



Distinguishing between Educational Psychologists, Clinical Psychologists, Industrial Psychologists and Psychological Counsellors

Namibia and the rest of the world celebrates the World Mental Health Day on 10 October every year. The focus of October 2015 was on raising awareness on what can be done to ensure that people suffering from mental health problems can live with dignity. As the professional association of Psychologists and Psychological Counsellors, the Psychological Association of Namibia asserts that the dignity of consumers of psychological services can be enhanced by sharing with them information that enables them to make wise and informed decisions about their mental health.

The word "Psychologist" evokes many kinds of images in the minds of the public. Most of these images are reflective of a stereotypical view of the discipline of Psychology. These images are betrayed by the kind of questions that are often posed upon learning that one is a Psychologist - 'so you can read my mind? can you hypnotize me?, do you have a black couch in your office?'. Part of this confusion can be ascribed to the fact that psychology as an applied discipline covers a very broad spectrum of content areas.

The use of the moniker "Psychologist" and the practice of the profession of Psychology are both protected by law. This means that practising the profession of Psychology within Namibia without being registered by the relevant Council is illegal, and so is the use of the title Psychologist without the necessary qualifications and credentials.

The title "Psychologist" is conferred by statute upon meeting a set of specific criteria. This is done to guarantee to the consumers of psychological services that those who offer or sell such services to the public do possess a minimal standard of expertise and training. In Namibia the mere possession of a degree in Psychology does not qualify a person to be called a Psychologist. Registration as a Psychologist involves a number of steps. One has to have a minimum of a Master degree, followed by completion of internship and then registration with the Social Work and Psychology Councils of Namibia. Such registration is maintained by way of payment of annual subscription fees and acquisition of the prescribed annual Continuous Education Units (CEUs).

The discipline of Psychology has a twin focus – research (concerned with advancing knowledge on the thinking and behaviour of human beings) and practice (concerned with the application of psychological knowledge to solve real life problems). In the professional world, this practice translates to the observation, description, evaluation, interpretation or modification of human behaviour via the application of psychological principles, methods or procedures to achieve specific goals such as prevention or elimination of maladaptive or undesired behaviour and of enhancement of interpersonal relationships, work and life adjustment, personal effectiveness, and mental health.

The specialty areas of Psychology reflect differential emphasis on the various elements of human life. Neuro-psychology concentrates more on the biological aspects of behaviour, Clinical Psychology on mental health, Educational Psychology on education, learning and development, Industrial Psychology concentrates on the application of Psychology to the world of work while Forensic Psychology focusses of the application of psychological principles to law.

The Social Work and Psychology Council of Namibia, registers two categories of Psychologists - Educational Psychologists and Clinical Psychologists plus Psychological Counsellors. The specific acts and actions that Psychologists and Psychological Counsellors can engage in pursuant to the practice of their profession is prescribed in the scope of practice. This is because all Psychologists are legally and ethically bound to practice within the bounds of their professional training and competence. In other words, the scope of practice exists to discourage professionals from the temptation of dabbling in activities that they have not been specifically or adequately trained in. Because of the elitist history of Psychology, the public is often not well informed about the type of the services that different categories of Psychologists offer. This article provides an elaboration of the core functions of Educational Psychologists, Clinical Psychologists, Industrial Psychologists and Psychological Counsellors as way of assisting members of the public to make wise and informed decision when they seek the services of psychologists.

Educational Psychologists

Educational Psychology is that specialty of Psychology that is concerned with learning and development and is usually practiced at three level – at the level of individual child, at the level of the school and at the level of authority. For brevity, the role of Educational Psychologists can be reflected in core functions, namely:

Consultation

In this role the Educational Psychologist facilitates the process of discussion and generation of strategies to solve identified educational issues. At individual child level consultation might involve the Educational Psychologist meeting with a child and his/her family to discuss and jointly formulate a plan to improve the child's school performance. At the school level, the Educational Psychologist can collaborate with a class teacher to find more effective ways of achieving set educational goals. At an authority level, the Educational Psychologist's role may involve contributing to strategic planning and policy formulation.

