

Descriptive Characteristics of Applied Psychologists in the New Zealand Public Service: A Preliminary Report

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During the October-December 1979 period all known psychologists working within the three major government/local body services: Health, Education, and Justice, were surveyed in order to gather information about work duties and relevant training. The current preliminary report is a descriptive account of psychologists employed in these services.

The training of psychologists is a topic which has consistently been under discussion for the last 20 years or so, and has, especially recently, provoked much controversy in the literature (Raeburn, 1978; De Cecco & Richards, 1977; Feuerstein & Schwartz, 1977; Keats, 1977; Montgomery & Sunberg, 1977; Freedman, 1976; Webb, 1975; Merenda, 1974).

In New Zealand, a special seminar was devoted to this subject at the New Zealand Psychological Society's annual conference of 1978. One of the issues raised at that forum was the question of compatibility between, on the one hand, the selected subject matter and skills preparation covered by existing training programmes and, on the other, the demands made upon psychologists in the field. Clearly, this issue presents something of a vicious circle—university trainers will be motivated by teaching objectives based upon concepts of what they consider psychologists should ideally be doing based on recent developments within the literature, whereas applied psychologists must deal with role demands shaped by the settings in which they work as well as the expectations of their psychologist and non-psychologist colleagues.

Without becoming embroiled in a debate on the relative merits of either view, it seems appropriate and timely to discover what psychologists in the field have to tell us about what they are actually doing, as well as about their present job attitudes and functions.

The Current Study

In order to elicit data about the training, role, and extent of professional activities of applied psychologists in this country, a survey was carried out aimed primarily at those professionals working for the three major, publicly-funded employers of the psychologists: the Education and Justice Departments, and the Hospital Boards.

Between October and December 1979, using lists of currently employed psychologists (provided by the chief of each psychological service), Hospital, Educational, and Justice psychologists throughout the country were sent a reply-paid questionnaire and an accompanying letter which explained the purpose of the survey and invited participation. Psychologists in private practice and various counsellor positions were also contacted, but since the total N was small at the outset, and relatively few returns were received from this miscellaneous group, it was decided to omit them from consideration.

A second letter and an extra copy of the questionnaire were despatched two weeks after the date by which returns were to have been received, in order to prompt the tardy respondents.

1. Description of the questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into three parts to gather information on:

- (i) *descriptive characteristics* identifying work experience, rank, number of

positions held, working hours, subscriptions to professional societies, etc.

- (ii) *professional duties and roles* eliciting data on involvement in and attitudes to assessment, treatment, research, administration, teaching, "diplomacy", and refresher activities; and,
- (iii) *training and qualifications* giving an indication of levels of formal training as well as attitudes to the kind of training undertaken.

The questionnaire format varied according to the information to be acquired. Descriptive data and information about training and qualifications were elicited using a series of multiple choice and open-ended questions, with opportunity for free comment. However, in order to find out about professional roles and responsibilities, a rank ordering of priorities was requested in addition to an estimation of their weekly occurrence expressed in percentage terms. Subjects were also asked to distinguish between *actual* involvement in specific activities, the amount of time that they *ideally* considered they should be spending in these same activities, and both *actual* and *ideal* estimates were compared with the subjects' *perceptions* of what demands or expectations were placed upon them by their employers. While being mindful of the pitfalls of this approach, the authors were interested to highlight possible conflicts psychologists might be experiencing in the course of their day-to-day practice.

2. *The population sampled*

Having a comparatively small service, the Justice Department was able to provide an up-to-date and accurate list of psychologists in its employ. It is of interest that this group had the highest response rate (96% of the 24 subjects canvassed), with 19 (83%) of these returns completed and able to be included in the analysis.

Psychologists within the Health setting are almost exclusively appointments made by individual Hospital Boards. Because this service is larger and regionalized there appears to be less accurate central knowledge of specific personnel across the country. Of 110 questionnaires sent out, 16 were returned to sender, address unknown, or with a note that the addressee had left the service. Thus 94

(86%) of those contacted responded and of those returns 73 (78%) were codeable. It is likely that some people new to the service were not included in the survey for the reasons cited above.

A similar proportion of educational psychologists replied, 117 (87%). Of those, 84 (72%) were able to be included. This slightly lower proportion may have been due to the fact that a compulsory survey of an equally extensive parallel kind was being simultaneously conducted by the Government Education Department. Nevertheless, of the 134 questionnaires sent out 17 were returned with full explanations for the failure to complete the survey. These reasons ranged from being too involved with their own survey, to boredom, ill-health, and resignation from the service. Additionally, a few respondents identified themselves primarily as teachers rather than as psychologists. Thirty-three replies were not fully completed, presented scoring difficulties, or contained comments that raised doubt as to the validity of the answers. These were omitted from the data analysis.

