

The Emerging Status of Organizational Psychology in Pakistan

Dr. Zainab F. Zadeh

Halima Ghani

Institute of Professional Psychology
Bahria University
Karachi, Pakistan

Abstract

This paper reviews the present status of industrial/organizational field of psychology in Pakistan by examining the scope, trends and issues of the local industry as well as availability and development of psychometric instruments in the country. Moreover ideas and initiative required for future development in the field are also discussed.

Key words: Organizational Psychology, Status in Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Psychology as a subject of study was recognized in Pakistan almost five decades ago. At the time of independence only two colleges taught psychology: the Government College (GC) and Forman Christian College, Lahore. In GC as a common practice until the 1960s psychology was taught as part of the philosophy syllabus. It was not until 1962 under the guidance of Dr. Muhammad Ajmal as its first chair that psychology achieved an independent status at the GC. At Karachi University the first independent psychology department was founded with Qazi Muhammad Aslam as chair, whose academic background was in philosophy. The psychology department at the University of Sindh became independent in 1960, with Dr. Rafia Hasan (Haque 2000). In the struggle to separate its roots from philosophy, large portion of the four decades were focused majorly on clinical psychology. The following table gives a fair idea of the field of interest during the early years of psychology in Pakistan.

Table I. Areas of research in Pakistani professional journals, 1986-1996 (Haque 2000)

	PJPR (1986-1996)	PJP (1986-1996)	JBS (1990-1996)	Total	%
Clinical	13	26	08	47	27.33
Social	21	08	14	43	25.00
Testing	22	03	04	29	16.86
Industrial/Organization	16	05	04	25	14.53
Educational	07	01	03	11	06.40
Development	05	00	06	11	06.40
Cross-cultural	04	02	00	06	03.49
Total	88	45	39	172	100.00

ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY IN PAKISTAN

The field of industrial/organizational psychology is relatively very new in our region of the world. Kao, Sinha, & Wilpert, (1999) stated; "Industrial/ organizational psychology in Asian academic psychology received more attention starting in the 1990s". Similarly in Pakistan awareness towards various fields of psychology including educational and organizational psychology developed recently. Psychologists are now offered jobs in hospitals and armed forces for psychotherapy of patients and psychological assessment for selection and recruitment of soldiers. Educational institutions and corporate sector both government and private have also started to hire psychologists with specialization in the relevant fields. In educational institutions responsibilities of the incumbent includes student assessment, guidance and counseling, while organizational psychologists are often hired for employee recruitment/selection and personality assessment. Organizational psychologists frequently work on contract basis or as outsourced consultants for specific projects or functions.

The reason often quoted for such an arrangement is the comfort and trust employees tend to show in outside professionals than towards a permanent employee. Psychologists also report to maintain a neutral stance without organizational pressures when they work as outsiders. However a major shortcoming of such outsourcing is its high cost, as the consultants and contract employees often charge per head/project/hour. Moreover in depth understanding of organizational culture and post project facilitation is usually not included in the services. Another mode of service is the hiring of psychologist on permanent basis. Armed forces and government organizations have been following the practice since a long time.

MAJOR ISSUES

The profession of industrial/organizational psychology is faced with major hurdles in Pakistan. Some of these are individualistic trends while others are systematic lacking. A few of these core issues are elaborated as under:

Financial Constraints

In a developing country like Pakistan financial constraints are a major hurdle in any developmental project. With the currency losing its value with every coming day it is difficult and sometimes impossible for educational institutions to procure test material from foreign publishers to continue with their educational programs. Psychological labs are allocated limited funds which are often quite less than the amount apportioned for medical or an engineering lab/workshop. Similarly organizations and consultants also find such material difficult to afford. Another major hurdle is the lack of required qualification for procurement of some tools. For instance 16 Personality Factor (16PF) test, and Bar on EQ test have a condition posed for the users by its publishers to be specially certified in the use of the test. These certifications courses are offered and arranged by the publishers and distributors in different parts of the world. The cost for certification is besides the amount required to purchase the instrument itself, thus it increase the expenditure for the buyers, moreover some of the psychologist may not have the required qualification for the certification.

