

CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT IN LITHUANIAN HEALTH CARE INSTITUTIONS: OPINION ANALYSIS OF PROFESSIONALS

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Abstract

Purpose – to investigate the state of clinical psychological assessment in the Lithuanian health care system: 1) what kind of tests are used in clinical practice and what are clinicians opinions about them; 2) what kind of psychological functions are assessed in clinical practice and what is the opinion of clinicians about the assessment of these psychological functions; 3) what kind of issues are the most pressing in clinical assessment.

Design/methodology/approach – 101 clinical psychologists, who work in Lithuanian health care institutions, completed a questionnaire about their opinion on clinical psychological assessment.

Findings – Attention, memory, executive functions, intelligence and emotions are the most important and frequently assessed psychological functions in clinical practice. Neuropsychological assessment of attention, memory, executive functions, are viewed as the most problematic fields of assessment. The adaptation, standartization and revision of the various neuropsychological tests is suggested. The most pressing issues in clinical practice are: 1) the assessment of specific psychological functions (neuropsychological and psychosocial functioning); 2) the assessment of specific disorders (schizophrenia spectrum disorders and autism spectrum disorders); 3) the assessment of specific stages of development (children and teenagers).

Research limitations/implications – 32 percent of health care institutions (30 out of 95 identified institutions), which provide mental health care, did not participate in the study. The majority of these institutions are from the provinces.

Practical implications – psychological assessment plays a key role in the practice of a clinical psychologist. This study investigated and pinpointed the most pressing issues and needs of psychologists in clinical practice. According to the study results, recommendations ascertaining to the adaptation and revision of tests and preparation of clinical psychologists for their practice can be made.

Originality/Value – this is the biggest and most thorough investigation of the state of clinical psychological assessment in the Lithuanian health care system.

Keywords: clinical psychology; assessment, specialists' opinion.

Research type: research paper.

Introduction

Psychological assessment plays a key role in the practice of a clinical psychologist. The field of psychological assessment has seen some drastic changes in the recent decade. New tests have been adapted and standardized in the Lithuanian-speaking population. The culture of clinical has greatly improved (ethical requirements for test use have risen, specialists training has incorporated more assessment courses, quality of assessment practice has been attended more thoroughly by universities) (Gudaitė, 2007). In order to provide psychologists services that ascertain to European standards there is a need for reliable, valid, legal and suitable for use tests in Lithuania. The availability of proper tests enables the acquisition of quality psychic health care services (Hunsley and Mash, 2008).

Despite the developments in the recent decade one biggest issues in clinical practice is the shortage of proper tests (Dapšienė ir Kalpokienė, 2011). In the biggest survey on clinical assessment among psychologists in the Lithuanian Health Care system to date 49 % of respondents the shortage of suitable tests for clinical practice as the most important issue in clinical assessment (Grigutytė, 2011). The majority of tests used in the current practice of clinical psychologists in the Lithuanian health care institutions do not meet the standards for proper tests (Dapšienė ir Kalpokienė, 2011). Although 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.

Study aim

To investigate the state of clinical psychological assessment in the Lithuanian health care system from the psychologists-practitioners perspective: 1) what kind of tests are used in clinical practice and what are clinicians opinions about them; 2) what kind of psychological functions are assessed in clinical practice and what is the opinion of clinicians about the assessment of these psychological functions; 3) what kind of issues are the most pressing in clinical assessment.

Methodology

101 clinical psychologists from 65 Lithuanian health care institutions completed a questionnaire about their opinion on clinical psychological assessment. Firstly, the participants were asked what tests are used during clinical assessment. The identified test was rated on a 6-point scale, how often the test is used in clinical practice, how they perceive the efficacy of the test, how they view the necessity of the test for clinical practice. Secondly, the participants of the study were asked what kind of psychological

functions are assessed during clinical assessment. The identified psychological functions was rated on a 6-point scale, how often the psychological functions is evaluated, how the assessment of a particular psychological function is important to clinical practice, how they perceive day-to-day effectiveness of the clinical assessment of a particular psychological function. Lastly, 3 open questions were asked: “For which psychological functions is the greatest need of new tests?”; “What kind problems and mistakes are most often encountered in clinical practice?”; “What kind of tests first of all should be standardized or adapted?”.

