

Psychological Assessment in Lithuanian Mental Health Institutions: A Survey of Practitioners

A. Rotomskis*

I. Vainoraitė*

A. Grabauskaitė**

P. Simanavičius***

O. Šakėnaitė****

**Vilnius University, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Clinical and Organizational Psychology*

***Vilnius University, Faculty of Natural Science, Department of Neurobiology and Biophysics*

****Vilnius University, Faculty of Philosophy, Department of General Psychology*

***** Vytautas Magnus University, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of General Psychology*

Summary. *Background.* During the last two decades the attempts to develop culture of psychological assessment are raising in different areas of applied psychology – clinical, educational, forensic, organizational etc. Despite the developments in the recent decade one of the biggest issues in clinical practice is the shortage of proper tests. In the biggest survey on clinical assessment among psychologists in the Lithuanian Health Care system to date 49% of respondents pointed out the shortage of suitable tests for clinical practice as the most important issue in clinical assessment. This pressing issue is poorly researched from the perspective of practitioners. Accordingly, the aim of our study was to evaluate the situation of psychological assessment in mental health care settings.

Methods. The total number of 113 psychologists, who work in Lithuanian health care institutions, completed a questionnaire about their opinion on clinical psychological assessment.

Results. Psychologists working in Lithuanian mental health institutions most often encounter a need to evaluate cognitive functions and at the same time they see this domain of assessment as the most important and for particular cognitive functions, as the most effective. Also, adaptation, standardization and revision of various neuropsychological tests were suggested. The most pressing issue in clinical practice is the assessment of specific psychological processes (cognitive functions, emotions and personality), not the assessment of specific disorders or developmental stages.

Conclusions. This study found that neuropsychological assessment of cognitive functions is the most pressing issue for psychologists working in Lithuanian mental health institutions.

Keywords: current assessment practice, healthcare institutions, test usage, survey of psychologists.

Neurologijos seminarai 2016; 20(67): 23-26

INTRODUCTION

Psychological assessment in Lithuania has its roots in establishing psychology laboratories in Vytautas Magnus University in 1920 (two years after gaining independence from Russia) and in setting of Lithuanian psycho-technique and professional orientation association in 1931. However, when Soviets occupied Lithuania (1940–1990), the practice of psychologists became scarce. Yet in 1969, a study program in psychology began at Vilnius University. Few years later, when specialists with diploma in psychol-

ogy began working in applied settings such as education and health care systems, the need for research and assessment tools appeared. The main problem was the closed Soviet system which refused to collaborate with other countries in developing psychological techniques. The adapting of West countries tests and using them without permission were a pervasive practice [1].

After regaining independence from Russia in 1990, the situation of psychological assessment in Lithuania changed a little, but one of the biggest issues in clinical practice remains the shortage of proper tests. In the biggest survey on clinical assessment among psychologists in the Lithuanian Health Care system to date 49% of respondents pointed out the shortage of suitable tests for clinical practice as the most important issue in clinical assessment [2]. According to Lithuanian Psychological Union, the known list of standardized and / or adapted/in process of adaptation psychological tools consists only of 19 items [3]. Al-

Address:

*Augustinas Rotomskis
Vilnius University, Faculty of Philosophy,
Department of Clinical and Organizational Psychology
Universiteto str. 9/1, LT-01513 Vilnius
Tel. (+370 5) 266 76 05, e-mail: rotomskis.augustinas@gmail.com*

though there is a shortage of tests for various psychological functions, there is a lack of knowledge of the most prevalent needs and issues, which clinical psychologists face in clinical practice. The state of clinical psychological assessment in the Lithuanian health care system from the practitioners' perspective is poorly researched. Despite of this, there are still few attempts to clarify which of the tools should be arranged in the first order [4]. The deficiency of proper psychological assessment tools may be explained by reasons named by previous authors [5] as "conditions external to psychology". In the case of Lithuania, that is the smallness of the country with its distinct language and historical situation. By the historical situation, the retardation of psychological practice under the rule of Soviet Union is meant, which led to the results resembling the situation of the countries which had a late establishing of psychology discipline in their universities (eg., Greece, [5]).

In other countries, which have strong traditions of psychological assessment, for instance, in the United States, the surveys encompassing the psychological assessment in general, was the focus of research in the previous century, e.g.: [6–8]. In more recent times, those countries tend to publish the surveys in more narrow fields, for example, in the psychological assessment in the forensic settings [9], the assessment using drawing [10], and also concerning special aims, e.g. to evaluate posttraumatic effects [11]. However, in the countries having poorer traditions of psychological testing the question of general psychological assessment remains relevant, for instance, in Asian countries [12], New Zealand [13]. To sum up, it is clear that the first step is to investigate a broader view of psychological assessment in the country before beginning to detail the smaller fields. Additionally, it is well-known that especially in countries where the psychology is quite a young profession, the use of scientific tools enhances the status of profession [14].

