

Psychology in Pakistan

SINCE its birth in 1947 the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has seen considerable political turmoil and unrest. A rich traditional life has been handed down through generations; the near century of British rule is still evident in the prominence of the English language, legal system, road names and architecture. Although people living in large cities are still influenced by Western culture in their adoption of dressing, eating and living habits, Islamic religion plays a vital role in the lives of people in all sectors of society. Religious festivals are celebrated with great enthusiasm and fervour; for Friday prayers and during the fasting month of Ramadan, all mosques – of which there are many, found on every other street – are full.

There is a huge class divide in Pakistan; a Western standard of living is enjoyed by those in affluent social strata, but the poor can often not afford the basic necessities of life. Following the concerted efforts of different governments, the literacy rate has now risen to 40 per cent. The current government has taken revolutionary steps to promote higher education in the country with many incentives being offered to researchers and the highly educated, so that more people are now inclined to pursue higher degrees. Enrolments for MPhil and PhD in psychology are much greater than ever before, especially for females. Although psychology was always

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female-dominated in Pakistan, the skew has been enhanced recently as males are attracted away to higher-salaried jobs in computer and management studies.

Roots of psychology in Pakistan

According to Ansari (1987), the earliest teachers of psychology were philosophers who developed interests in psychology and switched over to it, and so Pakistani psychology was influenced much more by philosophy than by the academic areas such as biology and sociology that have penetrated Western psychology. Originally a philosopher, Dr Mohammad Ajmal (1920–1994) has left a profound influence on the field of psychology in Pakistan, giving it a philosophical and analytical orientation. Gradually there was a shift towards a more behaviourist and quantitative orientation, and computer use, in part due to the training of some Pakistani psychologists in British and American universities.

How psychology is taught

Psychology is not taught in schools but is taught in pre-university colleges from Grade 11 onward. Grades 11 and 12 – called Faculty of Arts (FA) – are equivalent to A-level. The next two years – Bachelor of Arts (BA) – lead to first graduation, but only after a further two years is the student fully qualified (at master's level). FA and BA are taught in colleges and master's usually at university, though many colleges have now started master's degree courses. Psychology as an optional subject is offered at nearly all of the colleges in the

country and is an especially popular subject among women. We have separate colleges for men and women. Universities are coeducational, although a women's university was established three years ago and a women's college (Lahore College for Women) was granted university status in 2002. Most textbooks are available in Urdu, the national language, translated from US and UK originals.

Obtaining an MPhil and then PhD degree typically takes two and four years after graduating at master's level. In the Government College University Lahore (arguably the best undergraduate and postgraduate institution in the country) the Department of Psychology is the oldest in Pakistan offering master's level studies. The department was established in 1932, well before the partition of the subcontinent, under the headship of G.C. Chatterji, at which time it offered master's classes in collaboration with Foreman Christian College Lahore. The first master's student (in fact, the only student in the class of 1932) was Professor Abul Hai Alvi, who died in 2001 at the age of 92.

In 1976 the Federal Education Ministry decided to establish a National Institute of Psychology (NIP) as an autonomous organisation with a mandate to carry out research and teaching in the discipline of psychology. Dr Iftikhar-u-Nisa was appointed as its first director. In 1994 the institute was renamed the Dr Mohammad Ajmal Institute of Psychology after its founder. The NIP was initially a research centre, but now offers quality postgraduate teaching.

WEBLINKS

Government College University Lahore:

www.gcu.edu.pk

Council of Social Sciences: www.coss.sdn.pk.org

National Institute of Psychology: www.nip.edu.pk

Psychology in other disciplines

Psychology is also taught as a compulsory subject in other professional courses. For example, management studies include some courses related to psychology; communication, personnel selection, human relations, social and general psychology. The bachelor's in computer science programme and some courses pertaining to medicine also incorporate one compulsory paper on general psychology, and home economics includes courses in developmental psychology.

Research in psychology

In 1987 Ansari reported the staggering fact that there were fewer than 40 psychologists with a PhD in Pakistan. That number has not risen much since, although current PhD registrations should soon increase it by 50 per cent.

Poor library resources are a major hindrance in the production of high-quality and large-scale psychological research in Pakistan. The majority of postgraduate departments do not publish any psychological journals, but international journals are taken by Government College University Lahore, and Punjab, Karachi, and Quaid-i-Azam Universities. The library of GCU Lahore is computerised, available online and provides access to PsycINFO.