Results

The 15 most frequently used tests are presented in Table 1. The most frequently used tests measure intelligence, emotions and neuropsychological functions. The minority of the used tests are viewed as good instruments for clinical assessment. 43 of 61 tests were rated more often as ineffective then as effective instruments in clinical practice. The 15 tests perceived as the most effective are presented in Table 2. The majority of tests that are the most important for clinical practice measure neuropsychological processes, intelligence and emotions. The 15 tests perceived as the most important are presented in Table 3.

Table 1. The 15 most frequently used tests in clinical practice

Test	Percentage
WAIS-III	93
WISC-III	93
MMPI	90
“4-1”	90
HTP	90
Raven’s progressive matrices	89
HAD	89
BDI	89
Rorschach test	89
Luria’s 10 word test	89
Pictograms	89
Schultz tables	89
DISC	87
MMSE	87
Bender Gestalt test	85

Note: Percentage: Percentage of clinicians who use the test.

Table 2. The 15 tests perceived as the most effective

Test	Percentage
WAIS-III	49
WISC-III	45
“4-1”	38
Pictograms	24
Schultz tables	23
Luria’s 10 word test	23
Rorschach test	23
Raven’s progressive matrices	22
HAD	22
BDI	22
HTP	22
Spielberg State-Trait Anxiety Inventory	21
MMPI	21
DISC	18
Bender Gestalt test	18

Note: Percentage: Percentage of clinicians who view the test as very effective.

Table 3. The 15 most important tests for clinical practice

Test	Percentage
WAIS-III	63
MMSE	62
WISC-III	62
MMPI	62
BDI	57
HAD	56
Rorschach test	55
HTP	55
WASI	49
“4-1”	48
Burdon tables	46
Schultz tables	44
Spielberg State-Trait Anxiety Inventory	44
Zung depression scale	40
Luria’s 10 word test	39

Note: Percentage: Percentage of clinicians who view the test as very important for clinical practice.

21 different psychological functions are assessed in clinical practice. There is variation among different clinical psychologists and health care institutions, but every participant of the study assesses emotions, intelligence, attention, orientation, memory and executive functions in their clinical practice. Also, these psychological functions are most frequently assessed in clinical practice. Other psychological functions, which are assessed in clinical practice, include behavior (97 %), personality (97 %), motivation (91 %), verbal skills (85 %), development (84 %), sensation (79 %), perception (79 %), attitudes (71 %), self-appraisal (69 %), creativity (55 %), willpower (55 %), consciousness states (41 %), psychomotor (38 %), learning (8 %). Emotions, intelligence, orientation, memory, executive functions and attention are the most important evaluated psychological functions in clinical practice. The perceived importance of the assessment of the identified psychological functions is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. The perceived importance of the assessment of psychological functions in clinical practice

	Very important	Important	More important than not unimportant	More unimportant than important	Unimportant	Very unimportant
Emotions	72 %	25 %	3 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Intelligence	67 %	31 %	0 %	1 %	1 %	1 %
Memory	69 %	27 %	2 %	2 %	0 %	0 %
Executive functions	72 %	21 %	5 %	0 %	1 %	1 %
Attention	67 %	19 %	7 %	2 %	3 %	2 %
Orientation	64 %	19 %	4 %	7 %	5 %	1 %
Personality	51 %	23 %	24 %	1 %	1 %	0 %
Motivation	49 %	28 %	21 %	1 %	1 %	0 %
Development	49 %	26 %	11 %	3 %	7 %	4 %
Willpower	47 %	26 %	11 %	5 %	7 %	4 %
Behavior	47 %	21 %	13 %	9 %	6 %	4 %
Verbal skills	42 %	19 %	16 %	13 %	6 %	4 %
Self-appraisal	41 %	31 %	11 %	7 %	6 %	4 %
Attitudes	41 %	17 %	14 %	14 %	11 %	3 %
Sensation	21 %	31 %	14 %	9 %	15 %	10 %
Perception	21 %	31 %	14 %	9 %	15 %	10 %
Creativity	15 %	11 %	14 %	21 %	22 %	17 %
Consciousness states	8 %	9 %	32 %	31 %	9 %	11 %
Psychomotor	7 %	2 %	32 %	31 %	12 %	16 %
Learning	4 %	7 %	8 %	47 %	14 %	20 %

The perceived effectiveness of the psychological functions assessment is presented in Table 5. Intelligence, behavior, emotions, orientation, states of consciousness and

attention are perceived as the most effectively assessed. The majority of the clinicians consider the assessment of these functions either as very effective or as effective. Meanwhile, memory, executive functions, creativity, sensation and perception are considered are perceived as the least effectively assessed. The minority of the clinicians consider the assessment of these functions either as very effective or as effective.

