

ON THE VALID AND ETHICAL USE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSESSMENTS TO EVALUATE MENTAL HEALTH

2 March 2018

This statement is issued by the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) to inform the public regarding the ethical and valid use of psychological assessments, in response to the recent legislative proceedings that highlight the alleged mental/psychological condition of Chief Justice Maria Lourdes Sereno. The PAP maintains that in giving this statement, the organization is neither supporting nor opposing any position regarding the issues involving Chief Justice Sereno. It only seeks to clarify the function of psychological assessments and the diagnosis of psychological conditions.

First, the purpose of psychological assessment is to help understand a person's functioning in various aspects of life for informed decision making (for example, for job positions) or for treatment planning. Psychological tests are developed and applied via scientific methods, but they are not perfectly accurate. Actual behaviors and performance are more valid than what psychological assessments may predict.

Second, a psychological assessment is often conducted for a specific purpose, and should only be used for that purpose. To use a psychological assessment conducted in 2012 (which was for the purpose of Chief Justice Sereno's appointment) for the current legislative proceedings is a misuse of those results.

Third, statements that the Chief Justice "failed" the psychological evaluation are misleading, as no one "passes" or "fails" a psychological assessment. Instead, a psychologist recommends a person to a position after the assessment indicates that he/she possesses the characteristics that fit the demands of the given position.

Fourth, decisions and recommendations are derived from psychological assessments that use a combination of methods, such as interview, observation, standardized norm-referenced tests, and relevant informal tools. Good practices entail the application of all these methods, and using only one or two of these methods is inadequate. If a psychologist bases his/her assessment on only one of these methods, or from second-hand reports, then conclusions about "mental disturbance" based on alleged symptoms that indicate such a condition are misleading, if not inaccurate.

The PAP upholds the dignity of every human being and we reject recent narratives that directly or indirectly use psychological assessments to stigmatize those with mental or psychological conditions. We condemn the unethical practice of using confidential psychological information for purposes of discrediting or damaging a person's character. Even if psychological test results become public documents, this does not grant permission for anybody to use it for any purpose other than its original intent.

The PAP Code of Ethics (PAP, 2009) lists as its guiding principle our "professional and scientific responsibility to society." The PAP upholds the Psychology community's responsibility to conduct its affairs in accordance with the highest

ethical standards, and to contribute “to the knowledge about human behavior and to the persons’ understanding of themselves and others”. It is our obligation to use our expertise in educating the members of our discipline and the public about our profession and practice.