

Students' opinions about their capacity to practice psychology in their senior year

أراء الطلبة حول قدرتهم على ممارسة علم النفس خلال السنة الجامعية الأخيرة

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Abstract:

For several decades, clinical psychology has been developing on the fringes of psychiatry. Today, it has gained its independence. In Algeria, this discipline is still in search of benchmarks and references. In the psychology institutes scattered here and there, each one tries to offer training for future psychologists who will meet the increasingly urgent needs of society. However, we question the ability of students, upon completing their master's degree in clinical psychology, to practice clinical psychology in various health institutions or even in a private practice. In our work, we focused on the potential difficulties and problems that could jeopardize the fulfillment of a professional niche.

We conducted numerous in-depth semi-structured interviews with male and female clinical psychology students on the verge of obtaining their master's degree.

The results obtained were negative. For all the students interviewed, no one felt ready to practice as a clinical psychologist in the near future. Their testimony mainly mentioned a training that lacked practical experience or internships accompanied by competent professional supervision; they often concluded that theory was far from sufficient. In the same vein, we observed a lack of motivation among them to pursue training: they admit to putting in little effort and lacking initiatives that would contribute to the development of a true psychological counselor's personality, having acquired a minimum of the required skills in this field.

Keywords: training, psychologist, student, clinical psychology

ملخص:

على مدى عدة عقود، تطورت علم النفس العيادي على هامش الطب النفسي. أما اليوم، فقد اكتسب استقلالته. وفي الجزائر، لا يزال هذا التخصص يبحث عن معايير ومراجع. ففي معاهد علم النفس المنتشرة هنا وهناك، يسعى كل منها إلى توفير التدريب للأخصائيين النفسيين المستقبليين الذين سيلبون احتياجات المجتمع المتزايدة للإلاج. ومع ذلك، فإننا نتساءل عن قدرة الطلاب، بعد إكمال شهادة الماستر في علم النفس العيادي، على ممارسة علم النفس العيادي في مختلف المؤسسات الصحية أو حتى في عيادة خاصة. ركزنا في عملنا على الصعوبات والمشاكل المحتملة التي قد تعرض للخطر تحقيق مكانة مهنية.

أجربنا العديد من المقابلات شبه المنظمة المتعمقة مع طلاب وطالبات علم النفس العيادي الذين هم على وشك الحصول على شهادة الماستر.

كانت النتائج التي تم التوصل إليها سلبية. فلم يشعر أي من الطلاب الذين تمت مقابلتهم بأنه مستعد لممارسة مهنة علم النفس العيادي في المستقبل القريب. وقد أشارت شهاداتهم بشكل أساسي إلى تدريب يفتقر إلى الخبرة العملية أو التدريب الداخلي المصحوب بإشراف مهني كفاء، وكثيراً ما خلصوا إلى أن النظرية بعيدة كل البعد عن أن تكون كافية. وعلى نفس المنوال، لاحظنا انعدام الحافز لديهم لمتابعة التدريب: فهم يعترفون بأنهم يبذلون القليل من الجهد ويفتقرون إلى المبادرات التي من شأنها أن تساهم في تنمية شخصية مستشار نفسي حقيقي، بعد أن اكتسبوا الحد الأدنى من المهارات المطلوبة في هذا المجال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التدريب، أخصائي نفسي، طالب، علم النفس العيادي

Introduction

If we examine, from a historical perspective, the notion of clinical psychology, it appeared around 1890 in France, Germany, and the United States to characterize a discipline that aims to understand, in its individual specificity, the functioning of a person by taking into account their own modalities, their interpersonal relationships, their imagination, their emotions, and their cognitive functioning.

For several decades, clinical psychology has been developing on the fringes of psychiatry. Today, it has gained its independence.

According to Angel, P. (1971): "the clinical psychologist is increasingly sought after by institutions that take social demand into account, such as maternity wards, CSR, prisons, hospitals, and nursing homes." The societal shift towards an exacerbated individualism has notably contributed to the increased demand for "personal development" that the independent psychologist may encounter. However, the profession of clinical psychologist is fraught with

difficulties and complexities: addictions, psychological support for cancer patients, the elderly, and the dying. The confrontation with risky behaviors, pain, and death then requires constant work from the psychologist to find and

maintain the appropriate professional distance.

