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## Exploring the Practices, Trends, and Future Directions of Forensic Psychology in the Philippines: A Preliminary Study

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### *Abstract*

Forensic psychology is an emerging field in the Philippines. In view hereof, this study investigated the common qualifications and credentials of working professionals in forensic psychology in the country. This included the necessary career-related skills, areas of professional practice, ways of engagements, the various issues and challenges faced by the practitioners, and the necessary improvements for forensic psychology in order to advance as a professional practice in the country. This descriptive study utilized questionnaires in online and printout forms. A total of 35 professionals from diverse background engaged in forensic psychological practice participated in this study. Majority (42.86%) were master's degree holders with 1 to 5 years of practice (51.43%). Twelve (12) of them were registered social workers; five (5) were registered guidance counselors; nine (9) were registered psychologists, and another nine (9) were registered psychometricians. Results revealed that psychological testing skills, clinical strengths, and ethical uprightness are the necessary skills for forensic psychological practice. Meanwhile, the major lines of practices were in VAWC-related cases, child custody evaluations, competency to stand trial, and annulment cases. They practiced through referrals from other professionals. The challenges and issues facing the field were concerns on confidentiality, mental health-related concerns, lack of graduate and post-graduate training, appropriate assessment skills, professional fee concerns, and conflict of interest among and between allied professionals and the referring party. Measures for the professional advancement included

relevant trainings and workshops, offering of graduate and post-graduate courses, conduct of local empirical researches, and additional professional certification specifying forensic practice.

*Keywords:* Forensic settings, law, psychology in the Philippines, forensic psychology

### *Introduction*

In the Philippines, psychology is considered to be one of the emerging disciplines in professional practice, research, and education. According to the Commission on Higher Education (CHED, 2017), psychology as a discipline and professional practice contributes to national development through basic and applied research and interventions aimed at solving problems and promoting optimal development and functioning at the individual, family, group, organizations/institutions, community, and national levels. It is the scientific study of human behavior and mental processes that emphasizes the individual person and how the person's mental processes and behavior are affected by internal, relational, and social factors. With the recent enactment of the mental health law, the imminent role of psychology in the society is now recognized. In 2009, the Psychology Act (Republic Act 10029) which formalized the practice of psychology as a profession in the country became a strong hallmark of putting psychology in the country to greater heights. The country at large can see the vital role of behavioral scientists or psychologists in nation building.

From its humble beginnings,

it seemed that the earliest forms of psychological practice in the Philippines were in the areas of testing, counseling, and clinical psychology (Licuanan, 1989; Macapagal, 1999). From isolated efforts of a few pioneers, psychology and other allied professionals are now united to work hard in improving the practice of the profession and to earn the respect that it deserves from the public. However, there are still several things the psychologists can do to continue the development of psychology in the country. These include increasing the public awareness of the difference between scientifically grounded psychology and outright misconceptions of psychology, increasing the public awareness about what psychologists do, and being more open to inputs from, and doing collaborative work with other scientists in other disciplines (Macapagal, 1999). One of the areas needing attention is the application of psychology in forensic settings, which is forensic psychology.

As defined in various sources (e.g., Sanchez & Sanchez, 2005; Bartol & Bartol, 2008; Sullivan & Pomerantz, 2014), forensic psychology is the application of psychological methods and principles within the legal system.

This is the field of psychology where psychology and the law intersect. Psychologists with different academic backgrounds have been drawn to the field due to their interests in ways that social psychologists are involved in researching and applying psychological science to issues such as jury selection and jury dynamics. Cognitive psychologists bring their expertise to bear on the issues of eyewitness testimony and its accuracy. However, clinical psychologists are the most qualified for and most often involved in forensic psychology activities due to their extensive training in assessment, treatment, and psychopathology (Sullivan & Pomerantz, 2014). The latter is also true in Philippine context. The most obvious application of psychology in a forensic sense is the expert witnessing of clinical psychologists in court for cases of annulment and child custody.

