

Psychology in Spain: Its historical and cultural roots, instruction, research and future prospects

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Roots in Spanish Psychology dated back to Huarte de San Juan (1575). From this period to nowadays, Psychology has notably developed, branching in different areas such as psychology and sports and physical exercise, clinical and health psychology, educational psychology, psychology of social intervention, legal psychology, work and organisational psychology, and psychology of road safety. This paper includes a review of psychology students, students and population's image about psychology, psychology study plan and profile in Spanish universities, and functions of Spanish practitioners. Finally, the future of psychology in Spain is dealt, focusing on the necessary improvements to its advance.

Keywords: Psychology; Spain; universities; applications of psychology; study plan; Spanish practitioners.

THE SEEDS of psychology in Spain can be found in the 16th century (Spanish Renaissance) in the work of Huarte de San Juan (1529–1588). A medical doctor by training, he became known as the forerunner of modern psychology due to his work translated into English as *The Examination of Men's Wits*¹. Huarte was the first modern writer to base psychology on physiology and biology (moving away from the prevailing conservative philosophical and spiritual conceptions). He is also considered the forerunner of Developmental and Educational Psychology, paying attention to the type of 'wits' possessed by each individual and the types common to each age range (Velarde Lombraña, 1993).

However, this beginning of formal psychological thought was soon to be stunted by the arrival of the Inquisition. As Carpintero (1989) observes, 'a long road ensued from these precedents in the Renaissance era until the first manifestations of a new tradition, what is now scientific psychology, that began

to appear at the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century.'

Since the figure of Huarte de San Juan, there have been many who have made their contributions to constructing and consolidating psychology in Spain² (Siguán, 1976).

We must look back to the first half of the 19th century in order to observe a true, growing interest in psychology in Spain (*150 Años de la Psicología Española*, Carpintero, 2004). Despite a persisting philosophical bent, psychology in this period was becoming more established largely due to the Pidal Plan (1845), which decreed the compulsory teaching of 'Principles of Psychology, Ideology and Logic' at secondary schools. The Pidal Plan resulted in the first appearance of psychology teaching manuals, while psychology at the university level continued to be a part of the academic subject of Metaphysics (García Vega, Moya Santoyo & Rodríguez Domínguez, 1992). Although the role of psychology in this era was beginning to be valued, it was yet to become institu-

¹ *Examen de Ingenios para las ciencias* (1575).

² For more information on the most significant authors in the history of Spanish psychology and their contributions, see *Ciento Cincuenta Años de la Psicología Española*, available at <http://psi.usal.es/instrumentos-de-la-psicologia/textos/04.pdf> (last accessed 5 July 2010).

tionalised, and a defined social role was still lacking, as was a precise placement within the Spanish academic panorama. A professional role was yet to appear in a later period (1915–1936).

This inter-war period from 1915 to 1936 was marked by intense scientific activity, and produced significant progress toward the construction of applied, professional, clearly defined psychology (what is referred to as *Psychotechnia*) through implementing this knowledge primarily in the fields of vocational guidance and pedagogy (Zazzo, 1978). During this period the first institutions of applied psychology appeared in Spain – the pioneers in using psychological methods and instruments (Sánchez Vazquez & Guijarro Granados, 2000):

- (a) *Secretariat of Learning* (1915). This was the first Vocational Guidance Service. Its objective was to orient young workers toward their choice of a profession, by looking at each person's aptitudes and preferences.
- (b) *Institute on Vocational Guidance* (1918). Emerged as an expansion of the former, which was flooded by user demand.
- (c) *Psychology-pedagogy Laboratory* (1925). Created for the purpose of assessing students scientifically, not only their scholastic performance, but also all their physiological and psychological aspects (Kirchner, 1979).

The next key period for modern psychology in Spain took place after the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) (Quintana, 1991). Its milestones include the first Spanish journal of psychology, *Psicotecnia* (1939–1945), later replaced by the *Revista de Psicología General y Aplicada* (1946) (González Pérez, 2006); notable progress in centres of applied psychology that were launched in earlier years (1915, 1918 and 1925); the creation of the Department of Experimental Psychology in the CSIC (Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas) in 1943, where an important movement was established to promote psychology as an experimental science (Siguán, 2009); and the creation of the first

scientific society in this sphere, the *Sociedad Española de Psicología* (1952). All this created the conditions for a new consolidation of the research, instruction and professional activity of Spanish psychologists (Peiró, 1984; Encinas & Rosa, 1990).