Our study seeks to answer essential questions posed by the practice of clinical psychology today, and more specifically for these new psychology graduates. Because it is a common opinion that these future psychologists, who are called to work in different contexts: childhood, adolescence, substance abuse, autism, etc., need quality training that can meet the various needs of our society, in order to make these learnings increasingly specialized.

Angel., P. (idem) is a psychiatrist and clinical psychologist who reminds us that it is necessary to be demanding about the initial and ongoing training of psychologists, their competence, and their ethics, in order to best prepare them for a necessarily multifaceted practice adapted to different institutional contexts.

In Algeria, our sociocultural context is still different from Western societies, as it is a discipline that deals with ethics and human values, explaining the right and wrong behaviors and conduct to have, delineating the normal from the pathological, which means that many factors and cultural elements interfere with the content of the various teachings provided.

We also wonder if the existing gap between Algerian culture and what psychology brings is not too difficult for students who arrive with everything they have introjected as principles and rules of life to assimilate? Are they ready to let go of all this tamed heritage? Do they have the strength to embark on new and unknown paths, and to adhere to currents of thought that can sometimes be contradictory to what they have received as education and life culture? So many questions that need to be asked to clarify this issue.

When asked about the training and its content provided at the same institution, two teachers from the psychology department at the University of Constantine responded that it is a somewhat catch-all training during which the student assimilates some theoretical concepts on various psychological currents, learns to handle some projective or intelligence tests, most of which are not adapted to our cultural realities, learns more or less what is meant by a clinical interview, how to conduct a case study, but remains completely unarmed when it comes to therapy. Even if theoretically he knows the essentials of the different

existing therapeutic practices; at the practical level, adapting these practices to the specifically Algerian reality remains to be done.

In this research work, we address the specificity of clinical psychology training within an Algerian university institution, and we will focus more particularly on the students of this same specialty, but only for those who have completed their training.

We hope to shed more light on the subject and identify the most significant elements regarding it.

Psychology is still a relatively new science in our society. It is often ignored or poorly understood. It is just beginning to make its appearance in the social field alongside other medical practices, but despite this, it still remains somewhat mysterious and sometimes the subject of distrust or prejudice. This does not mean that it is completely rejected by the Algerian population either. Many are starting to approach it and are considering the possibility of consulting a psychologist for help. Even though, as we know well, opening up to a stranger remains very delicate for many.

We also know well that the task of the psychologist is important, delicate, and has very crucial consequences for the psycho-social development of all human groups. However, can we say that all those who are in a position to practice or work as such are aware of what the role of the psychologist is, their responsibilities towards their clients, and the personal psycho-intellectual qualities required at this level?

The psychologist is the practitioner of a specific discipline: psychology. In this, he offers expertise, applying the knowledge, methods, and techniques derived from this discipline and its various specialties, according to his own qualifications... ... The purpose of his action is not directly "therapeutic" since it aims to work towards "the autonomy of the personality." (Albernhe, T. and Albernhe, K. (2003), pp. 76 to 80).

However, a student who embarks on psychology studies arrives with all their psychological experiences already present, with their personal history: which may have been happy or rather sad; with everything that has been established within them such as: functions, reasoning, or reaction mechanisms, inherited in a certain way from the small environment that is the family, and in which they have been immersed for a time.

Not to mention that the motivation driving students varies from one individual to another; each having their own desires, projects, or aspirations. This, knowing that many are directed towards this field without even having indicated it in their wish lists, which they systematically submit after obtaining their baccalaureate.