Research limitations mean that many basic data are not available for Pakistan, such as the prevalence rates of psychiatric disorders. It is a matter of concern that Pakistan was never included in the World Health Organization surveys conducted in different regions of the world regarding the epidemiology of psychiatric disorders and estimates of mental health resources. India is usually included as the regional representative country, but although India and Pakistan share some cultural values and traditions, they also differ in many important respects, such as religious convictions and style of life (Indians are more influenced by the Western media).

In 1982 Ansari reported that 50 per cent of the articles published in Pakistani journals of psychology were non-empirical, 7 per cent were case studies, and only 43 per cent were empirical. To highlight the major areas of research published in Pakistan, I recently conducted a survey of Pakistani journals published between 1964 and 2003 (see Table 1). Popular areas of research were job satisfaction, measurement of anxiety and depression in mental and physical illnesses (especially in

TABLE 1 Research in Pakistani journals 1964–2003

Area	% of articles
Social	38
Abnormal	16
Psychological testing	12
Experimental	9
Clinical	8
Health	4.5
Philosophical and theoretical	2.2
Educational	2
Other	8.3

cardiac and cancer patients), Type A personality, achievement motivation, and self-esteem. Comparison between Ansari's 1982 data and my own revealed that while 'testing' was the most researched area during 1980–86, 'social issues' have become the focus in the past decade.

Content analysis of psychological

'The norm of mental health, therefore, is psychological closeness to God'

research published in Pakistan also reveals that statistical analysis in the majority of studies was usually quite elementary: some 40 per cent of studies published before 1987 reported only rank orders of subjects or frequencies and percentages, a quarter contained correlations, but only a few used inferential statistics (see Ansari, 1987). I found some improvement over the past decade, with greater use of *t* tests and analysis of variance, although purely descriptive statistics and correlations were still computed by many researchers. Advanced methods (multivariate, regression models, loglinear analysis, discriminant analysis, etc.) were scarcely found, even in the most recent research articles.

Professional training and practice

There is a real dearth of professional training courses in psychology in Pakistan. The formal training of clinical psychology as a specialisation started when two post-master's training centres for clinical psychologists were established at Punjab and Karachi Universities in 1983 and 1984 respectively. This Advanced Diploma in Clinical Psychology is offered as a full-time 15-month programme and is completed by about 25 clinical psychologists each year from the two

institutes combined. No other professional degrees (such as PsyD) are offered, despite a pressing need. Among the few qualified practitioners, the practice of psychology is limited to hospitals and private clinics.

Psychology is mainly taught to teach psychology. Although psychologists have also been employed in other areas, such as prisons, industry and special education, the number working there is very limited. There is no concept of hiring the services of psychologists in state schools to deal with children's educational, adjustment and emotional problems.

There are no formal requirements for the practice of psychotherapy or for other services in Pakistan. Many of those practising psychotherapy in private clinics or hospitals have only master's level qualifications in psychology and do not possess any professional degree or training. Other people practising psychotherapy are those who have completed post-master's diplomas in clinical psychology, though only about 60 of these currently practise professionally in Pakistan (Murray, 2002).

Religious influences

Clinical psychology has been informally practised in this part of the world over an extended period of time: religious leaders, Sufis, saints and wise old men and women have always been able to provide counselling and at times opportunities for catharsis and outlet. Modern practitioners of clinical psychology in Pakistan usually adopt an eclectic approach to treatment, but behaviour therapy and cognitive behaviour therapy are the most popular paradigms, and the use of Western models reflects the training of Pakistani psychologists in US and European universities.

However, indigenous constructs (including many derived from religious teaching) play an important role in psychotherapy, which is shaped largely by an indigenous culture that is collectivist, family-oriented and male-led, and 97 per cent Islamic (Murray, 2002). Dr Ajmal and many other Pakistani therapists interpret mental illness as distance from God. The norm of mental health, therefore, is psychological closeness to God. The Holy Quran (the religious book of Muslims) discusses mental illness in terms of dissociation, doubt, envy and deceiving others. Therefore, the man who becomes aware of this disease has to withdraw himself from his secular relations and to turn his gaze inwards (Ajmal, 1968).