Within this context, psychology went on to become a part of official university curricula: first as a 'Section' (1968) in the Faculties of Philosophy and Letters, and later on as a 'Faculty' (1980) at the Complutense University of Madrid and Central University in Barcelona. These were followed by the Autonomía University of Madrid, the National University of Distance Education (UNED), and the University of Valencia (1983). In 1989 a Faculty of Psychology was launched at the Autonomía University of Barcelona and in 1991 at the Universities of La Laguna, Oviedo, País Vasco, Salamanca and Santiago. This institutional process has not yet concluded, since there are still sections of psychology at other Universities that aspire to become Faculties (Quintana, 1991).

Psychology flourished in Spain during the last two decades of the 20th century, as demonstrated by the publication of nearly 30 specialised journals, the functioning of a significant number of associations related to psychology, and the birth of the *Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos de España*, COP [Official Association of Psychologists of Spain] (1980). These facts have consolidated psychology as a science undergoing continuous growth and development in our country.

The present situation of psychology in Spain

Professional psychology in Spain has undergone extensive development since psychology studies were established at Spanish universities in the 1970s. Psychology practitioners in Spain today are dedicated primarily to the following professional fields and roles: the Psychology of Sports and Physical Exercise, Clinical and Health Psychology, Educational Psychology, the Psychology of Social Intervention, Legal Psychology, Work

Figure 1: Professional profiles and sectors of practice.

Distribution by specialty	(%)	Public Sector (%)	Private Sector (%)
Clinical	68.36	80	20
Educational	15.29	75	25
Work and Organisational	8.05	58	42
Social and Community	4.40	42	58
Road Safety	1.63	6	94
Legal	1.15	73	27
Teaching and Research at University	0.51	97	3
Sports	0.35	43	57
Military	0.25	33	67

Source: Santolaya, Berdullas Et Fernández-Hermida (2002).

and Organisational Psychology, and Road Safety Psychology (COP, 1998). Figure 1 shows the distribution among the different sectors in the public and private spheres. Figure 2 displays several aspects about each of these professional spheres and how one gains entrance to them.

Psychology of Sports and Physical Exercise

This is a relatively young area, but widely recognised in our country. Its main object of study is behaviour in the area of physical exercise and sports, and it is practiced in different specialised areas such as athletic performance (professional or high performance), sports for beginners (school, university or community sports), and sports for leisure and health (sports for everyone, and adaptations for special needs populations).