Assessment

In the assessment role the Educational Psychologist might gather information from a number of sources using a variety of methods for the purpose of clarifying a particular educational issue. This can be achieved through the administration of psychological or psychometric measures such as Intelligence or School Readiness tests. Commonly assessment procedures lead to diagnosis of disorders that impact on the ability to learn such as dyslexia and writing disorders.

Intervention

It involves the development and implementation of interventions designed to overcome the identified learning challenge. For instance, a child whose school performance is less than satisfactory might engage with an Educational Psychologist over a number of meetings for remediation of the problem.

Training

In this role the Educational Psychologist is involved with the training of various stakeholders such as teachers, parents, care-givers, and learners in education related issues like bullying, anger management and interpersonal relationships.

Research

In the research role the Educational Psychologist conducts research with the view to continuously sharpen their craft and overcome various barriers

to learning. This role is pronounced in institutions of higher learning

Educational Psychologists adopt a continuing and comprehensive approach to their work. Thus they do not restrict themselves to working with children or to matters of learning only. They also engage with care-givers, conduct play-therapy, individual therapy and family therapy. Further, Educational Psychologists are obliged to refer to appropriate service providers when they come across conditions that fall outside their scope of practice. For example when they come across a client with severe mental conditions they are obliged to refer to a Clinical Psychologist or Psychiatrist.

Clinical Psychologist

In Namibia, Psychologists with background training in Clinical Psychology and Counselling Psychology are both registered in the category "Clinical Psychologist". This reflects the eroding of differences in the manner that Psychologists are trained and prepared for the counselling and the clinical role experienced in the past several years. It is however noteworthy to share with the readers the historical differences between Clinical Psychology and Counselling Psychology.

Clinical derives from the Greek word "kline" meaning bed. So in the original literal sense, Clinical Psychology is that branch of Psychology that is concerned with the treatment of bed-ridden patients. This emphasizes that the focus of Clinical Psychology is the treatment of persons with more serious mental health disorders. That said, it should be recognized that in the broader contemporary sense, the proviso that patients of Clinical Psychologists have to be 'bed-ridden' has largely fallen away. To illustrate, a patient suffering from a social phobia may not necessarily be bed-ridden but is obviously a legitimate patient for a Clinical Psychologist.

Counselling, on the other hand, derives from the Latin word "consulere" meaning advising. It originates less from the clinic but from the social settings where one person assists the other to manage less severe life challenges, adjustment and development problems with the aim of optimising psychological wellbeing. So historically Counselling Psychologists has been understood to be predominantly seized with "normal" problems of life rather than serious mental health problems.

Specific Role of Clinical Psychologists

Clinical psychology is broadly practiced in Namibia to include the provision of continuing and comprehensive treatment for both less and more severe cases of psychopathology. It utilizes knowledge and skill from diverse disciplines within and outside of psychology and is often at three levels - individual client (patient), institution (usually a hospital), and authority. The following the core functions of a Clinical Psychologist: Consultation

In the consultation role the Clinical Psychologist, engages all those who are involved or affected to work through the issues in a solution-focused, collaborative, problem-solving approach with the aim of attaining positive change. For example, in a hospital setting the psychologist may collaborate with nurses and doctors to better manage the patient's noncompliance with medication.

Assessment and Diagnosis

This role involves the systematic gathering of information on the cognitive, personality, emotional and neuropsychological functioning of clients. In addition to interviews, collateral history and observation, Clinical Psychologists also administer and interpret formal psychometric measures such as personality, intelligence, neuro-psychological and aptitude tests.

Intervention

In this role Clinical Psychologists apply various psychotherapeutic techniques to the broad psychopathological, psychological and psychiatric disorders such as anxiety, depression, schizophrenia, personality, eating and adjustment disorders.

Training

At institutional level, Clinical Psychologists may be involved in the training of other members of the multi-disciplinary team. They may also train and supervise psychological counsellors and intern psychologists.