Table 5. The perceived effectiveness of the psychological functions assessment is presented

	Very effective	Effective	More effective than ineffective	More ineffective than effective	Ineffective	Very ineffective
Intelligence	73 %	24 %	3 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Behavior	72 %	23 %	3 %	2 %	0 %	0 %
Emotions	72 %	28 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Orientation	71 %	24 %	5 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
States of consciousness	71 %	22 %	5 %	2 %	0 %	0 %
Attention	68 %	27 %	5 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Willpower	51 %	23 %	7 %	20 %	0 %	0 %
Personality	53 %	24 %	10 %	13 %	0 %	0 %
Motivation	47 %	23 %	11 %	19 %	0 %	0 %
Self-appraisal	44 %	16 %	19 %	21 %	0 %	0 %
Attitudes	44 %	14 %	19 %	23 %	0 %	0 %
Psychomotor	37 %	38 %	10 %	15 %	0 %	0 %
Learning	37 %	31 %	13 %	19 %	0 %	0 %
Motivation	32 %	13 %	46 %	9 %	0 %	0 %
Development	31 %	23 %	30 %	16 %	0 %	0 %
Memory	13 %	13 %	51 %	23 %	0 %	0 %
Executive functions	12 %	14 %	47 %	27 %	0 %	0 %
Creativity	11 %	13 %	43 %	33 %	0 %	0 %
Sensation	9 %	14 %	41 %	36 %	0 %	0 %
Perception	9 %	12 %	41 %	38 %	0 %	0 %

Thematic analysis was used to interpret the results from the open question “What kind problems and mistakes are most often encountered in clinical practice?”. A thematic map of the practical problems can be seen in Figure 1. Three predominant themes have been identified: 1) the assessment of specific psychological functions (neuropsychological and psychosocial functioning); 2) the assessment of specific disorders (schizophrenia spectrum disorders and autism spectrum disorders); 3) the assessment of specific stages of development (children and teenagers). The majority of participants answered that there is greatest for tests that measure neuropsychological processes (attention, memory,

executive functions, etc.). A pie chart of participants answers is presented in Figure 2. 61 % percent of participants answered there is the greatest need for tests that measure neuropsychological processes, 15 % - emotions, 11 % - personality, 5 % - development, 5 % - motivation. In Table 6 top 10 tests which first of all should be adapted or standartized are presented.