All this, while seeking to address this subject in a socio-cultural context that is not the one where the various theories underpinning the teaching of this psychology were developed, but that of an Algeria described by Nini., M. (2008, p.7) as: "a country comprising a society: having a still fragile balance, traumatized by long years of war and characterized by an essentially rural and illiterate population, a population that has been kept too long in ignorance and misery by a plundering and inhumane colonialism." Thus hindering a logical and harmonious development of mentalities, often a large segment of the population remains stuck in prejudices and narrow views on various aspects of social life (family life, couple life, children's education, the place and role of women, freedom and diversity of thought, etc.). Immersed in this human environment, the Algerian student cannot be indifferent to it; often in an unconscious or preconscious alienation from all this cultural magma. But at the university, through his psychology studies, he enters a completely different environment, which addresses subjects far beyond taboos and unspoken topics. According to Desfarges, P. (1982, p. 62): "The Algerian child is still largely raised in an atmosphere of magical-religious beliefs and maraboutic practices." This leads us to anticipate resistances, rejections, or refusals that will manifest in the student regarding certain theories, concepts, and explanations around the various psychological and social phenomena studied. Let's also mention what Dr. Kacha says: "Our traditions of magical inspiration are extremely vivid... very young, the child is imbued... with archaic family practices." And already all these quotes are full of indications.

In our study, we focused exclusively on clinical psychology students at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences - Abdelhamid Mehri Constantine 2 University. The training of the future psychologist includes their successful progression over the course of a few years of study, each year comprising a series of basic units known as "modules." Internships are conducted in schools or health institutions, but their number and duration remain limited, while being devoid of supervision and guidance.

The distortion between the theoretical input (which can be of high quality) and the availability of a field for the practice and application of the teachings provided to the student is evident.

Regarding the documentation: due to the fact that most students have followed their training in Arabic, and due to their limited knowledge (for the majority) of the French language; the Arabic books consulted mainly focus on psychoanalysis, education, and dream interpretation (imbued with a religious spirit) and are consequently poor in content and lacking in richness and diversity.

As we attempt to outline, we can also note other factors that interact with the entire landscape in which the concerned student lives, such as: the social environment, the political situation of the country, the immediate and extended family environment, economic and educational resources, housing, and lifestyle hygiene, etc.

So many variables that govern the conditions under which this training takes place, and that condition it at the same time. It is from this perspective that we will attempt to answer the following question: "Why does a clinician, at the end of their training, not feel ready or capable of providing psychological help to others?" As if there were a rift between the student world and the professional world. Is it such a specific field that integrating into the workforce as a "psychologist" becomes such a difficult matter? Often judged in advance by most students as a distant and unattainable goal.

The objective sought is to understand the main factors behind the difficulties faced by clinical psychology students in developing the required skills to integrate into the professional world and provide adequate assistance to the ambient demand.

1. Methodology

We cannot successfully conduct a research study if we do not approach its methodological and practical aspects in a rigorous and insightful manner. It is thanks to everything we will present in this section that we can achieve our work objective, to clarify certain aspects that interest us in this research. The latter being a set of finalized operations allowing the production of knowledge, the validation of hypotheses, and the interpretation of results, involving several elements.

At the very beginning of our work, we articulated our interest in clinical

psychology students nearing the end of their studies (in the 2nd year of the Master's program in clinical psychology) to delve into this issue, knowing that any research is first and foremost a question we ask ourselves and to which we try to find an answer after documentation and empirical study; it focuses on the ability of these same students to provide psychological support to others as soon as they obtain their degree. Certainly, without wanting to judge their skills or shortcomings, we would like to explore, however, their overall experience regarding this same question. The exploratory approach essentially provides qualitative data, it is not based on hypotheses or preconceived ideas; that is precisely why we chose it to conduct our work, we felt the need to explore our main question in depth and in a personalized manner, approaching each individual's experience regarding their future as a clinical psychologist cannot be treated in bulk, which is why we conducted clinical interviews with each of the interviewed students. However, we decided to conduct eight semi-structured interviews, which we qualify as "in-depth," with five female students and three male students. An interview according to Labov, W. and Fanshel, D. (1977, p. 19): is a "speech event" in which person A extracts information from person B, which has a lived experience character and would be conveyed without having been previously assimilated and subjectivized. It involves refraining from asking pre-written questions. In which it is exploration. The selection of candidates was not made based on specific criteria or any statistical rules; as long as their number was small, we wanted to talk to people who seemed different to us in terms of their personality, aspirations and future ambitions, ideological tendencies, or social background (brilliant students in their studies-less brilliant, introverts-extroverts, etc.). Nevertheless, the choice of the students' gender is proportional to their total number. On the other hand, the research interview As Blanchet, A. and Gotman, A. (1992, p. 10) remind us: "to converse with someone is, even more than questioning, an experience, a singular event, that can be mastered, coded, standardized, professionalized, managed,... but which can only be a simple collection of information." The interview is therefore, in the context of clinical research, the most interesting method as soon as we dedicate ourselves to the study of renunciation (act of speech production, the subject's attitude towards the interlocutor, the subject's position regarding their own statement). We can have a set of information and response elements regarding our subject that we can classify and organize in order to address the axes of our research. However, we