Historically, there are already manifestations of psychological services in forensic settings. As what Munárriz and Cervera (2013), and Birion and his colleagues (2013) cited, testing was already done in some institutions like the Bilibid Prisons and Welferville in the 1930s. A psychiatric social worker has worked in a psychological clinic (Tan, 1998; Macapagal, 1999). Moreover, military personnel then were taken care of by a psychiatrist and a psychologist under the neuro-psychiatry department in a government-owned hospital which was established to cater to their needs (Birion et al., 2013). It is interesting

to note that military and the police are establishments or fields that are overlooked by many psychology graduates for psychological services. Somewhere along its development however, forensic practice of psychology seems to still hold its ground as a solid career choice. Indeed, forensic psychology is an emerging professional practice in the Philippines.

At present, forensic psychology in the Philippines is limited to the experiences of the psychologists working with judges, lawyers, social workers and other allied professionals in courts where they serve as expert witness in legal proceedings. In other words, the psychologist is not expected to have a formal training in forensic-related setting but with experience in the job of having been expert witness in nullity of marriage cases and/or assisting in decision making in cases involving children aside from the appropriate degree earned are what the courts prefer. With all of these, it becomes more interesting to explore the practice of forensic psychology in the country while looking towards its future directions. Hence, this study intended to:

1. define the common qualifications and credentials of professionals practicing in the field of forensic psychology in the Philippines;
2. identify the necessary skills in the practice of forensic psychology;
3. ascertain the areas of professional practice in forensic psychology;

4. describe the professional engagements in the practice of forensic psychology;
5. discern the various issues and challenges faced by the professionals practicing forensic psychology in the country; and
6. determine the necessary improvement for forensic psychology to further advance as a field of professional practice in the Philippines.

*Framework of the Study*

Compared with forensic psychology as practiced in the United States of America (USA), the practice of forensic psychology in the Philippines is limited (Sanchez & Sanchez, 2005). The differences in laws, legal systems, court cases, financial capabilities of litigants, and even culture perhaps account for differences in the developments of forensic psychology in the Philippines and the USA. Certainly, forensic

practice in the field of psychology is yet to be explored. The book of Sanchez and Sanchez (2005) has provided a wide discussion on the status of forensic psychology in the country. Though others argue if there is really such a field in the local setting, this study was conceptualized to explore the practice of forensic psychology in the Philippines. In particular, this study identified the different qualifications of professionals in the field and the different areas of practice. More so, this research delved on the current trends, issues and challenges in the field and practice of forensic psychology. Finally, the future directions and areas to improve in the area of forensic psychology in the Philippines were explored.

To visualize the paradigm of the study, the conceptual framework is as described in figure 1. Practice of forensic psychology in the country is operationally categorized in three areas.

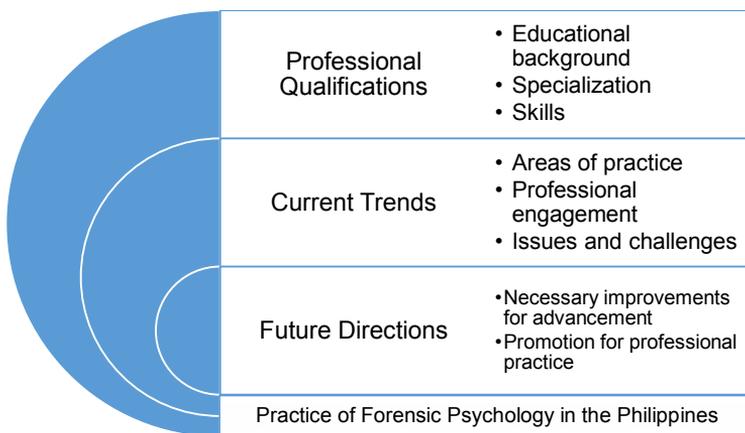


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

First in the practitioners' *professional qualifications*, which incorporate their educational background, field of specialization, and skills needed to perform their job. Secondly, *current trends* elucidate their areas of practice, professional engagements, and issues and challenges that they face in their practice. Lastly, *future directions* stipulate the perceived necessary improvements in the field of practice of forensic psychology in the country for its advancement and the promotional competencies needed for its professional practice in the country. When it comes to professional qualifications, forensic psychological skills include clinical assessment, interviewing, report writing, strong verbal communication skills (especially if an expert witness in court) and case presentation. These are all very important in setting the foundation of the practice of forensic psychology.

