

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on Women in Psychology in New Zealand

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At the 1975 Annual General Meeting of the New Zealand Psychological Society a remit was passed, calling for an investigation into the position of women within the profession. In April 1976 Council asked Dr Elisabeth Wells to convene an ad hoc committee for this purpose. The committee produced suggestions for research and some preliminary results for the 1976 Conference and the following report was presented at the 1977 Annual General Meeting.

New Zealand Psychological Society

The 1976-77 Membership List shows that of the 439 members listed, nearly a quarter are women. However there are no women among the 25 Fellows and only 7 among the 55 Associates of the Society. Women members are less likely than men to join Divisions — 44% of women but 57% of men belong to at least one Division of the Society — and there are some differences in interests. Women comprise 24% of the Division of Behaviour Analysis, 23% of the Clinical Division, 19% of the Cross-Cultural Division, 16% of the Educational Division, 7% of the Occupational Division, and 4% (1 person) of the Experimental Division.

Studies of the American Psychological Association and the Australian Psychological Society show that in the early 1970s they too had about a quarter of their members who were women (Mead, 1975; Task Force, 1973).

Psychology in Universities

Students

The following information applies only to Psychology graduates; those Education graduates eligible for membership of N.Z.P.S. cannot be separated out from other Education graduates.

In the decade from 1964-1974 the percentage of Psychology graduates who were women was 43 percent for bachelors degrees, 28 percent for masters and honours degrees, and 20 percent for

doctorates. There has been considerable variation from year to year, even at the bachelor's level, but there has been a trend for the percentage of women to increase. Psychology percentages are close to those for all Arts and Science degrees, well below those for English, and above those for Mathematics. However in all subjects the percentage of women decreases for higher degrees. The New Zealand Psychology figures are close to those in the U.S.A. in 1971 — 45 percent for bachelor's degrees and 24 percent for doctorates in Psychology (Education Statistics of New Zealand; Task Force, 1973).

It is important that faculty members examine the academic counselling they give to female students and that in graduate programmes with restricted enrolments the criteria used for selection are closely scrutinised. Because of the various social and personal pressures upon them, female students may require more encouragement to continue their studies than would males of similar ability.

Courses

With the exception of the Waikato Psychology Department, university Psychology and Education departments do not teach courses specifically on women, although faculty members may contribute to such inter-departmental courses. (University Calendars, 1977). It is to be hoped that developmental, social, personality and clinical courses do deal with current issues relating to sex roles, sex differences, and the experiences of women, and that students wishing to do research in these areas are able to do so.

Faculty

This information on Psychology departments was obtained from the 1977 calendars. Excluding positions without tenure and honorary lecturers, there are 12 women and 59 men, a percentage of women of 17 percent which is a little above the 10 percent found over all faculties. Women hold 30

percent of the lecturer positions (7/23), 15 percent of the senior lecturer positions (5/34), and none of the higher positions, a pattern also typical throughout New Zealand universities and universities overseas.

In Education Departments it is difficult to separate out the psychologists. However Professor Marie Clay is the exception to the general trend for women to be employed on the lower rungs of the academic ladder.

Employment

This survey is by no means comprehensive. However, including employment in universities, it does cover major areas of employment for psychologists and accounts for over 300 positions which specifically require psychologists.

Employment of Graduates

The only information available is the 1973-74 Survey of Graduate Employment. The material on psychology graduates is difficult to summarise; it suggests that at the bachelor's level women have more difficulty finding employment and more are unavailable for work but the numbers are very small and could be totally reversed by information from non-respondents. What is not known is the pattern of employment for many years after graduation.

Psychological Service of the Education Department

Throughout the education system women are prevalent in low status positions but virtually absent in the senior ranks (Dell, 1975). The Psychological Service of the Department of Education is no exception (Table 1).

Nearly all recently appointed psychologists hold the Auckland University Diploma in Educational Psychology which has been limited almost exclusively to people holding Education Department studentships entitling them to two years of full-time study on full pay. For the first seven years of the course (1960-1966) 19 men were selected but no women. In the next four years (1967-1971) 27 men and 3 women were selected. However in 1972 alone 3 women were selected, along with 5 men, and since then the number of women has increased. In 1977 6 of the 8 studentships were awarded to women. The Head Office of the Education Department deny that there ever has been a sexist policy on selection and as application records are not kept it is impossible to see what changes have occurred in the number of women applying and in the criteria used for selection.

Because of their absence from the early years of the course, women lack the advantage of length of service. However, recent trends suggest that the position of women is improving.

Table 1
Percentages of Women at each level of the Psychological Service of the Education Department, December 1976

Psychologists (N = 94)		Organisers of Special Classes (N = 27)	
Chief Psychologist	0	National Organiser	0
District Psychologist	0	District and Senior Organisers)	0
Senior Psychologists	11	Organisers	40
Psychologists	30		
Assistant Psychologists	64		

Psychological Service of the Justice Department

Of the 25 psychologists employed in 1977, at March 31st, 18 are men and 7 are women. Three of the women are in training positions as assistant psychologists, and four are at the basic grade position of psychologist. Only one has more than 5 years experience. The Department has not yet received applications from women for any positions above the basic grade position. The number of women employed has increased in recent years — for example, there were only four in 1974.

Clinical Psychologists Employed by Hospital Boards

Because of part-time and consultative appointments it is difficult to summarise employment in this field but information supplied by Mr H. Unger indicates that about 40 percent of positions are held by women. (The total number of positions is equivalent to about 80 full-time positions.) This 40 percent contrasts with the 23 percent female membership of the Clinical Division but consideration of absolute numbers suggests that the discrepancy is probably due to the 40 or more men who belong to the Division but who are not employed by Hospital Boards. Women seem to be more numerous at the lower levels although some are Senior Psychologists.

General Comments

A common pattern emerges from the data on membership of the New Zealand Psychological Society, students in psychology, and the employment of psychologists. In each case there are fewer women than men and the women tend to be concentrated at lower levels.

To some extent the employment pattern is the result of the student pattern — there have been fewer women graduates. Furthermore, women tend to have fewer years of experience than men, which limits their eligibility for promotion. However, discrimination against women cannot be ruled out, in spite of "equal pay and equal opportunity". Discrimination is always difficult to prove in individual cases but even so the com-

mittee has been convinced by some cases spontaneously presented to it. Evidence of discrimination in New Zealand universities has been documented (Women in Higher Education, 1974) and in United States universities it was found that when men and women were matched on all criteria officially used for promotion, rank and salary differences still persisted (Astin & Bayer, 1972).

The attitudes and expectations of women themselves, and of the people around them, and the practical difficulties of employment and of child care are all important factors contributing to the current position of women. A woman who has a conflict between success and femininity is handicapped. Couples who want careers often have difficulties in both obtaining satisfactory employment; do both make compromises during their careers? Combining a career and parenthood will continue to be more difficult for women than for men unless men are prepared to take a greater share in childrearing, part-time work is available for men and women, there is adequate maternity leave, better child-care facilities, and re-entry possibilities for people who leave work for some

time. The current career structures have developed primarily for the traditional male pattern of full-time work until retirement. There is a need for much greater flexibility and a re-evaluation of careers themselves.

Note

Information was obtained from the Department of Education, the Department of Justice, Mr H. R. Unger, and the Heads of Psychology Departments in universities.

References

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