



A Survey on the Challenges Experienced by Forensic Psychology Practitioners in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Forensic Psychology is a relatively new field of expertise in the Philippines. Requirements for qualifying as an expert witness are severe, but these have not been to become united in the form of policy or guidelines. The research conducted explored the actual challenges faced by forensic psychology practitioners. There were 30 participants who answered a researcher made survey questionnaire. The study made use of a quantitative research design and explored Nine (9) areas of forensic psychology practice where challenges might arise among practitioners. The areas of administration and interpretation of instruments and writing psychological reports are particularly easy for the participants. While all areas appear to be relatively without any difficulties, the areas that received the lowest scores are court appearances and schedules, testifying in court, being asked by prosecutor/judge, setting professional fees, and dealing with lawyers. Three of these areas are related with within-court activities, the other two are on fees and dealings with lawyers.

Keywords: Forensic practice; Forensic psychology; Forensic psychologist challenges

INTRODUCTION

During its 50 years existence, the field of forensic psychology has undergone considerable change. Although psychologists provided some clinical services in correctional, delinquency, and other forensic settings towards the end of the 19th century, service provision by psychologists in forensic settings was not significant until after the Second World War, when clinical psychology became clearly established as a profession and practice area. Beginning in the 1950s and continuing to the present, clinical and counseling psychologists have become integral to the provision of assessment and therapeutic services in correctional, delinquency, and other forensic settings. Psychologists have provided therapeutic services in what could be described as forensic settings (e.g., juvenile justice programs, correctional institutions, and non-correctional settings in which therapy services are provided to forensic populations such as abuse and crime victims) since the profession of clinical psychology was established. Indeed, it can be argued that some forensic institutional settings provided the first opportunities for

clinical psychologists to provide assessment and therapeutic services [1].

According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, a career in psychology is a wise choice. It is expected that there could be a projected 14 percent or even a faster rate of employment growth, starting 2016 to 2026 in the psychology profession (1). This growth rate is faster than the average for all occupations.

However, despite of the seemingly positive future in the career of psychology, it is also common knowledge among practitioners of psychology as a profession that is undeniably replete with challenges.

In the Philippines, the practice of forensic psychology in the Philippines is believed to have started in the 1980's. The initial wave of PhD graduates in clinical psychology have started to be engaged in litigation particularly on marriage nullification during this era. Although no document can clearly pinpoint who, where, or when it was established, it has been assumed that

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psychologist in the 80's have had initial yet informal engagement in the practice of forensic psychology.

Additionally, it was then verified by Arias and Lopez that the practice of the majority of the current forensic psychology professionals in the country initially took off from their practice in the area of marital nullity [2]. Records in the Office of the Solicitor General, an agency of the Philippine government, revealed that the documented cases of marital nullity stood at 10,528 as of 2012 [3]. This then became the take off point for the practice of forensic psychology in the country. The services of clinical psychologists, including the authors of this paper, were engaged into by the spouses who underwent stormy and destructive marital relationships, and who needed to determine whether or not either or both of them was psychologically incapacitated to perform his or her essential marital obligations.

Consequently, many people view forensic psychology simply as a general field where psychologists and psychiatrists counsel people that are either in prison or convicted criminals on probation or parole. This is a very limited view of forensic psychology and does not even begin to encompass the depths of its purpose. Forensic psychology professionals work in a multitude of subspecialties including, but not limited to, criminal, juvenile, civil, investigative, correctional, and police. In each of these roles they provide completely different services and serve different purposes [4].

Based on this view of limited knowledge about the practice of forensic psychology in the present time, possible challenges may occur, such as in the areas of testifying in the court, doing psychological reports, setting professional fees, dealing with lawyers and any other related concerns.

This informal engagement in the practice of psychology eventually led to its recognition. Universities such as the University of the Philippines and the Far Eastern University have opened curricular offerings focusing on this special field of Psychology. This academic feat has put to the forefront the special and unique challenges that are being now recognized by practitioners in this field. Although forensic practitioners are now increasingly sought to provide expertise to courts and criminal system, a quick review of available researches or studies on the practice of forensic psychology in the Philippines revealed a dismal dearth of available knowledge.