Given these common qualifications, the areas of practice and professional engagements of most professionals in practicing forensic psychology is the psychological assessment of individuals who are involved, in one way or another, with the legal system (APA, 2017). Although it is necessary to have training in law and forensic psychology, the most important skills a forensic psychologist must possess are solid clinical skills. With these skills, forensic psychologists perform such tasks as child custody evaluations, competency evaluations of criminal defendants, counseling services to victims of crime, screening and selection of law

enforcement applicants, the assessment of post-traumatic stress disorder, and the delivery and evaluation of intervention and treatment programs for juvenile and adult offenders.

Despite the emergence of strong identity of psychological practice in forensic contexts, there are still gaps needing attention for forensic psychology to advance as a distinct discipline in the country. In general, the practice of forensic psychology involves investigations, research studies, assessments, consultation, the design and implementation of treatment programs, expert witnessing and courtroom testimony. However, not all of these may be necessarily true as applied in the Philippines. Sanchez and Sanchez (2005) argued that forensic psychology is just relatively new but it is an exciting and rapidly expanding field under psychology. Because it is just emerging, and with many different types of psychologists conducting research and practicing professionally in forensic psychology, it is not surprising that there are disagreements on what the field should be (Ogloff, 2002 as cited in Sullivan & Pomerantz, 2014). Sullivan and Pomerantz (2014) argued that there is an unclear identity for forensic psychology. In other areas, some referred to it as psychology and the law, criminal psychology, or legal psychology. Also, in spite of the presence of clinical psychologists in the legal system for a very long time, there are still many other facets of forensic psychology which are not yet realized in the local setting.

The common observations regarding forensic psychology and its practice here in the Philippines include (1) definition of forensic psychology has not been made known to many psychologists; (2) foreign-authored forensic books are hard-to-find and Filipino-authored forensic psychology books are nowhere to be found; (3) forensic psychology was only previously offered as an academic subject in graduate degrees in the University of Sto. Tomas (UST); (4) seminars or conferences on this field have not been heard of; (5) forensic psychology as a specialty in professional psychology has not been fully established; (6) its practitioners are still few; (7) directory of forensic experts has not yet been circulated; (8) an association of psychologists engaged in forensic practice has not been formed; (9) Philippine ethical guidelines specifying its practitioners have not been formulated; (10) its practice is more associated with the application of clinical psychology to law; and its practitioners are usually confined to legal actions or defenses for the declaration of absolute nullity of marriage on the ground of psychological incapacity and petitions or defenses for child custody (Sanchez & Sanchez, 2005). However, trends indicate that courts in the Philippines are gradually moving toward those links and activities practiced abroad. In addition, Far Eastern University (FEU) in Manila has finally offered the first and the only graduate program in forensic psychology (i.e., Ph.D. in Psychology

major in Forensic Psychology) in the country. Also, there is already a growing number of practicing psychologists who can be regarded as forensic psychologists although most of them have specialized primarily in clinical psychology.

All of these existing information and literature about the current state of the professional practice of forensic psychology in the country served as a good starting point to examine the current trends and future directions of the discipline in the Philippines. Thus, this research has been conceptualized and undertaken.