The authors regard this level of return as very encouraging with regard to representativeness of psychological opinion in the three services. This could be interpreted as a reflection of the degree of interest in the topics covered by the survey, particularly as participation was a time-consuming exercise.

The current preliminary report provides information only on the first aspect of the questionnaire: a descriptive profile of publicly-employed applied psychologists.

3. *Employment characteristics of the psychologists sampled*

It should be noted that the descriptive data presented here relates to the situation as it was at the time of the sampling (October to December 1979). The authors have refrained from making any more than a minimum of interpretative comments, because explanations for the data go beyond the scope of the information gathered.

- (i) *Sex*: Table 1 indicates the sex composition of each of the three employment groups. Forty-two per cent of Hospital Board psychologists and just over one-quarter of Education and

Table 1
Sex composition of psychologists in the three employment categories surveyed

Sex	Hospital	Education	Justice
Female	25	23	5
Male	35	61	13
Information missing	13	0	1

Table 2
Comparison of actual numbers of psychologists at various grades within the three services and number of subjects whose returns were included in the survey.

Grade	Education		Health		Justice	
	Actual	Survey	Act. Survey	Act. Survey	Act. Survey	Act. Survey
	N	N	N	N	N	N
Assistant Psychologist	19	9	44	21	4	2
Basic grade Psychologist	59	45	51	37	14	12
Senior Psychologist	31	21	21	10	3	2
Chief District Psychologist	12	7	2	1	3	1
Other* : (Interns, Part-time, Unidentified)	13	1	10	4	0	2

Chi square = 23.01, df = 6, $p < .01$ for total sample

* This group was omitted in calculating the Chi square.

Justice psychologists were female. Information on this variable was missing for 13 Hospital Board returns and one Justice return. Comparison of the sexes in all aspects of this survey is an important area of the investigation that will be the subject of a later report. In a 2 x 2 contingency table comparing Hospital Board subjects with those in Education and Justice combined, a trend was observed for more males to be employed in the latter two services (Chi square = 3.51, df = 1, $p = < .10$).

It is difficult to evaluate the representativeness of this differential employment trend with regard to the sex variable without reference to the general population. However, it does appear from these results that either the Hospital Boards are more open to employing women than the other two services or, alternatively, that Education and Justice are less attractive

employment options to prospective female candidates.

(ii) *Professional rank and status*: Table 2 provides a profile of the professional grades of psychologists included in this survey. Information comparing the actual number of psychologists in each of the three services was sought at the time of the survey in order to establish whether responses adequately reflected, in terms of rank, the number of psychologists in the field. This information was provided at the time by Education and Justice. Hospital Board information was more recently obtained and the data in Table 2 refers to the *current* breakdown within that service. This explains the discrepancy between the actual number sampled ($N = 110$) and the present actual number of established positions ($N = 128$).

Overall, the survey adequately represented the gradings within the combined services. There was a slight under-representation of respondents at the Assistant level and a slight over-representation at the Basic grade level.

In comparing the *actual* appointment levels amongst the services, however, there are some important differences. At the Assistant level, Hospital Boards employ more than twice as many psychologists as the other two services and six or seven times fewer psychologists at the District/Regional grade. Although there appear to be relatively more positions at the Senior grade in Education, this may be an artifact produced by a possibly greater number of unfilled positions, particularly within the Hospital Board service. It should also be noted, that in the case of Hospital Board psychologists, the Health Service was regionalized in 1972, so that some who have responded may have considered that their present employment referred only to the period after that date. This may have had the effect of artificially reducing the apparent length of service in present employment for the 6-10 year group, but would have no effect on the preponderance of psychologists at the 0-5 year level.

Another explanation for this uneven distribution of gradings might be that there is a

Table 3
Comparison of psychological employment categories in terms of number of years with present employing authority.

Number of Years	Number of Psychologists		
	Hospital Board	Education Department	Justice Department
0-5	56	32	15
6-10	17	23	3
11-15	0	15	0
16-20	0	9	0
21-25	0	3	1
26-30	0	2	0

Table 4
Comparison of three psychological employment categories in terms of total number of years of employment experience as a psychologist.