Research

Research is the lifeblood of any profession. Through continuous research efforts more efficacious, effective, cost effective interventions are discovered.

Industrial Psychologists

Industrial Psychology is the blend of Psychology and business concerned with the application of the knowledge and skill Psychology to business issues such as recruitment and selection of staff, training, organizational development, performance management and work/life balance. It is referred to by different names in different parts of the world. It is referred to as Occupational Psychology, Industrial-Occupational Psychology and Work and Organizational Psychology in the UK, USA and many European countries respectively.

The core functions of the role of Industrial Psychologists are:

Selection and Placement

The main goal here is to match jobs to the skills and interests of the person.

Training and Development

Involves the identification of skills deficits and design of interventions needed to improve the performance of various cadres in the organization.

Performance Appraisal

This is the process of measuring the performance of staff against specific standards.

Organizational Development

This role flows from the realization that, like human beings, organizations have a life cycle and they need to be re-structured, retooled and re-configured to remain at par with changing times and challenges.

Work/life balance

In this role, the theory and practice of Psychology is deployed in search of the optimal balance between the demands of work and life. It is recognized that employees with balanced lifestyles tend to be more productive and effective both at work and at home.

Ergonomics

This involves the collaboration of Industrial Psychologists with other professionals to adapt tasks, work stations, tools and machinery to make

them more compatible with human skills.

This has found widespread application in the field of computing and office work where keyboards, mice, monitors and other devices as well as desks and chairs are re-designed and re-organized to make them more user-friendly.

Currently, Industrial Psychologists are not required to register with a legal body for them to practice their profession in Namibia. However they are much welcome to join the Psychology Association of Namibia for purposes of sharing best practices and experiences with the wider community of Psychologists.

Psychological Counsellors

In Namibia for some to earn the title of Psychological Counsellor, they must possess a relevant Bachelor's degree in Psychology and complete a number of hours of internship as specified by the Social Work and Psychology Council of Namibia.

Although a Psychological Counsellor have to have earned a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, they do not yet have the right to use the title "Psychologist". Due to the fact that they have not yet received specialized further training, the law prescribes fairly stringent conditions for their practice. The law specifies explicitly what Psychological Counsellors can do independently and what they can do only under the supervision of a registered Psychologist.

There are three broad categories of activities that Psychological Counsellors are authorized to undertake independently. First, administering and interpretation of psychological, psychometric and assessment measures in relation to school readiness, the aptitude, attitude and interest of the client. Second, counselling of an individual or individuals in respect of careers, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), community mental health, school and employment readiness, adjustment, career development and studies as well as sport including counselling of individual athletes or teams. Third, to report on the testing, testing and assessment in respect of the above activities that they are authorized to undertake.

There are certain activities that Psychological Counsellors may only undertake when assisting a Clinical or Educational Psychologist. These include making assessment or diagnosis of the mental state of person(s), administering and interpretation of advanced psychometric measure like personality and intelligence tests, conducting of therapeutic procedures in the treatment of various psychological ailments or difficulties, carrying out evaluation for forensic purposes and administering research procedures involving the mental status of a person or a group of persons.

Because the role of the Psychological Counsellor is that of "assisting", it is enjoined to ensure competent and ethical practice in accordance with the relevant statutes. For this reason professional reports prepared by a Psychological Counsellor in the "assisting" must be co-signed by both the Psychological Counsellor and the registered Psychologist.

In rounding off this article, we wish to point out that the offering of counselling services, therapy or psychotherapy is not the exclusive preserve of psychologists only. A number of other professionals can legitimately offer such services in the context of their work. For example trained pastors can offer pastoral counselling, Psychiatrists are authorized by their licence to practice medicine to offer psychotherapy, the nursing licence authorizes psychiatric nurses to offer therapy and social workers are also allowed to offer counselling and therapeutic services to clients. Finally, you will recall that earlier in this article it was stated that the roots of counselling are in social settings; therefore a lot of unregulated counselling activities take place in our communities. This falls under the rubric of lay counselling.

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