review of the current practice of psychological assessment. Assessment is a key activity of psychology practitioners. Thus, upholding standards in the practice is critical for two reasons: frst, psychological assessment assists in making important decisions that can have implications in the daily lives of people who seek it (e.g., formulating treatment, educational interventions, or employment decisions); second, it lends more credence to the professionalization of psychology in the Philippines. Hence, this study looks into the current assessment practices of Filipino assessment psychology practitioners and how these practices meet the standards of an evic mee Ă ʻ nm m ɪ ᵐ Mpsy

Gilmore, 2015).

The following section reviews existing documents and literature on the practice of psychological assessment, such as its legal definition and issues faced by practitioners. The issues are further categorized in terms of the training of practitioners, tools used, process of assessment, and stakeholders in the assessment process.

Defining Psychological Assessment and Psychological Testing

While there is a clear distinction between psychological assessment and psychological testing as described in the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 2014), "the semantic distinction between psychological testing and psychological assessment is blurred in everyday conversation" (Cohen & Swerdik, 2009, p.13). This blurred distinction is also observed among assessment practitioners as the terms are often used interchangeably.

Conceptually, psychological assessment is defined as "the gathering and integration of psychology-related data for the purpose of making a psychological evaluation that is accomplished through the use of tools such as tests, interviews, case studies, behavioral observation, and specially designed apparatuses and measurement procedures," whereas psychological testing is "the process of measuring psychology-related variables by means of devices or procedures designed to obtain a sample of behavior" (Cohen & Swerdik, 2009, p. 14). These definitions may be perceived as overlapping and related, and hence may result in confusion even among practitioners.

It is therefore important to understand the practice of Filipino assessment practitioners vis-à-vis the current legal definition and practitioners' interpretation of the terminology. The Psychology Act (2010) defines psychological assessment as:

> ...gathering and integration of psychology-related data for the purpose of making a psychological evaluation, accomplished through a variety of tools, including individual tests, projective tests, clinical interview and other psychological assessment tools,

possession of technical assessment skills.

There is no existing local literature that looks into how assessment practitioners are trained in each of these areas. In the United Kingdom, a survey of clinical psychologists found that most practitioners learned by doing and observing others in clinical practice (Nel, Pezzolesi, & Stott, 2012). However, there also seems to be a dearth of adequate supervision that could guide the learning process. Hence, it appears that there needs to be more research on specific learning activities that facilitate the acquisition of competencies among practitioners.

Tools Used in Psychological Assessment

Much of the existing literature on psychological assessment delves into the tools practitioners use (Archer, Buffington-Vollum, Stredny, & Handel, 2006; Piotrowski,1999; Wright et al., 2017); knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to utilize tests; as well as training, practices, and challenges experienced by practitioners in using assessment tools (Meteyard & Gilmore, 2015). Psychologists in different parts of the world are now more aware of using evidence-based practices and highlight fundamental and ethical considerations when selecting test materials to use for assessment (Wright et al., 2017). For instance, there is now a greater call towards using tests with strong psychometric properties (Musewicz, Marczyk, Knauss, & York, 2009). Furthermore, Bernardo (2011) pointed out concerns in using psychological tests translated to Filipino as they may not be conceptually and structurally equivalent to the original versions of the scales. Some Filipino psychology researchers have therefore responded by conducting validation studies to look into the applicability of foreign tests in the Philippine contexts and equivalence of English and Filipino versions of the same test (Bernardo & Estrellado, 2014; Bernardo, Lising, & Shulruf, 2013; Ganotice, Bernardo, & King, 2012a; Nalipay, Bernardo, Tarroja, & Bautista, 2018).

Piotrowski (1999) found that despite existing constraints, many Western practitioners still opted to use more traditional measures such as the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI), Wechsler Intelligence Scales, the Symptom Checklist-90, Bender-Gestalt, and the Beck Depression Inventory, and projective techniques

Figure 1. Understanding psychological assessment practice using Bornstein's (2017) evidence-based psychological assessment (EBPA).

Excel from the paper-and-pen surveys. The data was then analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Qualitative data was coded through thematic analysis by two raters. The raters first came up with the themes independently and then finalized the themes consensually.

RESULTS

The first section of the results is the quantitative description of the practice of psychological assessment in the Philippines based on Bornstein's (2017) evidence-based psychological assessment (EBPA): the practitioner, tests, process, and stakeholders. The frequencies and percentages are presented to have a better understanding of assessment practice based on the self-reports of the 151 respondents. The second section is the qualitative description of the practice and discuss

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Type of Licensure	
Registered Psychometricians	
Registered Psychologists	
Registered Guidance Counselors	
Place of Practice	
National Capital Region (NCR)	
Luzon	
Visayas	
Mindanao	
Other	
Gender	

Table 6. Tests for Personality Used in Assessment

Personality Test	Frequency *(N)*
Sentence Completion	99
Draw A Person	91
16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF)	85
House Tree Person (HTP)	74
Thematic Apperception Tests (TAT)	62
Family Drawings	47
Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)	45
NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO PI-R)	43
Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI/MMPI-2/MMPI-A)	
Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory (MCMI)	

exemplars and direct quotes from the participants.