AIM

A survey was developed to gain the information about the current and desired situation in using psychological assessment tools in Lithuanian health care system. For this purpose, medical psychologists were sought from different mental health institutions in different towns of Lithuania. The survey was organized and conducted in 2014, from January till April.

METHODS

Sample Size and Recruitment

At the beginning of the survey, a list of all mental health institutions was made. It consisted of total 96 institutions. Then a letter was sent to each of the institutions. The letter included an appeal for a director of particular institution,

instructions for participants and a questionnaire. Participation in the survey was not obligatory, so some of the specialists did not fill in the questionnaire. The total number of 200 questionnaires was sent. The total number of filled in questionnaires was 130 (i.e., 65%), from 61 (i.e., 64%) different institutions. Also, 17 participants left some questions unanswered, so we excluded them from further analysis. For the analysis, data from more than a half (i.e., 57%) of working specialists remained.

Participant demographics

The specialists participating in our survey were from different kind of institutions. The majority of participants, $n=65$ (i.e. 58%) were from centers of mental health. Also, $n=29$ (26%) from psychiatric hospitals, $n=16$ (14 %) from private practice, and $n=2$ (3%) from other institutions. The psychologists were from different towns: Vilnius ($n=61$), Kaunas ($n=18$), Šiauliai ($n=9$), Mažeikiai ($n=4$), Telšiai and Panevėžys (3 from each district), Jonava and Prienai (2 from each district), Alytus, Anykščiai, Elektrėnai, Ignalina, Kėdainiai, Molėtai, Pakruojis, Švenčionys, Tauragė, Ukmergė and Zarasai (1 from each district).

Measures

Based on material from the conference named "The Clinical Psychological Assessment in Lithuania: Issues and Expectancies" [2], the questionnaire was created. It consisted of total three questions with 6-point choice and three open questions. At first, participants had to evaluate each of the given domain in psychological assessment: 1) perceived frequency (1 = I never evaluate this domain, 6 = I evaluate this domain very often); 2) perceived importance (1 = totally unimportant to evaluate, 6 = very important to evaluate) and 3) perceived effectiveness (1 = very ineffective, 6 = very effective) in their daily practice. By effectiveness we meant how the methods participants used in this domain helped them to clear out the client's situation. For the open questions, we asked participants to identify: 1) the psychological domains in which they need new tests for their assessment; 2) what are the exact psychological assessment tools which should be adapted and standardized or revised at the first order; 3) what are the main problems and mistakes often occurring in their clinical practice.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows psychological domains in the order of most to the least frequently used for the assessment by psychologists participating in this survey. The same participants evaluated the following psychological domains: thinking, emotions, memory, attention, and intelligence, as five most important to assess in their practice. The assessment of intelligence, attitudes, self-evaluation, thinking, and behavior were perceived as the most effective of all domains being assessed in their daily practice. To sum up, psychol-

Table 1. Characteristics of specific psychological assessment domains as perceived by participants

Domain	Frequency	Importance	Effectiveness
Emotions	5.15	5.68	5.01
Thinking	5.08	5.74	5.05
Attention	5.05	5.35	5.04
Memory	4.89	5.50	5.00
Personality	4.84	5.29	5.05
Orientation	4.74	5.11	4.96
Intelligence	4.19	5.35	5.27
Behavior	4.11	4.63	5.05
Self evaluation	3.64	4.58	5.08
Psychomotor functions	3.38	4.02	3.35
Language	3.35	4.31	3.65
State of consciousness	3.31	3.97	4.15
Motivation	3.12	3.72	4.74
Sensation and perception	2.92	3.61	3.07
Learning	2.82	3.27	3.79
Will	2.52	3.21	4.74
Development	2.51	3.38	3.18
Attitude	2.04	2.79	5.15
Creativity	1.65	2.50	2.53

ogists working in Lithuanian mental health institutions most often encounter with a need to evaluate cognitive functions and at the same time they see this domain of assessment as the most important and, for particular cognitive functions, as the most effective, too.