### *Methodology*

This descriptive study was undertaken to explore the practices, current trends, and future direction in the practice of forensic psychology in the country. A questionnaire was constructed where the questions reflected the major variables of the study. These include the profile of the respondents (educational attainment, number of years in the field, and license/s); necessary skills in forensic practice; areas of practice in providing psychological services; manner of getting engaged in the practice of forensic psychology; issues and challenges encountered; and areas needing improvement for the advancement and promotion of forensic psychology in the country. The questions were formatted in checklist-multiple response options and forced ranking (*for the skills*). The

said questionnaire was validated by an expert and a practitioner in the field to ensure content validity.

The study was conducted in the span of three months from October to December 2017. Practicing professionals in the field of forensic psychology from the National Capital Region, Northern, and Southern Luzon were surveyed in this study. Through referrals, 35 respondents were purposively selected. Informed consent was secured explaining the nature of the research as well as the terms and conditions in participating. They were visited in their respective institutions such as courts, penitentiaries, social welfare offices, and shelter for children needing special protection, center for women at-risk, private clinics and offices, universities, and government offices while some answered in online forms. Basic descriptive statistics in the form of frequency count, percentage distribution, and ranking were applied.

### *Results and Discussion*

Based on the data gathered, the following pertinent results are presented.

#### *Common Qualifications and Credentials of Professionals Practicing Forensic Psychology in the Philippines*

Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents in terms of educational attainment, number of years in the field, and professional license/s. As to their educational attainment, 15 (42.86%) were master's degree

holders; 11 (31.42%) were graduates of baccalaureate degrees; four (11.43%) were doctorate holders, and one (2.86%) earned a post-doctorate degree. In the actual data gathering, four (11.43%) of the respondents were not able to provide information for their educational qualification. Majority of the respondents were bachelor's degree and master's degree holders. Professional licensure examinations require either a bachelor's degree or a master's degree. For instance, a bachelor's in social work and psychology is required to take the licensure examination for social workers and psychometricians, respectively. Whereas a master's degree in guidance and counseling, and psychology is needed to qualify for licensure examination for guidance counselors and psychologists, respectively. There is an exemption for these requirements known as "grandfather's clause" as provided by the laws that regulate the said professions. Some professionals were granted license without taking the examination prior to the full implementation of the licensure examination.

Table 1  
*Profile of the Respondents*

	Profile	Frequency	Percentage
Educational attainment	Bachelor's Degree	11	31.42
	Master's Degree	15	42.86
	Doctorate Degree	4	11.43
	Post- Doctorate Degree	1	2.86
	Not specified	4	11.43
TOTAL		35	101

Number of years in the field	1-5	18	51.42
	6-10	6	17.14
	11-15	5	14.30
	16 years and above	6	17.14
TOTAL		35	100
Professional license/s	Registered Guidance Counselor (RGC)	5	14.28
	Registered Psychologist (RPsy)	9	25.71
	Registered Psychometri- cian (RPm)	9	25.71
	Registered So- cial Workers (RSW)	12	34.29
TOTAL		35	100

Meanwhile, some respondents completed advanced studies like doctorate and post-doctorate studies. In support to this, the works of Licuanan (1989), Tan (1998) and Macapagal (1999) discussed that the pioneering psychology practitioners in the country earned their master's and doctorate degrees before they enter the practice. Similarly, Bartol and Bartol (2008) stressed that a master's degree with appropriate clinical training is necessary to take licensure examinations in USA. Further, they explained that forensic psychology has become the fifth applied branch of psychology to gain attention in graduate education. In the Philippines, it is only in FEU in Manila where one can find a doctorate in forensic psychology. However, in other schools like UST, forensic psychology is included as a subject in graduate courses (Sanchez & Sanchez, 2005). In other countries, there is an observable growth in the

development of several graduate programs in forensic psychology; both in the master's and doctorate levels which concentrate on either clinical or counseling psychology as it relates to corrections or on social psychology, legal psychology, and psychology and the law (Bartol & Bartol, 2008)

In terms of length of practice in forensic settings, 18 (51.42%) had one to five years of experience; six (17.14%) had six to ten years in the field; another six (17.14%) respondents earned more than 16 years of experience; and five (14.30%) were engaged in the practice for 11 to 15 years in forensic psychology. Among the licensed professions covered in this study, social work was the first one regulated by the government. In 1965, under RA 4373, graduates of social work were granted licenses to practice their profession. This may imply that social workers have probably handled forensic cases for the longest time. However, some psychologists were already practicing in forensic setting even before the ratification of RA 10029 in 2009. As revealed by Sanchez and Sanchez (2005), Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) has already given a certification. Meanwhile, guidance counselors probably entered the practice around 2004 upon the granting of their licenses through RA 9258.