Considering the current trend in the practice of forensics in psychology, and the need to delve deeper into the systematic and continuous development of the many facets of this practice. This study thus, is an attempt to add to the practically non-existent research data on understanding the actual problems and challenges experienced by forensic psychology practitioners and to help in the promotion and formalization of forensic psychology practice in the Philippines. It also aims to increase available researches and studies in the field of forensic psychology by putting into the forefront of consciousness of psychology practitioners the field of forensic psychology, thereby igniting interest in conducting further researches and studies and expect that it may serve as the catalyst in the creation of a formal special interest group for forensic psychology.

Related literature

Although there are no specific dates available, some of the first references related to the criminally insane can be located within original Roman law. This Roman law maintained that insanity was a punishment in itself and thereby, the law highly advocated for the use of leniency against the criminally insane (All-about-forensic-psychology.com, 2014). The more recent history of Forensic Psychology began back in 1893 when J. McKeen Cattell, of Columbia University, conducted the first psychological experiment on the psychology of testimony [5].

"Forensic psychology is the application of the science and profession of psychology to questions and issues relating to law and the legal system. The word "forensic" comes from the Latin word "forensis," meaning "of the forum," where the law courts of ancient Rome were held. Today forensic refers to the application of scientific principles and practices to the adversary process where especially knowledgeable scientists play a role" [6].

Since forensic psychology practice is just a recent additional field for psychologists, practicing forensic professionals' experience challenges in their perceived competencies or level of expertise in performing the multiple tasks that forensic practice may entail.

One aspect that poses as a very serious challenge to practitioners is their professional credential. There have been reports of misrepresentation of the credentials of psychologists before the court of law. Misrepresentations include educational degree attainment (e.g. claiming an unearned Ph.D. or a degree was earned from a particular institution when, in fact, it was not), professional licensures or certifications, employment history and data about previous testimonies such as number of times, locations, etc. Most often these are done to impress the client, the judge or jury to ward off the challenges such as cross-examination by exaggerating the qualifications. Due to lack of resources and fact-checking methods, such exaggerations are seldom caught, and such acts are unethical and must be dissuaded [7].

Additionally, Yadav, also identified the interpretation of analytical data and presentation of testimony in a court of law as another area wherein forensic practitioner may encounter challenges, in the courtroom. Forensic scientists face many ethical dilemmas while providing their testimonies. Ethical dilemmas associated with the interpretation of analytical data and presentation of testimony in a court of law may include bias on the part of forensic scientists, use of scientific jargons, and use of confusing or deceptive testimonies, excessive equivocation, and advocacy.

Another issue with forensic laboratories is the way results and conclusions are reported. Some laboratories report minimal results without any useful or appropriate explanations. Also, many a times, the forensic scientist who performed the analysis is not even required to be present in the court for the testimony. One more ethical dilemma talks about as a scientist, researcher and practitioner, all forensic scientists have the innate responsibility and obligation towards the forensic science profession to maintain the higher ethical values and standards. Ethical dilemmas include three categories: failure to keep up to

date with recent advancements and updated knowledge, improper use of proficiency tests, continuing the improper educational practice [7].

Subsequently, according to the American Psychological Association forensic practitioners need a doctorate in psychology to get an entry level job. That means five to seven years of post-graduate education before the certification process begins. Until a professional has experience and a reputation, he may be relegated to part-time work. Bachelor of Psychology and Master's degrees earn you the title of "associate" or "assistant" forensic psychologist. In addition to the extensive education required, practitioners can put in 18-hour days and be on call at any hour. Sometimes the work involves quickly-arranged travel. Another downside to the field is the salary. Though well-known private practice consultants can earn salaries of \$200,000 or more, doctoral psychologists often start at \$60,000 or less. Non-PhDs can begin at \$35,000.

Ethics is another "con" to forensic psychology. Forensic psychologists must often take sides in cases, just as attorneys do. For example, they work with one side or the other to help seat favorable juries. That kind of dilemma results in stress, which is another "con" to the field of forensic psychology. Frustration in the profession leads to a high rate of burnout [8].