While answering the question, what were the psychological domains in which they needed new tests for their assessment, participants mentioned: cognition (51% of participants), emotions (15%), personality (12%), development (6%), motivation (4%), will (3%) and other (9%). For adapting, standardizing or revising, participants identified the following tools of most importance: Bender-Gestalt test (30%), MMPI-II (24%), Beck Depression Inventory (21%), Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale (18%), Raven's progressive matrices (17%). For the fields in which problems and mistakes mostly occurred in their daily clinical practice, participants emphasized: an evaluation of specific psychological domains (e.g. cognitive functions, emotions and personality), 33% of participants; an evaluation of specific disorders (most notably schizophrenia spectrum disorders; autism spectrum disorders; depression), 32%; other specific clinical evaluation problems (most notably, a need to have computer versions of various psychological tests, a tendency of patients to distort results while seeking for benefit, and a tendency of hyperdiagnostics), 22%; an evaluation of specific developmental stages (most notably preschool children, adolescents, and geriatric population). Seventeen percent of participants left the question unanswered. The biggest prob-

Table 2. Practical problems in clinical practice

Problems and mistakes	Number of participants
Cognitive function assessment	16
Children assessment	15
Emotional disorder assessment	14
Schizophrenia spectrum disorder assessment	11
Autism spectrum disorder assessment	9
Mental retardation assessment	9

lems in clinical practice are the assessment of cognitive functions, children and emotional disorders (see Table 2).

DISCUSSION

The results of this survey may, at first, serve for Lithuanian psychologists by emphasizing their needs for psychological assessment in their practice, by guiding to create the list of the tools which need to be adapted, standardized or revised in the first order. Precisely, the survey identified that, first, a great deal of job in cognitive assessment should be done, followed by the assessment of emotions. Neuropsychological assessment of cognitive function is the most important domain assessment, which requires adaptation, standardization and revision of various cognitive tests. The neuropsychological assessment was also revealed as one of the most relevant needs of clinicians by previous authors in the United States, which may suggest that this is not only a local issue [7].

Second, in this section, we are intending to suggest some possible solutions for the countries that have poor situation of psychological assessment in practice of health institutions. The following suggestions are mostly based on our experience, stated in the conference of our working psychologists [2]. At the beginning, conferences detecting the problems and possible solutions are needed. Ideally, they should include as participants both, practitioners and academicians. Also, the reasons for gaining financial support from national and other funds may be clearly identified. Then, some surveys may aid in concretizing the actual needs in psychological evaluation. The country, like we in Lithuania, may reset its priorities, e.g. to invest more energy and finances for improving situation of psychological assessment tools instead of making excessive (sometimes needless) psychological assessment in everyday practice or keeping so many students of psychology in universities. On the over hand, students of psychology could also participate in the process of psychological tools adaptation and standardization. Also, working medical psychologists could improve the situation by accountable collecting and sharing their theoretical and practical material. Furthermore, there is a necessity to have and often update list of all currently adapted and standardized psychological assessment tools available in the particular country.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The practitioners working in Lithuanian mental health institutions identified the greatest need, importance and effectiveness of cognitive functions evaluation, in comparison to other domains of psychological assessment.
2. For the particular tools of psychological assessment, the Bender-Gestalt Test, the MMPI-II and the Beck Depression Inventory appeared to be the three most important tests for the adaptation and standardization in the first order.
3. In their practice, specialists mostly encounter problems in the field of cognitive evaluation, followed by children and emotional disorders assessment.

References

1. Bagdonas A. The challenges of fostering a culture of psychological testing in a small post-soviet country: the experience of the Laboratory of special psychology of Vilnius university. *Test Int* 2008; 19.
2. Kalpokienė V, Grigutyte N, Kazlauskas E, Dapšienė V, Mockus A, Girdziušaitė J, et al. Klinikinis psichologinis vertinimas Lietuvoje: problemos ir galimybės. Lietuvos psichologų sąjunga, Respublikinė Vilniaus psichiatrijos ligoninė, Vilniaus universitetas; Vilnius 2011. Available from: www.psichologusajunga.lt/lps/admin/spaw2/uploads/files/Klinikinis%20psichologinis%20vertinimas%20Lietuvoje_Konferencijos%20medžiaga_2011_01_27.pdf
3. Grigutyte N, Kalpokienė V. Klinikinis psichologinis vertinimas: adaptuoti/adaptuojami Lietuvai instrumentai [Internet]. Lietuvos psichologų sąjunga; 2011 [cited 2015 Mar 28]. Available from: www.psichologusajunga.lt/lps/admin/spaw2/uploads/files/Klinikinis%20psichologinis%20vertinimas.adaptuoti.adaptuojami.testai.Lietuvoje.2011_1.pdf
4. Simanavičius P, Rotomskis A, Petraškaitė K. Lietuvos sveikatos priežiūros įstaigų taikomų klinikinio įvertinimo priemonių analizė: taikymo dažnumas, suvokiamas reikalingumas praktikai ir suvokiamas efektyvumas. In: XI-oji Jaunųjų mokslininkų psichologų konferencija [Internet]. Vilnius: Vilniaus universiteto leidykla; 2014. p. 27. Available from: www.jmpk.fsf.vu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/JMPK-2014-santrauku-leidiny.pdf
5. Triliva S, Stalikas A. The use of psychological tests and measurements by psychologists in the role of a counsellor in Greece. *Couns Psychol Rev* 2004; 19(4): 32–9.
6. Sundberg ND. The practice of psychological testing in clinical services in the United States. *Am Psychol* 1961; 16(2): 79.
7. Piotrowski C, Lubin B. Assessment practices of health psychologists: Survey of APA Division 38 clinicians. *Prof Psychol Res Pract* 1990; 21(2): 99–106.
8. Edward C, Campbell VL, Nieberding R, Hallmark R. Contemporary practice of psychological assessment by clinical psychologists. *Prof Psychol Res Pract* 1995; 26(1): 54–60.