Challenges. The themes under challenges covered points 3 to 9 of EBPA, from using empirically validated tools to communication of assessment findings.

Availability and cost of test materials. Common challenges encountered by respondents were the availability and cost of test materials. Practitioners reported that the sites where they worked did not buy needed test materials because these were expensive. Thus, although many asserted that they used original test forms, there were those who admitted to having used photocopied or reproduced materials, which were also outdated. This response is quite typical for those working in the Human Resources department of their companies. Reasons for not investing in good test materials included: "employer has a tight budget," "no support from the employer in terms of ethics in my profession," and "our company does not give importance to testing materials." For the respondents, these reasons also translated to a basic lack of respect for their profession. One respondent noted that, "income [of the company] is much more important than my license and professional integrity."

Test appropriateness. Another challenge encountered by majority of the respondents was the suitability of tests used for their setting and clients, which is related to the aforementioned lack of materials. There were some who found it challenging to find appropriate tests for very specific populations, such as for elderly with dementia. Thus, this highlights the importance of the availability of a range of tests at one's disposal to respond to various population groups that practitioners served.

Applicability in the Philippine setting. A third challenge with test materials relates to their applicability in the local setting. Most tests being used in the field today are purchased from abroad. Test instructions and items used English and may also use certain expression and phrases that are not commonly understood in local parlance and this could affect clients' ability to show their true capacities:

> When my client did not understand the question, the test result was affected. Because of this, my observation toward the client and the test result contradicts each other. This may be due to the

fact that most of our tests were developed by Westerners.

Testing environment. Another challenge frequently encountered by respondents was the physical environment where testing itself was conducted. They reported environmental conditions not conducive for testing because of noise and uncomfortable high temperature in the room with only an electric fan serving as poor ventilation. Another practitioner noted the lack of available rooms: "(I) previously worked in the government and there are no permanent testing areas, we administer on (sic) vacant rooms."

Task demands. Practitioners experienced having a lot of clients and insufficient time to accomplish the work to be undertaken. The time it took to accomplish various tasks of assessment was a factor especially for tests requiring "laborious scoring and interpretation."

Similarly, coming up with well-written reports in a short period of time presented a strong challenge for many practitioners. For one, there is the need to ensure that the report reconciles all the data that has been gathered and making sure the findings are useful to the client. However, this kind of rigor also takes time and practitioners feel rushed especially when they are asked to turn in their reports as soon as possible. Additionally, the dearth of supervisors increases the conflict between quality and timeliness, especially in certain settings.

Attitude of clients. Difficulties pertaining to client attitude were frequently encountered during the assessment session itself and during report feedback. First, many practitioners reported that clients may not take the session seriously which can manifest as the client being "unruly or noisy" or "being uncooperative and defensive." Likewise, particularly in the HR setting where results of assessment have the consequence of a client being hired or not, some practitioners noted that it was possible that the applicants (clients) try to put their best foot forward which makes finding the truth challenging.

> In the HR setting it's frustrating to encounter applicants who ... answer only for desirability or (with) dishonesty; not expressing who they really are.

Report writing. Respondents admitted that it was challenging to write reports that will answer the reason for referrals. Part of the

difficulty may also be deciding what to include in reports especially if, as one respondent surmised, "the examinee did not take the test seriously." Thus, this concern speaks to gauging the veracity of findings as well. Respondents also felt pressure when clients insisted on the urgency of reports beyond their capacity to deliver.

Communicating findings. Practitioners encountered obstacles in communicating assessment results from clients who were unable to understand or who refused to accept the results. For the former, using simpler language or being more careful in explaining report findings were solutions. The latter concern was considered more complex since the practitioner was faced with the dilemma of having to defend their findings and recommendations.

Best practices. Despite challenges in testing conditions and expected outputs that practitioners encountered, there are best practices that many recognized and tried to use in their practice. Many were aware of ethical principles governing assessment. They also appreciated various aspects of the process which included knowing the reason for referral, having the means to integrate test data, collaborating with clients, and having facilitative tools such as technology to improve their work.

The themes under best practices covered points 1 to 4 of EBPA, from proficient use of psychological assessment to using tools to validate findings.

Supervision. Being supervised by psychologists who are considered to be experts is considered to be most helpful. Aside from profting from the expertise of the supervisor, practitioners also appreciated the ways their supervisor allowed them some level of autonomy so they could explore how to interact with clients. In addition, the practitioners exerted due diligence in modeling how their supervisor wrote reports, and learned about tests through their own reading and by asking for help. These indicate that respondents who engaged in self-directed learning found themselves more effective in doing assessments. Being knowledgeable about how to administer, score, and interpret tests accurately also increased the practitioners' sense of efficacy.