Forensic psychologists face unique obstacles and ethical dilemmas in their line of work because forensic psychology has several important differences from more traditional psychotherapy. Clients are frequently not meeting with the psychologist on a voluntary basis, and may have limited or no opportunity to direct the course of their treatment. Forensic psychologists may often not follow the traditional rules of confidentiality, particularly when their work occurs in an evaluative context. Because of this, people seeing these psychologists may be more likely to withhold information and forensic psychologists must often fill the role of investigator. Forensic psychologists frequently make recommendations about child custody, incarceration, and sentencing that can dramatically affect a person's life. For this reason, people may diminish or exaggerate the severity of their symptoms. Malingering is a common issue faced by forensic psychologists [9].

Most of these dilemmas and challenges are fuel from international or western studies. In the Philippines, there is almost a non-existence of data, statistics, studies and researches that looks into the past and current situations of forensic psychology practitioners.

Theoretical framework

Any profession entails challenges and the practice of psychology is not an exemption to this. Although the psychology can be very rewarding and satisfying, it is not a perfect career. Reports have enumerated the "cons" of practicing psychology as a profession. These includes having to set up one's own practice which may be daunting as one has to find clients, ascertain one's skills to maintain the dignity of the profession, purchase and maintain psychological assessment and tools, keep abreast with the most

practical utilization of psychological tests, ensuring engagement and figure out billing of patients among others.

The field of forensic psychologist is no exemption to the issues of practice of the psychology profession. The more intimidating task however is how enlighten on the challenges confronting forensic practitioners so that effective, relevant and responsive interventions may be developed by professional regulating bodies to further improve the situation of forensic psychology as a profession.

In the Philippines, Psychologists are often invited to serve as expert witnesses to forensic cases. Their clients are either the lawyers whom they work with or the court itself, they need to assist a decision maker, or to aid the court in making a decision. There is also a tough competency requirement wherein forensic practitioners must use examination techniques that are relevant to legal claim. They should maintain impartiality or take a neutral stance in their case analysis. They are expected to write lengthy and detailed reports where they should disclose everything needed to aid the courts in making their decision. They are also expected to be prepared to appear to court once summoned [10].

With all of these expectations, it is not far-fetched to assume that practitioners of forensic psychology do experience and face challenges that need to be identified so that appropriate actions be taken to further put a professional and legal personality to its practice.

Research questions

This study is an attempt to explore the challenges being experienced by forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines?
2. What are the levels of challenges that forensic psychology practitioners are experiencing in the different aspects of forensic psychology practice?
3. What areas in forensic practice do they usually experienced difficulties?
4. Are there significant relationships between age and years of practice and the different aspects of forensic practice?
5. What do they think are the major concerns and challenges that forensic psychology practitioners are currently facing?

Significance of the study

The study will be beneficial to the following individuals:

To forensic practitioners: This study shall be helpful for them by giving sense of understanding about the problems and challenges which are being encountered by currently practicing forensic practitioners as well as those that may be faced by future forensic psychologists. Psychologists who do not have experience working with a forensic population may feel unprepared to assist in giving them the needed psychological services. Therefore, it is

important to bring together current data based on research to aid them in delivering professional forensic services.

To students: The finding of this study shall provide appreciation and understanding amongst students regarding the difficulties being faced by forensic practitioners. The actual challenges reported in this research may help spark a deeper interest in advancing the improvement of forensic psychology in their studies and later on, in their future profession.

To psychological association of the Philippines: It is expected that though the data gathered by this study, the association will take more cognizance of the challenges experienced and confronting Psychologists who are practicing in the many spheres of forensic psychology and establish appropriate guidelines in the practice of forensic psychology in the Philippines. Furthermore, it is aimed that a special interest group be formed specifically for forensic psychology which is not existing as of yet.

To FEU Psychology Department: Being in the forefront of Forensic Psychology in the academe, it is the desire of the researchers that the knowledge gained and data mined by this study shall help in the further and continuing improvement of the curriculum of the graduate school forensic psychology program thereby be an academic trendsetter in the field of Forensic Psychology, not only in theories and concepts but in the industry and private practice application as well.