In addition, the professional license/s of the respondents revealed that 12 (34.29%) were registered social workers (RSWs); nine (25.71%) were

registered psychologists (RPs); another nine (25.71%) were registered psychometricians (RPMs); and the remaining five (14.28%) were registered guidance counselors (RGCs). The data imply that more practitioners are from the field of social work. This is not surprising because the said field is the first regulated profession. Also, they deal primarily with children in conflict with the law (CICL), victims of violence against women and children (VAWC) and child custody cases. In support to this, the USA recognizes a subspecialty called forensic social work (Bartol & Bartol, 2008). On the other hand, psychology professionals are sought for psychological assessment, counseling, and psychotherapy for trauma victims and expert witnessing in courts (Sanchez & Sanchez, 2005; Barareza, 2007). However, there were few guidance counselors who engaged in forensic practice because most of them are found in school settings. In addition, the court requires a clinical psychologist with certifications and skill in expert witnessing. Meanwhile, Bartol and Bartol (2008) reported that there is a diplomate certification in forensic psychology that attests to the fact that an established organization of peers has examined and accepted the psychologist as being at the highest level of excellence in the field of forensic practice.

### *Necessary Skills in the Practice of Forensic Psychology*

Table 2 indicates the results of the forced ranking of the respondents in

terms of the vital skills in the practice of forensic psychology. Among the six skills enumerated, psychological assessment skills ranked first (87.93%); clinical strengths that include having the clinical eye ranked second (71.84%), while ethical sensitivity and uprightness got the third rank (64.29%). At the fourth rank (52.78) is excellent written and oral communication; on the fifth rank (49.4) is assertive capacities and personal toughness, the least important as perceived by the respondents. On the sixth rank (25%) is research capabilities. This result is consistent with the explanation of Sullivan and Pomerantz (2014) that clinical assessment is a prevalent activity among clinical psychologists who work in forensic settings. According to them, the most common assessment was in the areas of child custody, competency, and presenting evaluations. Similarly, clinical skills are necessary for the practice of forensic psychology as Sanchez and Sanchez (2005) stressed that practice in the field is more associated with the applications of clinical psychology to law. In fact, according to some (e.g., Sullivan & Pomerantz, 2014), forensic psychology is a unique subspecialty of clinical psychology.

Table 2  
*Ranking of Important Skills in the Practice of Forensic Psychology*

Skills	Percentage	Rank
Psychological assessment	87.93	1
Excellent written and oral communication	52.78	4

Assertive capacities and personal toughness	49.4	5
Ethical sensitivity and uprightness	64.29	3
Research capabilities	25.0	6
Clinical strengths (i.e., having the clinical eye)	71.84	2

In addition, the laws that regulate the different professions (i.e., RA 4373, RA 9258, and RA 10029) require ethical sensitivity and uprightness. In the same way, Bartol and Bartol (2008) said that professionals are also ethically obliged to comply with the standards pertaining to the practice of the profession as outlined in the ethical principles and code of conduct. However, in the field of psychology in the local setting, ethical guidelines for practitioners in forensic psychology were not specified (Sanchez & Sanchez, 2005).

Meanwhile, assertive capacities and personal toughness are also important. Sullivan and Pomerantz (2014) asserted that in forensic settings, clinical psychologist is in the midst of an adversarial relationship between parties in conflict with each other. On the other hand, excellent written and oral communication was seen as least important as it appears to be a fundamental skill in all professions. Similarly, research capabilities are seen to be less necessary maybe because forensic psychology by nature and scope is an applied field. Although most professionals encourage the convergence of research and practice. The top three skills identified by the respondents can be acquired through

further studies, in-depth training, and experience in handling forensic clients.