Years Employed	Number of Psychologists		
	Hospital Board	Education Department	Justice Department
0-5	49	47	15
6-10	16	18	1
11-15	4	8	1
16-20	3	9	1
21-25	0	2	1
26-30	1	0	0

higher turnover of staff within the Health setting compared with Education and that psychologists simply do not remain in Hospital service for lengths of time greater than five years.

Unfortunately, the authors do not have definitive data which may support or refute any of these suggestions.

It is clear, however, (see Table 3) that personnel do tend to remain in government service within Education for longer periods compared with other employers. Sixty-two per cent of Education psychologists are still employed in the service after five years compared with 23% of Hospital Board and 21% of Justice psychologists. Length of service is likely to be related to eligibility for promotion and may account for the greater number of Seniors with Education.

As there is no significant difference amongst the groups in terms of length of time employed as a psychologist (Chi square = 8.93, $df = 10$, $p = <.6$) it cannot be argued that Health and Justice psychologists have had shorter professional experience (see Table 4).

4. Full-time versus part-time employment

All of the Justice psychologists and 95% of educational psychologists surveyed were in full-time employment. Health psychologists had the largest number of part-time employees (18%).

5. Official hours of work

As might be expected in an era of the seven to eight hour working day, the majority of full-time psychologists ($N = 160$) in all three employment categories, reported their regular working hours to be between 36 and 40 hours per week ($\bar{X} = 38.6$ hours; $S.D. = 8.7$ hours) with no significant inter-group differences. The mode is on 40 hours and only four people (2.5%) reported working slightly longer. Three of those were in Education and reported their hours to be between 41 and 45 hours per week. One was in Health and estimated 85 hours per week to be the average official time needed for the position!

6. Overtime worked

Twenty-two per cent of Hospital Board psychologists and 32% of Education and Justice psychologists claimed that they regularly have to spend additional time to keep abreast of their duties. For this number, in all three employment categories, six to ten hours per week or one to two hours per day is the most common amount of time necessary for unofficial, unpaid overtime (see Table 5).

7. Satisfaction with employment hours

Two-thirds of the total group of psychologists (Table 6) express satisfaction with employer time demands. Hospital Board

Table 5
Comparison of amount of weekly unofficial overtime necessary to discharge professional responsibilities and duties to major employing authority.

Unofficial Overtime Hours	Number of Psychologists		
	Hospital Board	Education Department	Justice Department
None	57	57	13
1-5	1	3	0
6-10	10	19	4
11-15	3	3	0
16-20	1	2	1
21-25	1	0	1

Chi square = 11.22, $df = 10$, $p = .4$.

Table 6
Employees' Perceptions of the amount of working time expected by their major employer
 (Total N = 178)

Psychologists' Views of Employer Expectations About No. of Hrs Worked	Hospital Board	Education Department	Justice Department
a) Expectations reasonable	56	49	10
b) Expectations unreasonable	6	20	4
c) Unsure about question of reasonableness	5	7	4
Total number answered	67	76	18
Total number possible	73	84	19

Table 7
Comparison of reported frequencies of overtime duties across services.

Overtime Duties	Hospital	Education	Justice
1. Patient contact	30	37	15
2. Private practice	2	0	0
3. Supervision of students/assistants	3	3	1
4. Lecturing and lecture preparation/talks	16	46	1
5. Public relations (including committee work)	4	25	2
6. Correspondence and professional reading	8	43	5
7. Research	2	6	0
8. Travelling	2	7	0
9. Other	4	2	1
Total number of mentions	75	169	25

psychologists were the most satisfied of the three employment groups about the reasonableness of employer expectations (84%). Justice and Education psychologists were the most ambivalent with only 56% and 64% respectively indicating satisfaction with their working hours. As there is no evidence that they report working significantly longer hours for their major employer than Health psychologists (see Table 5), the reasons for their relatively greater discontent about employer expectations in this regard may lie in job conditions rather than in length of hours as such. This observation could perhaps be

qualified by stating that although a difference of one or two per week may not be statistically significant, it may be personally very significant if it reflects a consistent tendency. Justice psychologists do not, however, report working relatively longer hours than full-time Health psychologists (38.2 compared with 39.9 hours per week) and Educational psychologists report working slightly less than either (37.6 hours per week).

8. Overtime duties

When psychologists are engaged in out-of-hours work (Table 7) this is primarily involving patient contact for Health and Justice practitioners. Education respondents, however, in rank order of overtime duties mentioned, are engaged in: lecturing and lecture preparation; correspondence and professional reading; patient contact; and public relations. Thus, there appears to be a greater variety of additional activities of a professional nature undertaken by this group. It is of interest that educationalists are more involved in "public relations" and do comparatively more correspondence and professional reading out of normal working hours than either Justice or Hospital Board psychologists.

