

On the Nature, Purpose, and Utility of Psychological Evaluation Reports

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Abstract

The Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) issues this statement in response to the misuse of a psychological evaluation report from confidential court records to publicly scrutinize an electoral candidate. Not to be taken as either a support for or as a statement against any candidate, the PAP takes this opportunity to highlight the basic principles that guide the use of psychological assessment findings and subsequent reports, namely, respect for the dignity of persons, right to private and confidential communications, use of relevant and updated assessment results, and the proper use of terms.

The Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) considers the recent reference of a psychological evaluation report regarding one of the candidates for the coming national elections as an opportunity for clarification about the nature and purpose of psychology as a scientific discipline and professional practice. Underlying this humanistic science and practice is a fundamental valuing of the inherent dignity and rights of each individual.

In giving this statement, the PAP wishes to explicitly declare its intention neither to endorse nor to oppose any specific political candidate. We believe in the individual's right and capacity to form his/her own opinions and political convictions based on his/her experiences and reason. This statement defends this right and is not intended to push for any particular political persuasion. It only wishes to clarify the nature, purpose, and utility of psychological practices, particularly the psychological evaluation report.

The PAP wishes to inform the public of the following:

Firstly, the PAP upholds the proper use of psychological evaluation results, ensuring that these are not utilized as a means of undermining the character of any person, private or public. The PAP Code of Ethics for Psychologists (PAP, 2009) lists as its first guiding principle the "Respect for the dignity of persons." In essence, any social science or profession engaged in human services aims to enhance the functioning and wellbeing of any person. The intentional misuse of information derived from such a service (i.e., psychological evaluation) is a clear violation of this principle. Using psychological evaluation reports for purposes other than their original intent fosters the stigmatization of people who try to gain access to mental health services and delivery of public health in general.

Secondly, the PAP upholds the individual's right for privacy and confidential communications. Psychological practice necessitates the careful and secure handling of records and documents concerning clients, including assessment reports. Psychological evaluations or assessments are done for various purposes and in different contexts (e.g., industry, medical, educational, forensic, etc.), and will focus on relevant information that fulfills the goals of the assessment within each given context. In the event that the psychological assessment report is to be submitted as part of the requirements for a legal procedure, such as, a court proceeding for the petition for the declaration of nullity of marriage, it then becomes a public document. However, this does not grant permission for anybody to use it for any purpose other than its original intent. Psychological assessments are designed and conducted based on the individual's reason for undergoing one. Hence, results of the assessment primarily address this reason, and cannot simply and easily be generalized to the person's other intentions and behaviors.

Thirdly, the PAP upholds the ethical practice of basing assessment decisions and recommendations on data and test results that are updated and relevant to the current purpose. Hence, we do not utilize outdated and possibly obsolete assessment results to describe and explain an individual's current functioning. Assessments done several years back may be valid then but may not be completely reflective of the person's present functioning. We acknowledge that certain aspects of psychological functioning remain stable over a long period of time, but subsequent interventions or life experiences may likewise affect many aspects of one's psychological functioning.

Lastly, the PAP would like to correct the common use of the term “psycho test” to refer to the process of psychological evaluations or assessment. This process often entails the use of various methods, and standardized psychological tests are just one of the methods often employed. The usage of the term is misleading in that it creates the impression that psychological tests are the only tools used in diagnosing mental illnesses and psychological disorders. The fact is mental health professionals (e.g., psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, etc.) are the ones who diagnose with the use of various assessment methods, not solely on the basis of results from psychological tests.

The PAP reiterates its mission to strengthen Philippine psychology's scientific base in support of a relevant and humanistic practice of its profession. We seek to enhance a greater understanding of psychological truths that enhance the wellbeing of each individual, regardless of race, gender, age, education, political convictions, etc. We pray that this statement brings to light the fundamental principles and good practices that guide the profession, which other professions and the general public can appreciate and respect.

Reference

Code of Ethics for Philippine psychologists. *Philippine Journal of Psychology*, 43(2), 195-217.