may realize that several particularities arising from the transposition of the clinical interview—intended to listen and produce a therapeutic situation—into the field of research could limit the contribution of this method. This does not prevent us from emphasizing that we preferred this investigative tool over the questionnaire for its personalized and circumstantial nature; we believe it can lead us to more in-depth conclusions and thus more enlightening, enriching, and innovative insights for our subject. Regarding the choice of semi-structured interviews: we find that it is the best approach to follow in our research work because, on the one hand, the student needs to express themselves freely, to lead us into landscapes unique to them, which are enriching due to the diversity of testimonies; on the other hand, we sometimes need to guide them, even direct them, so that we can benefit from elements and information likely to answer our questions. The type and conduct of our clinical investigation will closely depend on our objectives. The collected material will undergo specific treatment: discourse analysis, comparisons..., allowing for an interpretation of our results and the production of a description and explanation of the students' desire or lack thereof to practice clinical psychology and their aptitude to do so very soon. Our analysis of the content of the eight interviews we conducted was carried out according to the method itself but with particularities specific to our work and research needs; the work was recorded in tabular form where we extracted the relevant units from each subject's discourse, to then classify each of these units into one of the eight categories we developed to organize and sort this corpus. Among these categories, we started with the one that concerns the very essence of our inquiry: the aptitude or lack thereof of these students to work in the field, naming it the reference core; followed by the positive or negative points of the training according to the student; their personal conception of the psychologist; their needs in this same training; their professional aspirations and orientations, their difficulties in their many forms, and finally general information. This means that we will be able to observe our results clearly, deduce and identify the most striking and significant elements. Analysis of the results: The corpus of interviews conducted is rich in information and can help us understand what clinical psychology students experience at the end of their program, so that we can be guided in our research work. The information is abundant, but we will focus only on what we consider to be the most representative and indicative of their attitudes regarding their desire to work in

the near future (as early as next year) as clinical psychologists. We begin with what results from our first category: "reference core" on the students' ability or not to work as clinical psychologists. Because all the students except one admitted that they were not currently capable of helping people who would seek their assistance, especially not adults; most would prefer to start with children first, perhaps believing it to be easier, or simply to avoid the discomfort they might feel in the presence of an adult, whereas with a child they would feel more at ease; let us also note that a growth relationship experienced with a child can be even more delicate and subtle. We return to the exception of these interviewed individuals, a young student who claims to be convinced that he can help people and starting now. We cannot judge his ability or not to psychologically support people in need, but we comment on this by stating from our interview with him that he has not yet had the experience of personally taking care of a single person, that he has little field experience, and that this is without real supervision according to his own statements. This leads us to say that we cannot rely solely on his words. However, what stood out the most in the students' explanations of their inability to provide help was primarily the lack of experience they reiterated each time, the lack of time to spend in the field, and even the absence of supervision from the psychologists present, perhaps due to their own ineptitude having themselves lacked supervision in their own training. Another point that we find very important to highlight is that it seems the students have a vague representation of what a real psychologist is: they claim not to know how much time they need to become psychologists, some completely resign themselves to becoming one, others justify it by saying it is poorly paid in the public sector, and several also state that the idea of becoming a psychologist scares them. All of this proves that they have not yet managed to form a clear idea about the entity of the psychologist. They add that it requires a lot of willpower and effort, while they feel overwhelmed and demotivated to persevere in the training. Many of these elements provide an answer to our main question but also open doors and raise other questions about the true reasons, deeper reasons for this feeling of discouragement and demotivation among most of these students. At the level of the second and third categories that we will address simultaneously, we will comment on the positive and negative aspects of the training that concludes with the obtaining of a degree in clinical psychology, always from the perspective of these same students. What stands out here is that, on the one hand, some students assert that there are