9. Number of employers

Although they do not work significantly longer hours in their main employment than Health and Justice psychologists, educational psychologists are least likely to have jobs other than the one that provides their major source of income (Table 8). Hospital Board psychologists are most likely to have a second income source and this is probably related to the fact that 13 are employed only part-time by Hospital Boards.

Table 8
Comparisons of hospital, educational, and justice psychologists in numbers of employers for whom they work.

Employing Authority	Number of Psychologists		
	Hospital Board	Education Department	Justice Department
Only one employer	60	80	16
More than one employer	11	3	0
Private practice	2	1	3

Chi square = 13.83, df = 4, p = .01

If Justice psychologists take on extra work for remuneration, it seems that this is usually in the form of private practice, though the number is small ($N = 3$). The motivation for seeking additional paid employment by Health and Justice psychologists was not ascertainable from the survey data and may provide an opportunity for further investigation.

10. Membership of psychological societies

Uniformly, across all three employment authorities, more than 80% of psychologists are members of at least one professional psychological society. Half of the psychologists in Education and Health and three-quarters of those in Justice belong to one society only while Hospital Board psychologists are significantly more likely to be members of three or more societies ($p = <.03$).

Only two societies emerged as being heavily subscribed to by respondents: the New Zealand Psychological Society and the New Zealand Psychological Service Association (Table 9). The latter is a special association for Educational psychologists and attracts a membership slightly in excess of the number of Education Department psychologists who are members of the New Zealand Psychological Society. It is noticeable that compared with Health and Justice only half as many Educationalists are members of the New Zealand Psychological Society. This could mean that many Educational psychologists have insufficient psychological qualifications for membership or that far fewer Educationists apply for membership, because of having their own association with its own journal.

Table 10 shows that consistently higher percentages of Senior psychologists are members of the New Zealand Psychological Society. In contrast, the membership of the New Zealand Psychological Service Association is dominated by "Junior" psychologists.

Conclusion

The picture emerges of a government or local body funded service which employs a disproportionate number of males to females, especially in the case of Justice and Education. As far as seniority is concerned, Education seems to have a more established career structure and more permanent staff

Table 9
Comparison of three employment categories in terms of major psychological society to which respondents reported they belonged.

Major Psychological Society	Number of Psychologists		
	Hospital Board	Education Department	Justice Department
New Zealand Psychological Society	51	34	16
British Psychological Society	2	1	0
New Zealand Psychological Service Association	0	38	0
Other Societies	6	0	0
None	14	10	3

Table 10
Comparison of membership of firstnamed professional psychology societies across three psychology employment categories.

First-named Society	Number of Psychologists					
	Hospital Board		Education Dept		Justice Dept	
	Jnr*	Snr†	Jnr	Snr	Jnr	Snr
New Zealand Psychological Society	38	10	19	15	11	3
British Psychological Society	1	1	0	1	—	—
New Zealand Psychology Service Association	0	0	28	9	—	—
Other Societies	6	0	0	0	—	—
None	13	0	7	3	3	0

* Assistant and basic grade psychologist

† Senior and chief psychologists

at the upper levels, with Health, in particular, employing what might be regarded as a surfeit of practitioners at the Assistant level. This trend is significant at the .001 level, and cannot be accounted for simply by referring to overall number of years employed as a psychologist, irrespective of service.

In terms of conditions of employment, Educational and Justice psychologists appear to be less sure of the reasonableness of employer demands of their time than their counterparts in Health, with a fair propor-

tion of their numbers regarding employer expectations as being unreasonable. It is also important to note that Health psychologists as a group are significantly more likely to have more than one employer than those in the other two services.

Less than one-third of the total group are regularly involved in overtime and where overtime is worked, this tends not to be excessive.

In examining professional society membership, two-fifths of Hospital Board psychologists and over half of those in Education do not envisage the New Zealand Psychological Society as having their primary professional allegiance. Similarly, it is of interest that amongst the more junior Educational psychologists, the New Zealand Psychological Service Association has a far more substantial following than the New Zealand Psychological Society. As the more recently employed Educational psychologists have all had to undergo post-graduate training prior to appointment, the reasons for their failure to become members of the New Zealand Psychological Society cannot be due to lack of relevant qualifications. It may well be that this group does not perceive the New Zealand Psychological Society as being able to fulfil their professional needs.

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