Qualification

In the absence of qualified psychologists in the organizational field, those with qualification in the clinical psychology have filled the positions. Consequently, due to their lack of specialized expertise clinical psychologists fail to understand and cater to organizational demands. It has also consequently limit the work scope for organizational psychology only to recruitment and selection, since other area of functions including employee counseling and development, organizational research and planning are not their forte'. Unfortunately due the unfilled gap in the demand and supply of the organizational psychologists the trend still continues. Universities offering specializations and post masters qualification are focused on the clinical field. The reason e by the chairpersons and head of psychology department of leading universities in Lahore and Islamabad is the lack of qualified faculty and funds to send students abroad for qualification or hire foreign faculty. Those few who have attained degree in organizational psychology through self finance find it more beneficial to work in the capacity of a consultant or HR professional than a psychologist. Thus losing the essence and focus on the subject.

Quality of psychological instruments

Cheung (2004) observed that the growth of industrial/organizational psychology in academic psychology in Asian countries during the 1990s witnessed an increased interest in cross-cultural personality assessment and the use of evidence-based and culturally relevant tests for recruitment and personnel decisions.

However, the introduction of personality assessment in industrial/organizational psychology in Asia lagged behind the development of personality assessment in clinical psychology. The personality tests used mainly are simple measures for which relatively little research evidence exists. (Kao, Sinha, & Wilpert, 1999).

Practices guiding the translation and adaptation of Western instruments varied greatly during the early days of test importation. Researchers or practitioners typically translated a popular test and used it as if it were the original test. Little consideration was given to the quality of the translation or the equivalence of the translated instrument. Sinha (1983, cited in Lonner, 1990) lamented that, in India, many of the early tests were borrowed from Western tests with imperfect translation or adaptation. Different versions of the same test were developed in the same country without reference to one another or to methods for cross-cultural test adaptation.

For example, more than 10 versions of the MMPI were developed in Japan in the 1980s. They later were integrated and improved in a uniform version (Clark, 1985).

However in Pakistan unfortunately the surge to meet the rising demand for personality assessment has led to unqualified practitioners utilizing instruments that are not well adapted or validated, thus posing serious questions to the credibility of these locally adopted instruments.

Unethical practices

With few local instruments available, most psychologists depend on the importation of well-developed western personality tests (Cheung, 1985; Cheung, Leung, Fan, Song, Zhang, & Zhang, 1996). Absence of qualified organizational psychologists also provides opportunities for the unqualified to carry out unethical practices in this regard. For instance in Pakistan it is not uncommon to openly use non copyrighted psychological assessment material. From colleges to universities, private to government organizations the convenient utilization of such illegal practice is not hidden from anyone, where little adherence typically is given to respecting the copyright of the tests. Moreover, to date there is no association or governing body responsible for accreditation of professional programs or issuance of licensure to qualified psychologists /practitioners, this is suggestive of the fact that this profession which is given high value/ respect all over the world, is still not given its due status and is not a recognized profession yet in Pakistan, thus making delivery of quality service a great challenge.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Lack of the necessary education and training in organizational psychology limits the scope of work for the psychologists employed in organizational setting. This is one of the reasons why this field has shown slow progress in Pakistan despite of rapid expansion in other parts of the world.

In order to strengthen the specialization in organizational psychology in the country it is the need of the hour that our universities initiate a unanimous effort to introduce necessary qualifying diplomas and degrees in organizational psychology to fill the existing gap in the field.

Professional psychologist and faculty members together have to look into the issue to ensure ethical use of instruments. Furthermore instruments are required to be developed locally to fulfill the needs that arise at organizational level.

On the international front, the expanded coverage of this literature available through electronic indices and abstracts has improved the accessibility of research on Asian personality assessment to a large audience of English language readers. Increasing collaboration between local researchers and original authors of imported tests also has raised standards governing test adaptation and validation practices. Practical measures to help psychologists to deal with the copyright of translated versions of imported tests, such as providing guidelines and training workshops, will also encourage active research and facilitate copyright compliance. The International Test Commission (2000) also has published international guidelines for adapting tests in an effort to promote uniform professional standards (Cheung 2004). International forums are to be utilized to communicate the need for subsidies and relaxation in the procedures and costs of psychological instruments and material.

These guidelines need to be circulated more widely and used systematically across Asia. Needs and demands for training in the use of tests in Asia are considerable. Workshops offered in association with regional conferences provide opportunities to address these issues with Asian psychologists. International associations could explore closer collaboration with local psychological associations on these issues in an effort to raise the standards governing test development and use in Asia at the local level (Cheung 2004).

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