Peer supervision. Peer supervision transpires when respondents consult a colleague with the same depth and level of

overview of the practice of psychological assessment. The authors highlight how the current practices may not be consistently aligned with the EBPA elements of Bornstein (2017). Misalignments or gaps are elaborated to emphasize the need for an evidence-based practice in assessment, not only to meet international standards, but also to

supervised by registered psychologists.

EBPA highlights the importance of developing proficiency in psychological assessment in terms of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. In the Philippines, assessment practitioners are expected to adhere to the provisions of the Psychology Act (2009) in their practice of assessment. For registered psychometricians, proficiency in psychological assessment is not an adequate requirement to conduct psychological assessment. There are limited assessment tasks and activities that registered psychometricians can do. This limitation appears to pose a quandary to some practitioners especially in settings where there is a need to conduct group assessment and come up with quality reports in a short period of time, as there are not enough supervisors to oversee their work in a timely manner. as assessment practitioners who are registered psychologists become proficient in what they do, some engage less in assessment practice and engage more in psychotherapy. As mentioned in previous literature (Bekhit, Thomas, Lalonde, & Jolley, 2002; Meyer et al., 2001), experienced and seasoned psychologists likely spend more time doing therapy work, consultation, and other non-assessment related activities.

The issue on psychological assessment proficiency also relates to the training of the practitioners. Many of the practitioners surveyed cater to more than one type of client, implying that they need to have both breadth and depth of knowledge in assessment practices as well as appropriate ways of serving various types of clientele. However, the undergraduate assessment training in schools appears to prepare them for a more generalized practice of assessment that is not context-specific as reflected in the course offerings mandated by the Commission on Higher Education (CMO 34. 2017). The graduate program training in assessment, on the other hand, appears to be more focused on clinical assessment.

Given the limited experience of most of the assessment practitioners surveyed, there is a strong clamor for continuous training and supervision. This is an important finding as it shows that assessment is still considered to be a valuable endeavor that practitioners want to continue to educate themselves about. These behaviors adhere to some of the elements mentioned by Bornstein (2017) as crucial for an evidence based assessment practice, specifically in terms of developing

stakeholders. It is nevertheless important to exercise care when crafting assessment plans suited to client needs. In this last stage when the clinician relays findings of the assessment, crucial information is imparted that could potentially be life changing for clients.

Ultimately, when practitioners engage in the process of assessment, they should strive to strike a balance between adhering to ethical and professional standards and meeting needs of clients in a timely and relevant manner. This is the essence of evidence-based practice. Through the different responses of practitioners who took part in the survey, there seems to be an understanding that assessment is not merely an endeavor done on clients by technicians who administer tests and follow manuals and guidelines. It is essentially a professional relationship, one that is based on mutual trust, respect, and regard; and where standards and expectations are clear. Psychological assessment is a professional transaction where stakeholders know their respective roles and are engaged in it because it is an essential tool in decision-making and intervention.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

The sample is not representative of all the assessment practitioners in the Philippines. Many of the respondents came from NCR, reflecting the limited reach of the survey rather than the state of the practice. It is likely that the way the survey was administered (i.e., online and through paper-and-pencil survey) made it more accessible to people living in more urbanized regions.

The results are also limited by the type of respondents surveyed who are generally young and with few years of training and experience in the practice of assessment. The demographic profile indicates that only a very small portion of the respondents had doctorate degrees in Psychology. It is therefore uncertain to what extent the demographic characteristics of the respondents, and by implication, the results, reflects the actual state of the practice of psychological assessment in the Philippines. The authors acknowledge that not everyone who conducts psychological assessment is a psychologist by license or profession (e.g., supervised psychometricians, guidance counselors), and this is clearly reflected in the profile of the respondents. The authors also

recognize that some psychologists may find this problematic based on their own interpretation of the Guidance Counseling Act (2004) and Psychology Act (2010), and so further investigation is encouraged that would clarify this perceived gap in what the law stipulates and what is seen in actual practice. Further research can be conducted on the development of a survey that is more comprehensive and inclusive and looks into the different contexts of assessment and different types of professionals.

Professional psychologists are likely to benefit from continuous research on assessment training, supervision, and practice. Researchers can make significant contributions in the practice of psychology when they endeavor to study more specific areas of psychological assessment. Possibilities that can be explored are the translation and validation of standardized Western psychological tests, and the development of local tests that are socio-culturally sensitive to the needs and characteristics of Filipinos.

Conclusion

Psychological assessment is an essential part of the practice of psychology in the Philippines. It plays an essential role in problem identification, intervention, progress monitoring, and evaluation of people in various settings, and the data obtained from the process is

process may need to be reviewed in relation to the definition of EBPA.

Cognizant of the predominance of Western tests both in training and actual assessment, practitioners must thus take every possible step to ensure that tools used have good psychometric properties and are appropriate for the contexts in which they will be used. Thus, this paper highlights the need for supervision and developing local tests that can be used in practice.

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