good and competent teachers who have been able to impart valuable and important knowledge for the proper development of their education, and on the other hand, these same students claim that at the same time there are teachers who lack competence, each describing in their own way certain negative attitudes they perceive from one teacher to another, such as laxity, distance from the student, misunderstanding, and even attitudes of devaluation and intimidation towards them by some. We can only note that some students even experience a feeling of rejection towards certain teachers, either due to real violence they have suffered or by themselves experiencing disproportionate reactions towards these teachers because of their own wounds and, consequently, their own projections. Almost all the students emphasized especially the lack of practical experience within healthcare institutions; a very insufficient amount of time; a complete absence of supervision from psychologists who have already been practitioners for a few years. They described a gap between what is provided theoretically in the institute and what is absent in practice in the specialized units, while all – without exception – felt the importance of field experimentation: long in duration and efficient in its supervision. All, again, stated that thanks to this training they were able to discover a new world, that of psychology: it nurtured personal qualities in them and they were able to advance in tolerance towards others, kindness, non-judgment regarding certain behaviors of people, it taught them to become more autonomous, more responsible for their actions towards others. Many say they have become aware of the importance of observing different human phenomena, as well as being open to "taboo" subjects. Some students have criticized the Arabization of the training, arguing that it has harmed its quality due to the lack of books and publications written in Arabic. They also perceive the stage of psychology in Arab countries and its lack of evolution as hindering a deep learning of this field. As one of them said: the most important thing is to use the source as long as we are not yet very advanced in the field. Not to mention the cyclical disruptions that our institutes experience due to repeated strikes and the overall economic and political climate of the country, which negatively influence the students and are imbued with a continuous feeling of instability and even insecurity. We now arrive at the fourth category, which is of considerable importance in our work and concerns the students' representation of the good psychologist. Their testimony is very revealing to us. Clearly, there is a very nuanced divergence in

each person's conception of what a psychologist capable of helping is, each has their own notion but they converge on the requirement of personal qualities of a psychological nature and other cognitive and intellectual ones. They described values such as listening, unconditional acceptance of others, respect, intuitive abilities, etc., and on the other hand, a good mastery of psychological tests, a solid theoretical knowledge of psychology and its phenomena. We have also noticed that some of their concepts are a source of their own projection, as if they were describing an entity opposite to their weaknesses and imperfections, or it could be related to their own ideal: how they see themselves when they are capable of helping. We believe that it can also be related to the personal and relational difficulties they notice in themselves in their daily lives; and this explains the desire of most to start working with children, believing it to be easier. We also think that it can arise from their own need for help, and they imagine, consequently, what a person who could help them would be like. For some, this same person approaches human perfection. A rather imaginary conception as the vast majority of the students surveyed have never had a session with a psychologist, nor have they themselves helped someone. All, however, express their need to spend much more time in the field and practice as psychologists under the supervision and guidance of a competent professional, undertake specialized training outside the university framework, and master various therapeutic techniques. Some add that they need to, for example, pursue extended studies or do a lot of reading. It is interesting to see, moreover, that most of them did not choose psychology, as they were forced to enroll due to their average grades. By following this training, some have developed a taste for psychology and claim to love it, wishing to help people psychologically in the future if they can. However, and with the exception of one or two people, none of them mentioned the desire to start practicing clinical psychology next year or even in the near future; some even stated that they were considering working in other more attractive fields such as banking or the military, for example. Through these psychology studies, some have noted that they became aware of certain personal psychological and relational difficulties they were experiencing. Through being confronted with mental illnesses and various human dysfunctions, they gradually deciphered that they themselves suffered from certain disorders, lack of confidence, depression, fear of others, etc. Some admitted that they were afraid to confront Western culture, the cradle of psychology, or had difficulty with the French language, in which many basic

texts are written. What stands out the most on this point is the terrible lack of professional opportunities in this field and also the devaluation of the psychologist's status in Algeria. We can clearly see that the graduate already lives in fear of unemployment and the weakness of their resources in case of hiring.