Future researchers: They may utilize the research as a source of baseline study in the conduct of future researches that may help increase available data and knowledge regarding this area of interest. It is expect that future researchers use the findings of this study to conduct further researches that are applicable in forensic settings and in relevant multi and inter disciplinary fields of study.

Research impediments (limitations and delimitations)

The researchers experienced a number of difficulties and limitations in the conduct of this study. The most challenging issues that had to be dealt with was the availability of respondents in the locale of the researchers. It was initially decided that only licensed psychologists who actually conducts psychological assessment, prepares consequent psychological reports and actually serve as expert witnesses in courts shall be allowed to respond to the survey. However, the researchers found difficulty in this because although there were licensed psychologists in the locality and nearby towns or provinces, not all have experiences in forensic practice. It was discovered then that Psychometricians and guidance counselors sometimes do forensic practice, particularly, serving as expert witness for nullity. Thus, even if they are not forensic specialist, they were allowed to participate in the study to complete the minimum number of respondents and also to be able to cull vita information that may contribute to the discovery of challenges faced even by non-psychologists who have first-hand experience in the delivery of forensic psychology services.

METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes the discussion of research design, participants, instrumentation, ethical consideration, data gathering procedure and data analysis.

Research design

This study utilized quantitative research design using survey questionnaire as the primary data gathering tool. Quantitative research is especially effective in obtaining numerical and measurable information from a given sample of respondents. Quantitative research is useful in making inferences from sample data to the population from which the sample came from.

Participants

The participants of this study were 30 forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines. The mean age is 46 with a standard deviation of 8. Majority are married and has been practicing forensic psychology for more than 10 years. The participants were all purposively selected.

Instrumentation In gathering the data needed in the study, we developed a questionnaire with two major parts. The first part asked about basic demographic profile and characteristics of the respondents about their exposure in forensic psychology practice such as number cases handled so far and the nature of the cases they have engaged with. The second part is a likert-type kind of questionnaire asking them to indicate their level of agreement. These areas are composed of: testifying in court, administration/interpretation of instruments to clients, interviewing clients/collateral source, writing report, being asked by the prosecutor/judge, dealing with clients, setting fees, scheduling of court appearance, and dealing with lawyers. The second part is a 35-item questionnaire answerable from strongly agree, agree, and disagree to strongly disagree. Numerical value were assigned to each response option with strongly agree as 4 to strongly disagree equivalent to 1.

Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations were established in the conduct of the research by providing cover letter both in the electronic and in-person distribution of the survey. The cover letter stated the nature, objective of the study and the utilization of the data to be obtained. Informed consent was also established by giving the respondents the option whether or not to voluntarily participate in the study. It was also categorically stated that all and any substantive information obtained from the survey is to be kept with utmost confidentiality and that the data gathered will never be used apart from the purpose that it was gathered for.

Data gathering procedure

The researcher conducted an online an in-person distribution of researcher made survey questionnaire. The respondents were chosen through a purposive sampling procedure. The researchers agreed to identify Practicing Forensic Psychologists in their localities and to personally invite them to fill out the survey form,

either electronically or personally. Initially targeted as respondents were licensed psychologists only, but later had to include psychometricians and guidance counselors who also qualified as respondents based on the performance of functions as a forensic practitioner, either as expert witnesses or in the psychological assessment and/or preparation of psychological reports for use in courts.

Data analysis

All data were encoded on SPSS Version 21. The analyses done included frequencies and percentages, the computation of mean and standard deviation, and the correlation of relevant variables relative to the objectives of the study. We used Pearson r in the computation of the correlation.

RESULTS

Using both online and person-to-person distribution, we were able to get 30 participants in this study. Table 1, shows the basic demographic characteristics of the participants.