### *Areas of Professional Practice in Forensic Psychology*

Table 3 shows the areas of practice of the respondents. Results revealed that among the 35 respondents, 16 (45.71%) have handled violence against women and children (VAWC) cases and 14 (40%) have worked with child custody cases, which are common among RPsys and RSWs. Then, competency to stand trial is common among 10 (28.57%) respondents while eight (22.86%) of them have been tapped for annulment cases, which are both prevalent among RPsys. Also, six (17.14%) are in the practice of criminal rehabilitation; five (14.29%) have handled clients with insanity claims; one (2.86%) is in parole-related cases, and seven (20%) are in other uncommon areas.

Table 3  
*Areas of Practice in Forensic Psychology by Various Professionals*

Legal Areas	BGC	RPsy	RPm	RSW	Total	Rank
Annulment cases	2	5	0	1	8	4
Child custody cases	1	5	1	7	14	2
Violence against women and children cases	2	9	3	5	16	1
Competency to stand trial	0	8	1	1	10	3
Parole-related cases	0	1	0	0	1	8
Insanity claims	1	4	0	0	5	7
Criminal rehabilitation	0	4	1	1	6	6
Others	0	4	2	1	7	5

Explaining further, RA 9262 of 2004 defines the crimes committed against women and their children,

thereby prescribing penalties. The law further specifies child custody rights together with RA 7610 or the Special Protection of Children against Child Abuse, Exploitation, and Discrimination Act of 1992. In both laws, social workers, counselors, mental health professionals, and therapists are among the professionals who may file complaints on cases of unlawful acts against women and children. As stated earlier, common psychological assessment is in the areas of child custody, competency, and presenting evaluations while others were in some parole decisions, personal injury lawsuits, workers' compensation hearing and social disability evaluations (Wood, Garb, Lilienfeld, & Nezworski, 2002 as cited in Sullivan and Pomerantz 2014).

Moreover, Bartol and Bartol (2008) expounded other services provided under the field of forensic psychology. These are developing psychological profiles of victims and offenders; providing counseling services to law enforcers, victims of crimes and traumatized victims; conducting child custody evaluations and competency evaluations to stand trial; and providing victim-offender reconciliation and programs for juvenile and adult offenders, among others. More interestingly, Sanchez and Sanchez (2005) stressed that in the Philippines, practitioners as usually confined to legal actions or defenses for the declaration of absolute nullity of marriage on the ground of psychological incapacity and petitions or defenses for child custody.

As identified, insanity claims were another important type of case handled by a forensic psychologist. Sullivan and Pomerantz (2014) identified this as "Not Guilty by Reason of Insanity (NGRI)" in which an individual is unable to control his or her actions due to a mental disorder.

### *Professional Engagements in the Practice of Forensic Psychology*

Table 4 presents the ways the respondents engage in the practice of forensic psychology. With the total number of respondents of 35, 24 (68.57%) of them were referred by other psychologists or professionals in the field, while nine (25.71) were sought by legal practitioners like lawyers, fiscals, and judges. The other four (11.43%) respondents entered into the practice though private practice and eight (22.86%) engaged in forensic practice through various means which are not specified.

Table 4  
*Manner of Engagement of Professionals in the Practice of Forensic Psychology*

Professional Engagements	RGC	RPsy	RPm	RSW	Total	Rank
Referral from other psychologists/ professionals in the field	2	9	5	8	24	1
Sought by legal practitioners (lawyers, fiscals, judges)	0	4	1	4	9	2
Personal venture	0	2	1	1	4	4
Other means	0	4	4	0	8	3

To engage in forensic practice, other professionals tap majority of these professionals in forensic settings.