Where therapists in Pakistan use behaviour or cognitive therapy, the use of these will be moulded according to the cultural and religious beliefs of people. For example, a psychotherapist is not expected to teach females to become very assertive with their in-laws or husbands, as it would be neither appreciated nor likely to work in our culture. Similarly, therapy is usually more effective in Pakistan if it is incorporated with fundamental religious beliefs. Certain fundamental teachings of Islam – patience, tolerance, agreeableness, kindness – are used in cognitive restructuring of patients in Pakistan.

Service availability and reform

Ever-increasing numbers of people are consulting mental health services in Pakistan, but many cases still go untreated because of the stigma that still attaches to psychological treatment. Mental illness is often interpreted by people as a way of escaping one's responsibilities, and physical illnesses are more culturally accepted. Perhaps because of this, depression often manifests in headaches, stomach problems, aches and pains (particularly in Pakistani women).

Despite greater awareness about mental health problems, and better treatment facilities, the rate of mental illness is rising in Pakistan. Although official figures are not available, clinical psychologists and psychiatrists claim that anxiety-based disorders are rapidly increasing. Drug addiction is also a problem: according to the 1993 survey conducted by the Integrated Drug Demand Reduction Project, there are over three million drug abusers in Pakistan, of which 51 per cent are heroin addicts. The government has taken notice of this rise, and a task force for drug eradication was formed by the Punjab Governor in 2001.

In the same year the outdated Lunacy Act was abolished and the President of

ORGANISATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

The Pakistan Psychological Association (PPA) is the oldest academic and professional organisation of Pakistani psychologists, established in March 1968 at Dacca. It has a membership of about 300 psychologists working in various fields of life, including college and university teaching, clinical practice, the Public Service Commission and the armed services.

The *Journal of Psychology* was the first such publication, started in 1964 by Dr Mohammad Ajmal. It was replaced after two years by the *Psychology Quarterly*. GCU Lahore now publishes the *Pakistan Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, and other refereed journals are published by Karachi University, the National Institute of Psychology and Punjab University.

Pakistan promulgated the Mental Health Ordinance, which consolidates and amends the law relating to the care and treatment of mentally disordered persons. For this purpose, the federal government constituted the Federal Mental Health Authority to advise the government on the promotion of mental health and prevention of mental disorders.

In big cities, like Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad, there are separate psychiatric units in major hospitals. Two years ago what was formerly the mental hospital in Lahore was renamed the Government Hospital for Psychiatric Diseases, since when conditions have been considerably improved, and several programmes aimed at psychological and vocational rehabilitation have been introduced. However, no such facility is available in small cities and towns. Although there are posts for clinical psychologists in general hospitals in Multan, Bahawalpur and Faisalabad, the posts usually remain vacant.

A psychiatrist's help is more acceptable to most people in Pakistan, since the 'mere talking' which is thought to characterise psychological treatment is considered neither acceptable nor sufficient. People generally do not understand the difference between a psychologist and a psychiatrist, while the media consider psychiatrists more prestigious and ask them to provide 'psychological' interpretations of disasters or important events.

Testing

Western tests of intelligence, personality and aptitude have been adapted for use in Pakistan, but there have also been a few attempts to develop indigenous scales. A good example is the Ghazali Personality Inventory, developed in line with the teaching of the famous Muslim scholar Al-Ghazali about the human psyche. It is designed to determine degree of normality on the basis of three scales referring to bodily needs, social behaviour and divine

force helping in the integration of the personality (Rizvi, 1978).

In the armed forces and civil service, both at provincial and central level, psychological tests and techniques are employed for personnel selection. Along with other modes of selection (group task observation, group discussion and interview), psychological assessment is considered a necessary step.

Though psychological tests have been used by the Federal Public Service Commission almost from its inception, a fully fledged Psychological Unit was established in 1965 (Zaidi, 1975). In the Central Superior Services (CSS) a psychological report on a candidate (based on a battery of tests, group discussion and an interview by a panel of psychologists) is submitted to the Federal Public Service Commission regarding suitability for specific job groups. The commission makes a final selection decision on the basis of interview, psychological report and the candidate's performance on the written competitive scholastic examination. Similar assessments are carried out by provincial services, especially in the judicial and executive branches of the civil service.

Although in recent years people have become more aware of the importance of psychology as an individual subject and as a useful interdisciplinary area, for a more promising future of psychology in Pakistan the following three steps are very crucial:

- the initiation of a four-year degree programme by the public and private sector universities to bring our degree in line with those the world over;
- more practical and professional courses in different areas of psychology; and
- the expansion of the use of psychology to all sectors of life.

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