9. Archer RP, Buffington-Vollum JK, Stredny RV, Handel RW. A survey of psychological test use patterns among forensic psychologists. *J Pers Assess* 2006; 87(1): 84–94.
10. Bekhit NS, Thomas GV, Jolley RP. The use of drawing for psychological assessment in Britain: survey findings. *Psychol Psychother* 2005; 78(Pt 2): 205–17.
11. Elhai JD, Gray MJ, Kashdan TB, Franklin CL. Which instruments are most commonly used to assess traumatic event exposure and posttraumatic effects?: A survey of traumatic stress professionals. *J Trauma Stress* 2005; 18(5): 541–5.
12. Fanny M Cheung FTLL. Psychological assessment in Asia: introduction to the special section. *Psychol Assess* 2003; 15(3): 243–7.
13. Dugdale J. Patterns of use of psychological tests in New Zealand. In Sydney; 2002 [cited 2015 Oct 23]. Available from: www.nzcer.org.nz/research/publications/patterns-use-psychological-tests-new-zealand
14. Cheung FM, Leung K, Fan RM, Song W-Z, Zhang J-X, Zhang J-P. Development of the Chinese personality assessment inventory. *J Cross-Cult Psychol* 1996; 27(2): 181–99.

A. Rotomskis, I. Vainoraitė, A. Grabauskaitė,
P. Simanavičius, O. Šakėnaitė

PSICHOLOGINIS ĮVERTINIMAS LIETUVOS GYDymo ĮSTAIGOSE: SPECIALISTŲ APKLAUSA

Santrauka

Įvadas. Per pastaruosius du dešimtmečius Lietuvoje psichologinio įvertinimo kultūra gerėja įvairiose srityse: klinikinėje, pedagoginėje, teisminėje, organizacinėje ir pan. Neatsižvelgiant į tai, klinikinėje praktikoje vis dar jaučiama, kad labai trūksta tinkamai pritaikytų testų. Anksčiau atliktu tyrimu nustatyta, kad 49 % respondentų šią problemą įvardijo kaip didžiausią, su kuria susiduriama atliekant psichologinį įvertinimą. Tačiau ji vis dar beveik netyrinėjama. Šio tyrimo tikslas – įvertinti psichologinio įvertinimo situaciją Lietuvos psichikos sveikatos gydymo įstaigose.

Tiriamieji ir tyrimo metodai. Siekiant išsiaiškinti Lietuvos gydymo įstaigose dirbančių specialistų nuomonę, parengta anкета. Ją iš viso užpildė 113 psichologų.

Rezultatai. Apibendrinus Lietuvos gydymo įstaigose dirbančių psichologų atsakymus, dažniausiai susiduriama su poreikiu vertinti kognityvines funkcijas. Kartu jų vertinimas suvokiamas kaip svarbiausias ir labiausiai efektyvus. Taip pat apklausos metu nustatyta, kurias konkrečias psichologines priemones dirbantys specialistai pageidautų sutvarkyti pirmiausia: Benderio–Geštalo testą, MMPI-II ir Beko depresijos skalę.

Išvados. Atlikus apklausą, išsiaiškinta, kad Lietuvos gydymo įstaigose psichikos sveikatos srityje dirbantiems psichologams aktualiausias neuropsichologinės (t. y. kognityvinės funkcijos įvertinti skirtos) priemonės.

Raktažodžiai: įvertinimo praktikos situacija, sveikatos apsaugos institucijos, testų taikymas, psichologų apklausa.

Gauta:
2015 10 25

Priimta spaudai:
2015 11 12