In a network of different professionals working within the same area or setting, a referral system is highly integrated. A forensic psychology professional will refer a client to another professional who is capable of handling the concern. For instance, assessments were best done by registered psychometricians, who are trained in the administration of objective psychological test and in conducting intake interview, provided that the work is under the supervision of a competent psychologist. Forensic assessment that includes clinical interview, intelligence tests, and personality tests shall only be done by professionals equipped with the skills in conducting these activities and permitted to practice according to existing laws.

Meanwhile, referrals from law practitioners is evident among RPs and RSWs because pertinent laws like RA 7610 and RA 9262 mandate their services. In support of this, Sullivan and Pomerantz (2014) said that many clinical psychologists are increasingly employed in law enforcement agencies to perform variety of duties. Also, some professionals were already venturing in private practice through their respective clinics and offices while others were engaged in university extension projects that undertake psychological assessment and counseling among victims of disasters, violence, abuse and other criminal acts in collaboration with Local Government Units (LGUs).

### *Issues and Challenges Faced by the Professionals Practicing Forensic Psychology in the Philippines*

Table 5 indicates the issues and challenges encountered by the respondents in the practice of forensic psychology. Among the different professionals, confidentiality, anonymity, and inviolacy are common issues with a frequency of 15 (42.86%). More so, 10 (28.57) respondents saw the neglect in the mental health of the client as a pressing issue. The issues on appropriate graduate or postgraduate training; the concern on appropriate test selection, administration, scoring, and interpretation; professional fee-related concerns; and the conflict of interest between or among the clients, the attorney-at-law, and/or the referring party all got a frequency of 8 (22.86). At the least concerns, with a frequency of 2 (5.71%) are contested cases. Conversely, 2 (5.71%) RPs saw no issue in their practice while the remaining 2 (5.71%) identified other challenges which were not specified.

Table 5  
*Issues and Challenges Encountered in the Practice of Forensic Psychology*

Issues and Challenges	RGC	RPsy	RPm	RSW	Total	Rank
Confidentiality, anonymity and inviolacy	3	4	3	5	15	1
Neglect in the mental health of the clients	1	2	3	4	10	2
Appropriate graduate/postgraduate training	2	2	3	1	8	4.5

Appropriate test selection, administration, scoring and interpretation	3	1	2	2	8	4.5
Professional fee related concern	0	4	2	2	8	4.5
Conflict of interest between or among the clients, the attorney-at-law, or/ and the referring party	0	2	0	6	8	4.5
Contested cases	0	2	0	0	2	8
None	0	2	0	0	2	8
Others	0	1	1	0	2	8

Consistent with the earlier result concerning ethics, the issues on confidentiality was revealed as the most alarming issue in the practice of forensic psychology. In practice, it is always important to consider ethical issues such as the limits of confidentiality when conducting a psychological evaluation, especially when conducting forensic evaluations (Sullivan & Pomerantz, 2014). Sanchez and Sanchez (2005) identified the same issue as there were no specified ethical guidelines for practitioners in the field. In the US, there is a Specialty Guidelines for Forensic Psychologists which asserts that “forensic psychologists are responsible for a fundamental and reasonable level of knowledge and understanding of the legal and professional standards that govern their participation as experts in legal proceeding” (Committee on Ethical Guidelines for Forensic Psychologists, 1999 as cited in Bartol & Bartol, 2008). In the said guidelines confidentiality is highly stipulated.

Alarming, the issue in the neglect of the mental health of the client might

be caused by the lack of awareness of law enforcers and professionals in the legal system on information regarding mental health. Sullivan and Pomerantz (2014) stressed that a clinical psychologist’s assessment of a person’s mental state could become a crucial component in the legal proceedings. Another issue is the appropriate graduate or postgraduate training in forensic psychology. This has been mentioned already by Sanchez and Sanchez (2005) that forensic psychology is only a graduate course in very limited universities. Although today, there is already one university in Metro Manila that offers a doctorate program in this area. However, the program is just getting started. On the other hand, on the issue of appropriate test selection, administration, scoring, and interpretation, Munárriz and Cervera (2013) cited that the use of appropriate instruments locally produced by the professionals are still very limited even today. Alongside this, the conflict of interest between or among the clients, the attorney-at-law, and/or the referring party is because the role of the psychologist in forensic settings is not clear as compared to common clinical situations (Sullivan & Pomerantz, 2014).

