

EDITORIAL

WHY DO WE NEED MORE CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGISTS?

Rahmattullah Khan bin Abdul Wahab Khan

Department of Psychology, International Islamic University Malaysia,
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.



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Whats' all the fuss about the need for more clinical psychologists? Can't the psychiatrists and counselors do the psychologists work? What do clinical psychologists do? Traditionally, clinical psychologists work in the department of psychiatry. Their role was only seen to be important in the domain of psychiatry, mental health and psychological testing. Clinical Psychologists help's psychiatrists with their diagnosis by their primary skills of administering and interpretation of standardized psychological tests; and they are also involved to a certain extent in treatment and psychotherapy. The field of Clinical Psychology has branched itself into sub-specializations and have more than 200 kinds of therapeutic techniques. Clinical Psychologist also use counseling techniques in their therapy and sometimes, because of that, their role are quite often confused with counseling psychologists who assists people with their daily problem that are not very serious in nature.¹ In Malaysia, this confusion has also created some problems in government hospitals where instead of creating positions for Clinical Psychologists, positions of Counselors were increased. Nowadays clinical psychologists are contributing significantly to many other areas such as health promotion, behavioural medicine, neuropsychological assessment, issues of professional management, forensic science and others.

Clinical psychologists in Malaysia, although few in numbers, have great potential in providing significant services in the treatment of psychologically-related disorders in almost every level of sub-specialities of medicine. As such they are not only called upon to treat psychological disorders but are also required to investigate, screen and advice or give recommendations for the best treatment of clients which was referred to them by physicians, surgeons, medical practitioners, social

workers, nurses, lawyers, etc. In some teaching hospitals clinical psychologists served in almost all of the departments such as psychiatry, pediatrics, surgery, medicine, community medicine, obstetrics and gynaecology. The versatility of clinical psychologists also has its negative impact on their profession as such that although their services are needed yet the management has not seen the need for a separate department of clinical psychology which will cater for the welfare and the future advancement of the profession. The dire need for more clinical psychologists have been voiced out even by the Public Services Division especially with the creation of the post Chief Psychologist in the early 80's but yet we have not seen any serious efforts by respective bodies to alleviate the shortage.

The system of education in Malaysia considered psychology to be an arts discipline and thus a student who graduates with a psychology major will hold a Bachelor of Arts degree contrary to their counterparts in the western countries who has the choice of two streams: Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science. The arts graduate usually chooses specialization in social psychology, cross cultural psychology, industrial and organizational psychology whereas the science graduates goes into clinical, neuropsychology, physiological psychology, forensic and other sub-specialities that have a strong science base. Some private universities in Malaysia have started offering the BSc in Psychology programmes through their twinning programs with UK, US or Australian Universities (Sunway University College offers the BSc Psychology with Lancaster University, UK).

Another reason for the shortage of clinical psychologists is that clinical psychology is a specialised course and it is only offered at the post graduate level unlike some of the allied health programs. Presently there are about 50 clinical

psychologists distributed all over public as well as private sectors. Most of them hold Masters degree but only one fifth (10) hold Doctoral (PhD, DPsych or PsyD) qualifications. Thus, the need for post graduate studies in clinical psychology is inherent if we want to have more of their services in various areas as mentioned above. But can IIUM and UKM handle this shortage? What about other universities? Are they following suit? A private university that is accepting the challenge is Help University College which is planning for its master's clinical program to be offered beginning September 2008. Running the course is not without problems. Supervision is one of the main problems why most clinical psychology programs have a quota for their intake. Since there are not many clinical psychologists around thus quality supervision will be a problem.

The global demand for clinical psychologists reflects the rapid expansion in the application of cognitive approaches to clinical as well as social problems, which is evident in surveys, conducted looking at the range of activities performed in order of percent involvement: psychotherapy (84%), diagnostic tests (74%), teaching (50%), clinical supervision (62%), research and writing (47%), consultation and administration (52%)².

In Australia, sharing of clinical psychologists between 2-3 hospitals have been practiced for many years to remediate for the shortage. Their role include providing clinical services, consultation, teaching and research. In the UK, efforts are focussing in increasing the number of clinical psychologists in major hospitals. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Health is trying its best to station at least 2 clinical psychologists in government-operated hospitals but without much success. In 2008, the Public Services Department created 105 psychology officer positions specifically for the Ministry of Health to ease the shortage. Although these positions are to be taken up by counselors, psychologist and clinical psychologist, so far only one clinical psychologist have taken up the Bachelors Degree in Psychology, Counseling, Counseling Psychology, Education and Counseling Psychology. Clinical psychologists, however must have at least a masters degree in Clinical Psychology. However the demand is also great in medical faculties that incorporate clinical psychology programme in the psychiatry department for teaching undergraduates pursuing medical doctor degree. Presently only two public universities in Malaysia that run post graduate programme of clinical psychology, ie, Department of Psychology at the International Islamic University

and the Faculty of Allied Health of the University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM).

Some suggestions to solve the problems of shortage in the discipline of clinical psychology: (1) The Ministry of Education should play important roles in trying to meet the demands for more clinical psychologists; students with good CGPA at the matriculation level should be invited to do psychology locally and overseas and later sub-specialize in clinical psychology such as clinical neuropsychology (needed by the neuro-sciences department); forensic psychology (needed by the police force and the prisons department); and health psychology (needed by the medical personnel). When these students return, they should be held responsible to run the post graduate program locally. (2) Students who graduate with psychology discipline should be awarded with a Bachelor of Science degree. This will give them a sense of self-enhancement in future directions. (3) Both UKM and IIUM should work together in offering and improving the clinical psychology course such that it would be a world class standard and thus would attract more students to join.

*Dr. Rahmattullah Khan is also a Visiting Clinical Psychologist Honorarium at the was the National Heart Institute, Kuala Lumpur. He is also the External Examiner for the Psychology Program, Lancaster University at the Sunway University College, Kuala Lumpur.

Corresponding Author :

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Rahmattullah Khan bin Abdul Wahab Khan B.Sc, M.Psych(Clin), D.Psych(Clin)
Department of Psychology,
International Islamic University Malaysia,
Jalan Gombak, Kuala Lumpur,
Malaysia.
Tel: +603-6196 5101
Fax: +603-6196 5063
Email: rahmat@iiu.edu.my

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