Age	F	%
n=30		
31-35	3	10
36-40	6	20
41-45	4	13.3
46-50	6	20
51-55	5	16.7
56-60	4	13.3
61-65	2	6.7
Mean =46.9	Sd = 8.44	
Sex		
Male	7	23.3
Female	23	76.7
Civil status		
Single	7	23.3
Married	23	76.7
Highest educ. attainment		
College	4	13.3
Masteral	9	30
Phd	17	56.7
Field of specialization		

Clinical	25	83.8
Social	5	16.7
Years of practice		
3 and below	2	6.7
4-6	3	10
7-10	8	33.3
11-and above	17	56.6

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the participants of this study.

The mean age is at 46, with youngest at 33 and oldest at 62. The standard deviation suggests a rather wide distribution of age of the participants. Also, the data suggests that a forensic practitioner is most likely a female, married, with a Phd in Clinical Psychology and is a practitioner for more than 10 years. Notably however is the presence of four practitioners who only have undergraduate degrees and five participants who have graduate degrees in social psychology (Table 2).

Approximate number of cases handled	f	%
1-5	1	3.3
6-10	3	10
11-15	4	13.3
16-25	7	23.3
25-and above	15	50
Types of cases handled Nullity		
1-5	6	20
6-10	6	20
11-20	12	40
21-and above	6	20
Violence against women		
1-5	6	20
6-10	5	16.7
11-20	9	30
21-and above	10	33.3
Child custody		

1-5	10	33.3
6-10	3	10
11-20	7	23.3
21-and above	10	33.3
No. Of times being an expert witness		
1-5	3	10
6-10	0	0
11-20	7	23.3
21-and above	20	66.6

Table 2: Approximate number and nature of cases handled by the participants.

For cases handled, majority have managed more than 25 which are fairly distributed on cases of nullity, violence against women, and child custody. Data on table 2 also indicate that majority of the participants have experienced being an expert witness at least 20 times or more (Table 3).

Aspects	Mean	Sd	Description
Interviewing clients	3.18	0.45	High
Administration and interpretation of instruments	3.46	0.36	Very high
Being asked by prosecutor/judge	3.10	0.52	High
Dealing with lawyers	3.13	0.45	High
Dealing with clients	3.27	0.38	High
Setting professional fees	3.11	0.56	High
Court appearances and schedules	3.03	0.55	High
Writing psychological reports	3.60	0.31	Very high
Testifying in court	3.08	0.35	High

Table 3: Levels of challenges experienced by forensic psychology practitioners in the different aspects of forensic psychology practice.

In this study, we explored nine (9) aspects of forensic psychology practice and determined which aspects forensic psychology practitioners are experiencing challenges or difficulties. Table 3, summarizes the data for this objective. From a possible mean score of 1 to 4 with scores closer to 1 suggesting a lot of challenges and scores close to 4 suggesting no challenges, the Table 4, suggests that participants are not in any way facing challenges and difficulties in their forensic practice. The areas of administration and interpretation of instruments and writing psychological reports are particularly easy for the participants. While all areas appear to be relatively without any difficulties, the areas that received the lowest scores are court appearances and schedules, testifying in court, being asked by prosecutor/judge, setting professional fees, and dealing with lawyers. Three of these areas are related with within-court activities, the other two are on fees and dealings with lawyers.

Aspects	Age	Years of practice
Interviewing clients	0.01	0.10
Administration/ interpretation of instruments	-0.22	0.17
Beingasked by prosecutor/judge	0.04	0.01
Dealing with lawyers	0.40*	0.27
Dealing with clients	0.21	0.32
Setting professional fees	-0.19	-0.11
Court appearances and schedules	0.17	0.01
Writing reports	0.35	0.21
Testifying in court	0.17	0.14

Note: *Correlation significant at 0.05 alpha level.

Table 4: Correlation (Pearson r) between age and number of years of practice with levels of challenges in the different aspects of forensic practice.

We also determined the relationships between age and number of years of practice and the areas of challenges in forensic practice. As shown in Table 4, the areas of dealing with lawyers and writing psychological report are significantly correlated with the age of the participants. No other significant correlations were found.