#### *Necessary Improvements for the Advancement of Forensic Psychology in the Philippines*

Table 6 shows the necessary improvements and advancement for forensic psychology in the Philippines. According to 32 (91.43%) respondents,

seminars, workshops, and training must be made available, while 24 (68.57%) indicated that there should be more graduate and post-graduate programs in the Philippines. Also, 23 (65.71%) of the respondents signified the need to conduct more local and empirical researches in the field and provide pertinent certification to those who are in practice. Meanwhile, 22 (62.86%) agreed that forensic psychology should be included in the curriculum of psychology, and 17 (48.57%) said that there should be a division representation in the PAP.

Table 6  
*Necessary Improvements and Advancements for Forensic Psychology*

Measures	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Conduct more local and empirical researches in the field	23	65.71	3.5
Inclusion as an academic subject in the undergraduate curriculum of psychology	22	62.86	5
Division representation in the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP), Inc.	17	48.57	6
Pertinent professional certification for those who practice in the field	23	65.71	3.5
Availability of seminars, workshops and trainings	32	91.43	1
Offering of graduate and post-graduate degrees in Forensic Psychology in more universities in the country	24	68.57	2

These results confirmed the earlier report of Sanchez and Sanchez (2005). These were (1) seminars or conferences on the field have not been heard of; (2) forensic psychology was only previously offered as an academic subject in graduate degrees in the University of Sto. Tomas; (3) foreign-authored

forensic books are hard to find, and Filipino-authored forensic psychology books are nowhere to be found; (4) forensic psychology as a specialty in professional psychology has not been fully established; and (5) an association of psychologists engaged in forensic practice has not been formed.

The data presented showed a picture of the current state of forensic psychology in the Philippines. In addition, issues and concerns were also revealed which are vital in determining the future directions of the profession in the country.

### *Conclusions*

In light of the data gathered by this study, the following conclusions are hereby drawn:

1. Forensic psychology is an emerging field of psychological practice in the Philippines which is largely dominated by licensed professionals whose expertise are in social work, psychology, and guidance and counseling;
2. The vital competencies needed in the forensic psychological practice are skills in psychological assessment, clinical strengths, and ethical sensitivity and uprightness;
3. As per the conduct of this study, the major areas of practice of forensic psychology in Philippines are in line with cases on violence against women and children, child custody evaluations, competency assessment to stand in trials, and

- annulment of marriage;
4. Referrals from other professionals seemed to be the common point of practice in the field of forensic psychology in the country;
  5. Pressing issues and challenges in forensic psychological practice include confidentiality and inviolacy, neglect in the mental health of the clients, lack of graduate or post-graduate trainings, appropriate skills in testing, professional fees, and conflict of interest between and among clients, lawyers, and the referring party; and
  6. Future trends in forensic psychological practice include availability of relevant training, inclusions of more academic offerings in the graduate and postgraduate level, improvement of the localized empirical researches, and specialized professional certification to improve the status of forensic psychology in the Philippines.

### Recommendations

In light of the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations were derived:

1. Professional organizations like PAP may organize intensive training focusing on the skills that are vital in the practice of forensic psychology as a profession and devise guidelines for professional expert services in the legal system by a psychologist;
2. CHED may design policy guidelines in offering forensic psychology as a course both in the graduate and postgraduate level;
3. Government agencies should prioritize the funding of relevant empirical researchers in the field of forensic psychology that will contribute to social advancement and policy-making; and
4. Aspiring professionals who intend to work in the forensic psychological setting shall develop clinical strengths and proficient skills in psychological testing and assessment.

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