

Differences between Male and Female Psychologists within the Public Service in New Zealand¹

F. A. Walker

Cherry Farm Group of Hospitals, Dunedin

D. W. McKerracher

Department of Education, University of Otago

The questionnaire returns to 109 N.Z. male psychologists were compared with those of 53 N.Z. female psychologists. This number represented 60.5 per cent of psychologists in public service positions. Occupational duties, professional characteristics and training experiences were analysed. Females reported themselves to be significantly different from their male counterparts in several professional respects.

In analyzing the data derived from a survey carried out in late 1979 to examine the occupational duties, professional characteristics and training of applied psychologists in Health-related services and the Education and Justice Departments (Walker, McKerracher and Edwards, 1982; McKerracher and Walker, 1980; 1982), some interesting differences were noted between male and female psychologists that may well serve to stimulate further research.

Method

The sample comprised 109 males and 53 females whose sex could be definitively determined from the questionnaire returns. Characteristics of the survey format and questionnaire have been referred to elsewhere (see Walker *et al.*, 1981).

Results²

Findings which reached statistical significance at the .05 or better level (using analy-

sis of variance or chi square formulas) are listed below.

1. Professional Characteristics

(a) No females held any of the top positions at a national, regional or district level compared with 8 per cent of the males. In addition, 8 per cent of the females and 27 per cent of the males were classed as seniors ($\chi^2 = 21.83$, $df = 4$, $p = .002$).

(b) Seventy-five per cent of the females and 53 per cent of the males had had less than five years' experience as psychologists ($\chi^2 = 6.64$, $df = 1$, $p = .01$).

(c) Seventy-three per cent of the women and 60 per cent of the men were members of NZPsS. In contrast, 23 per cent of the females had subscriber status compared with only 4 per cent of the males ($\chi^2 = 17.38$, $df = 5$, $p = .004$).

2. Role Functions

A seven-point rating scale³ was used by survey respondents for allocations to each of the following activities:

(a) Assessment:

On a seven-point time scale (Never to Always) females and males ($\bar{X} =$

¹ The authors wish to acknowledge the invaluable contributions and advice concerning statistical analysis rendered by Dr L. R. Nelson, Department of Education, University of Otago. In addition, they wish to express their gratitude to the N.Z. Association of Hospital Psychologists and the Government Department of Education for assistance with funding for this project.

² The data cards from which the computer analyses were performed can be accessed at Otago University. Arrangements to use them may be made by writing to Dr D. W. McKerracher.

³ 1 = Never 4 = Sometimes 6 = Almost
2 = Almost Never 5 = Frequently Always
3 = Rarely 7 = Always

4.6 and 4.3; $\delta = 1.2$ and 1.0) were not significantly different in their reports of the amounts of time actually allocated to behavioural and psychometric assessment ($F = 3.27$, $df = 1, 155$, $p = .05$). Females more markedly than their male counterparts, claimed that they would ideally like to increase the amount of behavioural analysis undertaken by a significant amount ($F = 7.19$, $df = 1, 147$, $p = .008$). This change in emphasis was from Sometimes ($\bar{X} = 4.3$; $\delta = 1.4$) to Frequently ($\bar{X} = 5.0$; $\delta = 1.1$). They also believed that this increase was more in line with the significantly higher expectations ($\bar{X} = 4.7$; $\delta = 1.3$) of their employers ($F = 7.13$, $df = 1, 86$, $p = .009$).

(b) Treatment:

The only difference between the sexes is that women report that they offer less formal therapy to professional colleagues and their families than men ($F = 3.96$, $df = 1, 155$, $p = .05$). While this activity happens, at best, Rarely, ($\bar{X} = 1.8$ and 2.1; $\delta = 1.0$ and 1.2) both sexes would like to increase involvement in this area. Men ideally want this to occur relatively more frequently ($\bar{X} = 2.9$; $\delta = 1.3$) than women ($\bar{X} = 2.3$; $\delta = 1.1$). This difference was significant ($F = 8.62$, $df = 1, 134$, $p = .004$).

(c) Teaching:

Regarding this aspect of professional activities, there is overall little difference when comparing males and females. The various teaching duties were rated as being performed between Never and Sometimes. There is, however, a difference between the sexes in on-the-job teaching of treatment techniques to other psychologists. While this is an infrequent activity for both, ($\bar{X} = 2.2$ and 2.8; $\delta = 1.5$ and 1.5), men are more involved than women ($F =$

5.81, $df = 1, 153$, $p = .02$). In addition, men perceive employers' expectations to be greater in this area ($\bar{X} = 2.3$ and 3.2; $\delta = 1.5$ and 1.5) than do women ($F = 8.22$, $df = 1, 91$, $p = .005$).

(d) Research:

Although research projects, when they are undertaken, are reported as being written up Rarely, men indicate that they are more likely to do this than women ($F = 4.44$, $df = 1, 154$, $p = .04$).

(e) Refresher Activities:

Women rate themselves as doing less professional reading ($\bar{X} = 2.8$ cf 3.4; $\delta = 1.2$ cf 1.2) during salaried working hours than men ($F = 8.52$, $df = 1, 156$, $p = .004$) and although they would like to increase the present amount, there is still a discrepancy at the ideal level ($\bar{X} = 4.2$ cf 4.6; $\delta = 1.0$ cf 0.8) with men expressing a desire to do more ($F = 5.50$, $df = 1, 148$, $p = .02$). Like males, women psychologists presently do the bulk of their professional reading in their own time, but whereas men would ideally like to reduce this personal time commitment only slightly, females would like to reduce it significantly ($F = 5.34$, $df = 1, 148$, $p = .02$).

(f) Policy Meetings:

Women are less involved than men both in policy meetings with representatives of other disciplines ($F = 5.69$, $df = 1, 154$, $p = .02$) and in internal policy meetings with other psychologists ($F = 4.84$, $df = 1, 154$, $p = .03$). Furthermore, in the case of formal multidisciplinary policy meetings, there is a significant difference between males and females in the degree of participation purportedly expected by their employer ($F = 4.49$, $df = 1, 103$, $p = .04$). In any event, such activities are rated as occurring only Rarely (3.0) or Sometimes (4.0). Interesting-

ly, women are more involved than men ($\bar{X} = 5.0$ df 4.6; $\delta = 1.2$ cf 1.1) in informal multidisciplinary meeting ($F = 5.07$, $df = 1, 154$, $p = .03$) and ideally consider that this form of activity should be continued to a significantly greater extent ($\bar{X} = 5.3$ cf 4.8; $\delta = 1.1$ cf 0.9) than do males ($F = 7.17$, $df = 1, 146$, $p = .008$).

(g) Miscellaneous:

Women are more likely to discuss ($\bar{X} = 4.5$ cf 4.0; $\delta = 1.3$ cf 1.2) their job-related frustrations with other psychologists than are men ($F = 5.72$, $df = 1, 150$, $p = .02$) but would ideally like to do this less, in which case their results would become comparable with those of males ($F = 2.52$, $df = 1, 139$, $p > .05$).

Discussion

Since the original survey was not specifically designed to investigate the sex difference issue, it is considered unwise to attempt interpretations of these data. Some interesting research questions are raised, however, of which the most important seem to be:

1. Why do women appear to have less psychological work experience than men?

2. Is this relative lack of experience reflected in their limited representation at the senior levels of appointment?
3. Why do women perceive that their employers expect more behavioural analysis to be undertaken?
4. Is the more limited role taken by females in the area of on-the-job training of other psychologists related to having lesser work experience?
5. Why do women report writing up less research than men, particularly as they report undertaking comparable amounts of research work?

References

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