In relation to the study of Yadav, 2017 as a scientist, researcher and practitioner, all forensic scientists have the innate responsibility and obligation towards the forensic science profession to maintain the higher ethical values and standards. Ethical dilemmas include three categories: failure to keep up to date with recent advancements and updated knowledge, improper use of proficiency tests, continuing the improper educational practice (Table 5).

	f
Availability of relevant/recent tests/instruments	23
Need for training for competencies/assessment skills	19
Standardization of practice/fees	18
Lack of support for forensic practitioners	7
Lack of educational trainings for forensic psychology	6
Annual orientation for relevant laws	5
No specific organization for forensic practitioners	3
Lack of job opportunity	1
No government funding	1

Table 5: Major challenges and concerns of forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines.

Table 5, is a summary of the answers of the respondents on the major challenges and concerns forensic psychology practitioners are currently facing. The first three major concerns are related to test instruments, relevant trainings, and standardization of practices. While lack of job opportunity and government funding are the least concern of the participants.

DISCUSSION

Forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines, in terms of demographic data, indicate that majority are females, married, with an average age of 46, and most likely with a PhD in Clinical Psychology. It is expected that a great majority is in the field of clinical psychology since graduate study in forensic psychology is very limited. In fact, it was only very recent that one school offered a degree in PhD Forensic Psychology. Forensic psychology as discipline in graduate studies in the Philippines has yet to be popularized as it is still in its beginning stage. It can be noted however that forensic psychology practice has been in existence as early as the 1970s. The practice is still in its infancy as there has been no standard procedure being followed by practitioners. In terms of qualification, even those with just undergraduate degrees in psychology can practice

forensic psychology. It is also notable that the current psychology law of the Philippines is silent on the practice of forensic psychology as it is only concentrated on clinical psychology practice. This current state of forensic psychology practice is understandable since it is only in its infancy stage.

In terms of the nature of cases, there has been no primary type of case that had been revealed. The data suggest that common cases include nullity, violence against women, and child custody. Apart from these, no other type of cases has been mentioned by the respondents. This seems expected since these cases are the most common not only in Asia but across Europe and the United States.

The number of cases the respondents have handled so far reveal that forensic psychology practice in the Philippines is successful. This must be a clear indication that graduate studies particularly in forensic psychology must be developed among leading higher education institution in the Philippines. It is worth mentioning here that the Far Eastern University must have sensed this need since they are the first institution to offer a PhD in Forensic Psychology in the Philippines.

Challenges of forensic psychology practitioners

Nine (9) areas of forensic psychology practice were explored where challenges might arise among practitioners. The areas of test administration and interpretation and writing psychological reports were the areas where practitioners appear to have no problem at all. In other words, these are the areas where they are comfortable doing and possibly where they can be regarded as an expert of. Of course, these results are not amaze considering that these are major area of specializations in almost all field of psychology starting from the undergraduate to the doctoral program. It is always and almost expected that even a college graduate of psychology must have considerable knowledge in the field of tests administration and interpretation and report writing. In addition, these two areas are completely intertwined as one must learn both in order to have a basic knowledge in the field of personality assessment. Although cases might be completely different from each other, the overall procedure is generally similar from one case with another, plus the idea that the same assessment tools are being used for different clients. The constant practice of doing it may have largely defined why practitioners have no much problem in these two areas.

While there were no areas which can be considered as problematic for the participants of this study, five areas seem to converge and received the lowest scores. To some extent, there might be some difficulties experienced by forensic psychology practitioners in these five areas. Three of these areas have similarities in that they are all court-related activities, namely; court appearances and schedules, testifying in court, and being asked by the prosecutor/judge. The other two are setting fees and dealing with lawyers. These results might also be understandable since forensic psychology practitioners with most of them in the field of clinical psychology have no formal training or education on laws and court-related fields of specialization. It is just perhaps by way of their experiences that they have learned about the nitty gritty of court-related activities. These areas initially are challenging particularly those who are

still new and are starting in forensic psychology practice. With these results, there might be a need to include some form of education or training for court-related activities within the curricular programs of both forensic psychology and clinical psychology. The ideal scenario is perhaps for those who plan to enter forensic psychology practice to have trainings in both forensic psychology and jurisprudence.