Between their fine aspirations and the weight of difficulties, the student often finds themselves demotivated and lost, not knowing how to position themselves regarding their professional future

2. - Analysis of the results

It is clear that four or five years of study do not make a student a psychologist (which is also true for any university education). According to Richelle, M. (1968, p. 163): "Training allows the student to acquire theoretical foundations, analytical methods, thought attitudes, and a particular approach to problem-solving, on which the chosen specialization will be built," but it is evident that he acquires most of his knowledge through reading and personal research, and most of his skills through the practice of his profession. All of this therefore requires a great deal of motivation from the student and, above all, a sufficiently strong passion for psychology to want to dedicate not only a few hours of classes at the university but also a part of their "free" time to it... It is clear that we cannot attribute this incompetence solely to the quality of the training or its instructors. The most motivated will always seek out ways, solutions to train and practice in the field. Even though we observe that a more serious and organized implementation of training internships in specialized health units, more numerous and longer in duration, with serious and competent guidance, would be of great benefit to psychology enthusiasts. As for the students tired and weary of persevering in their education and training in this vast field of psychology, their future would remain highly improbable, as the famous Confucius liked to repeat: "Give great breadth to your studies, and bring a firm and constant will to them."

Conclusion

At the end of this research work, we conclude that the training of future clinical psychologists over five years (holders of a master's degree) is far from sufficient for them to be capable of providing psychological help to those who seek their assistance. According to Desfarges, P. (1982, p. 272), "The student receives a very eclectic knowledge base consisting of philosophy, sociology, mathematics, natural

sciences, biology, pedagogy, linguistics, psychiatry, and currently especially psychoanalysis." From this entire encyclopedia of knowledge, he retains only a few fragments of theories whose practice he does not understand. Such teaching does not allow the student to structure either thought or practice. His words only confirm what emerged from our interviews with several students, and here we find that he highlights a reality mentioned by them, which is the lack of coordination and coherence between the theories taught by various instructors. The student ends up disoriented and overwhelmed by a multitude of references. Prof. Kerbouche and Prof. Nini (Teachers in the psychology department at the Faculty of Psychology - University of Constantine 2) in a joint work highlight the lack of resources and the excessive number of students which hinder any serious training. Also, the ambiguity of the texts regarding the status of the practicing psychologist means that this practice remains to be reinvented in any case.

The body of licensed psychologists is under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which distributes them among the various institutions it manages, namely: SOMEO (Open Environment Observation Services), CSR (Specialized Rehabilitation Centers), EJS (Schools for the Deaf), EJA (Schools for the Blind), FEA (Homes for Assisted Children), CPP (Psychopedagogical Centers), CNFPH (National Training Centers for Disabled Personnel), nurseries and kindergartens, and finally hospitals. We would like to emphasize that the shortcomings raised regarding this specific training are an international issue and are not limited to the university in Algeria. Many French authors emphasize the difficulty for a student at the end of their clinical psychology program, whether they hold a bachelor's degree or even a professional master's degree, following the curricula of French universities, to practice as a therapist or counselor. For example, Richelle, M. (1968, p. 163) states that: "five years of study do not make complete psychologists." They can only provide a foundation of information... Without wanting to remain in a pessimistic view, we hope that all those responsible for the functioning of the training will know how to reorient and restructure it in a way that its teaching becomes more effective, more enriching, and more in line with the realities of our society. It is important in our view to consider introducing what is commonly referred to as "group dynamics" or "encounter groups" into the university curriculum of the specialty in question and to establish mechanisms to encourage students to engage more with the field and experience it, and why not, to set up a listening and psychological guidance

unit to ensure these students receive psychological support and guidance. It is also important, for the students, to find within themselves the necessary motivations to deploy the energies required to successfully complete this psychology training.

The future of clinical psychology remains to be built. We conclude this work with a beautiful quote from a man who, through his method and rigor, contributed to the development and evolution of humanistic psychology. It is André Rochais who says: "All human evolution is slow." It is a journey. The journey is often slowed down and sometimes blocked. Understanding the mechanisms of braking or blocking helps in the journey. it's all the necessary work for future psychologists to do on themselves in order to later provide it to those seeking help.

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