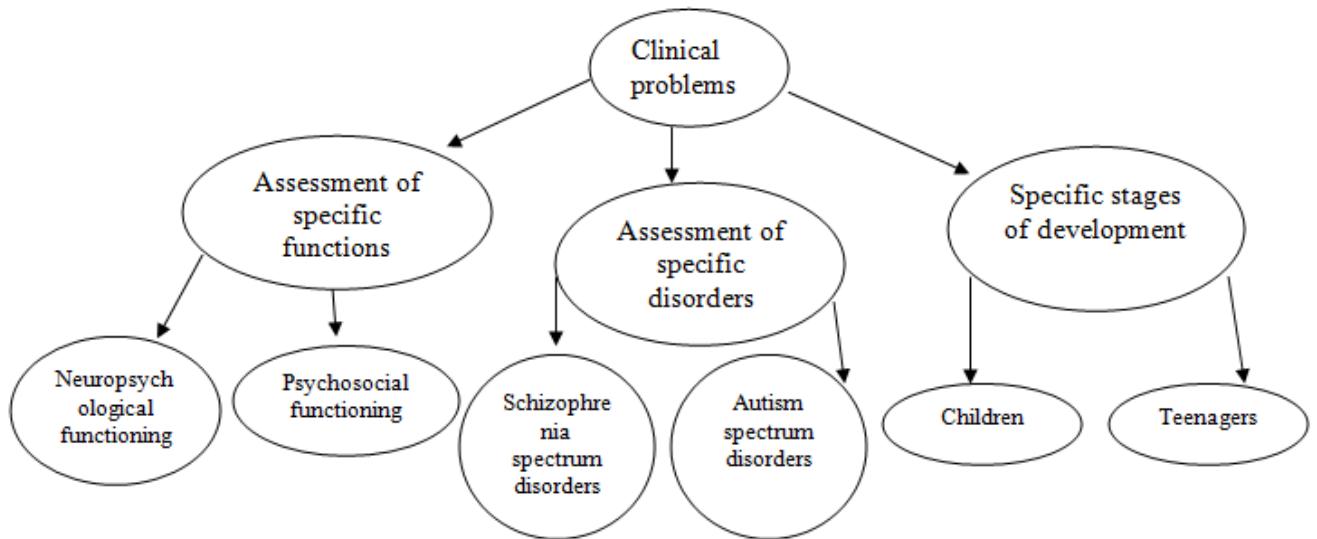


Figure 1. Initial thematic map of three main themes of the practical problems in clinical practice

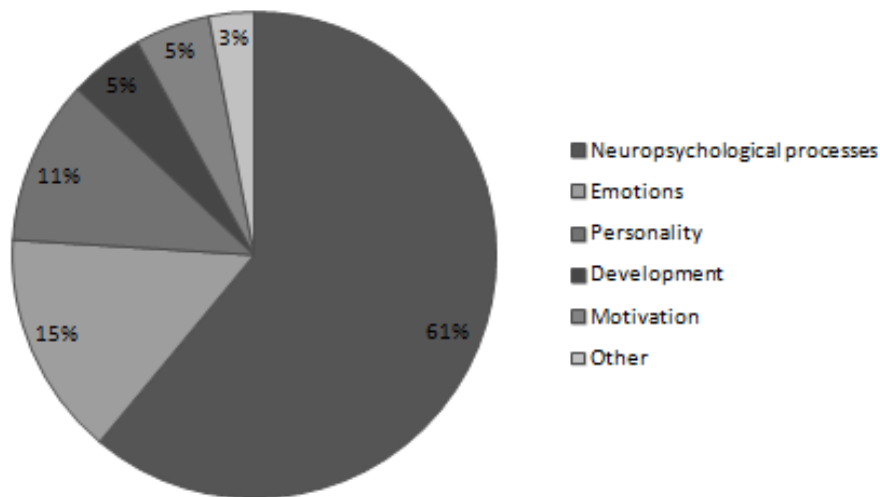


Figure 2. Psychological functions that require new tests

Table 6. The 10 most needed tests in clinical practice

Test	Percentage
MMPI II	27
“4-1”	21
BDI	19
Kraepelin tables	18
Schultz tables	17
Raven’s progressive matrices	17
Bender Gestalt test	15
Zung depression scale	15
Burdon test	12
DISC	7

Note: Percentage: Percentage of clinicians who think this test first of all should be adapted or standartized in the Lithuanian speaking population.

Attention, memory, executive functions, intelligence and emotions are the most important and frequently assessed psychological functions in clinical practice. Neuropsychological assessment of attention, memory, executive functions, are viewed as the most problematic fields of assessment. The adaptation, standartization and revision of the various neuropsychological tests was suggested. The most pressing issues in clinical practice are: 1) the assessment of specific psychological functions (neuropsychological and psychosocial functioning); 2) the assessment of specific disorders (schizophrenia spectrum disorders and autism spectrum disorders); 3) the assessment of specific stages of development (children and teenagers).

Conclusions

Intelligence, neuropsychological processes and emotions are the most frequently and important assessed psychological functions in clinical practice. Despite this fact, the assessment of neuropsychological processes (attention, memory, executive functions) is viewed as problematic and ineffective. Currently in clinical practice the greatest need is of neuropsychological tests. The adaptation, standartization and revision of the various neuropsychological tests is heavily supported by the majority of clinicians.

The most pressing issues in clinical practice are: 1) the assessment of specific psychological functions (neuropsychological and psychosocial functioning); 2) the assessment of specific disorders (schizophrenia spectrum disorders and autism spectrum disorders); 3) the assessment of specific stages of development (children and teenagers).

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