Correlation of age and years of practice on areas of forensic practice

The results indicate that age was a more relevant variable than years of practice in some of the aspects of forensic psychology practice. In particular, age is significantly related to dealing with lawyers and writing psychological report. Those who are older are more adept in handling relationships with lawyers. This could be a function of deeper and wider exposure in the practice of forensic psychology. Younger practitioners may have yet to be fully acquainted with procedures and steps in dealing with lawyers who can be regarded both as a client and a professional partner. Older practitioners are expected to have more exposure and thereby more familiar and skillful of the trades within the forensic psychology practice [11]. In addition, older practitioner may be more equipped with practical knowledge in running the affairs between them and lawyers and, committing less blunders compared to younger forensic psychology practitioners.

Age is also significantly correlated with the ability of writing psychological report. Again, older practitioners may have been more exposed to writing psychological reports by way of the greater number of clients and cases they have been through. Younger practitioners may have yet to fully grasp the nature of writing reports within the context of a legal case. No other variables have been found to have significant correlation with age. Years of practice had no correlation with any of the areas of forensic psychology practice included in this study. It worth mentioning however, that years of practice had moderate correlation with dealing with lawyers and writing psychological reports but both did not reach significance level.

Major concerns and challenges of forensic psychology practitioners

Majority of the respondents talk about three major concerns for forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines. The first is focus on the availability of relevant tests instruments that are relevant and sensitive to the context of Filipino clients. This to a large extent reflects the current situation of psychological assessment tools in the Philippines which is widely dependent on western-developed psychological tests. This is not only true to forensic psychology but to all fields of psychology that make used of psychological instruments such as clinical and industrial psychology. In addition to this is the reality that we have a dearth of contextualized or even translated western-made tests into the Filipino context and language. Hence, this particular challenge characterize the state of personality assessment in particular and the entire field of Philippine psychology in general. Forensic psychology practitioners might have first-hand experiences on the inappropriateness of some if not majority of western-made instruments.

The second major issue is the need for trainings on competency and assessment skills. As forensic psychology as a field is still in its infancy in the Philippines, capacity-building programs are lacking. Majority of those who are into forensic psychology practice were either a clinical or social psychology major. Hence, relevant trainings, for example court-related competencies are needed. This is in corollary to the findings that respondents have lowest score in areas that are court activity-related. With no relevant educational background in law and court-oriented fields, forensic psychology practitioners might have difficulties adjusting to the law and juridical aspects of forensic psychology practice.

The third major issue focuses on standardization of practice. Since the forensic field is very young (although the practice of psychology is considered old), standardized guidelines has yet to be established. As of the writing of this paper, no interest group has been existing in both the two professional groups of psychologists in the Philippines, the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) and Pambansang Samahansa Sikolohiyang Pilipino (PSSP). This concern calls for the advancement and development of a special interest group focusing forensic psychology practice in the Philippines [12].

In general, this paper has successfully disclose some initial but pertinent information about the challenges of forensic psychology practice in the Philippines. Although limited in terms of scope and participants, it is expect that this paper have set the stage in understanding and at the same time in the advancement of forensic psychology as a field in Philippine Psychology.

Recommendations

Forensic psychology practitioners need to lobby for the creation of special interest groups to aid them in the development and further enhancement of their forensic psychology competencies. They should also serve as an impetus in encouraging psychology practitioners and researchers to develop localized, responsive and culturally suitable psychological assessment tools to assist the forensic practitioners in the requirements of the law and the courts.

CONCLUSION

Based from the result of the research it can be very well concluded that practitioners of forensic field in psychology are indeed facing challenges in the discharge of their duties to the law and the courts and to their clients as well. While all areas appear to be relatively without any difficulties, the areas that received the lowest scores are court appearances and schedules, testifying in court, being asked by prosecutor/judge, setting professional fees, and dealing with lawyers. Based on the result of the research it can be very well concluded that practitioners of the forensic field in psychology are indeed facing challenges in the discharge of their duties to the law and the courts and to their clients as well. Also, limitation in the practice of forensic psychology in the Philippines is usually hampered by the lack of instruments available for use.

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