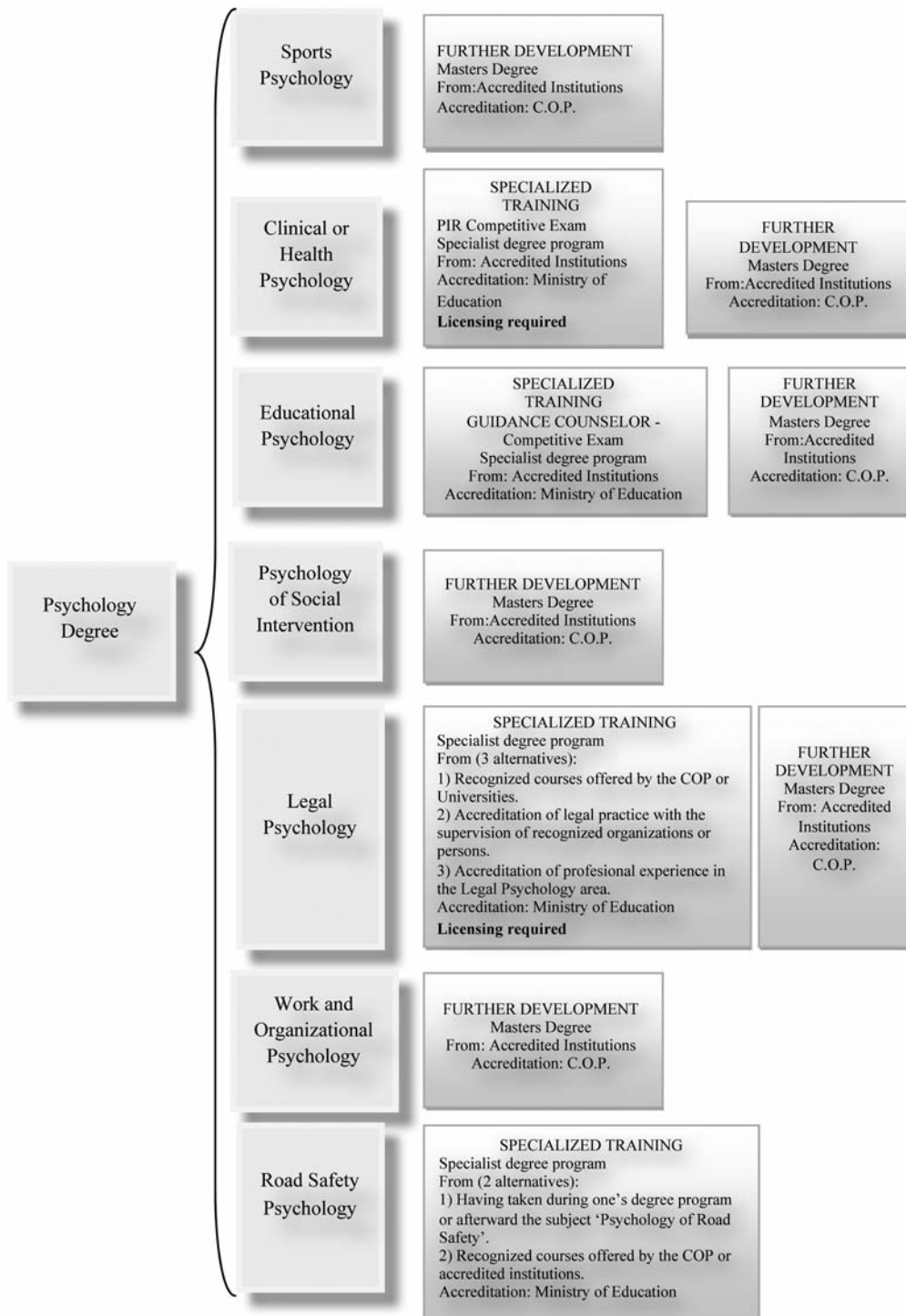
The function of a sports psychologist begins with a psychological/sports assessment that is adapted to the areas of practice described above. This is followed by planning and programming the intervention and continues with an assessment or monitoring of the work being carried out. These functions can be complemented by other functions related to education, training or research (COP, 1998).

Clinical and Health Psychology

Clinical and Health Psychology in our country has found its traditional sphere of application in private practice, due in part to inadequate development of psychological care within our public health system. Presently, the private sector of Clinical and Health Psychology is dynamic and diverse, and is found in practices that range from a single practitioner to complex centres with broad-ranging multi-professional teams.

In the public sphere, recent years have seen the gradual incorporation of clinical and health psychologists (thanks to General Health Act 14/ 1986, 25 April). In order to work in the public sector one must obtain the *Specialised Degree in Clinical Psychology*, extended by the Spanish government. According to current Spanish legislation regarding health professionals, the *Appointment of Health Professionals Act 44/2003*, only psychologists specialised in Clinical Psychology are recognised and authorised for the health care tasks of screening, diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of mental and behavioural disorders of patients. The degree mentioned can be obtained through the PIR channel (Resident Intern Psychologists) and through the official accreditation channel (COP, 2010).

Figure 2: Entrance to each of the professional profiles.



The PIR is a system of postgraduate training, with a four-year duration, designed and developed jointly with the Ministries of Health and Education. It is eminently practical training, but complemented by theoretical training, and is carried on within the framework of Public Services. It was first put into place in certain Autonomous Regions in 1983, and at the state level in 1994; since then, new enrollments are received on an annual basis. Admission is granted through a competitive exam, open to anyone with a psychology degree.

Regarding the official accreditation channel, practitioners who wish to take advantage of this option must possess specialised training in clinical and health psychology, as shown in Figure 2.

There are a number of different settings where intervention takes place, geared toward the specific needs of the situation. These include hospitals and specialised units, schools, volunteer organisations and NGOs, clinical psychology teams in the military, and so on.

The functions of the clinical and health practitioner are varied. However, they can be grouped into categories such as screening, diagnosis, treatment and intervention, counsel, advising, consultation and referral, health promotion and prevention, research, teaching and supervision, management, and administration.

Educational Psychology

Educational Psychology is applied mainly within the framework of social systems of education at all levels and in all modalities: state-regulated and private systems, formal and informal settings, and throughout life-long learning (COP, 1998).

The functions of practitioners in this sphere include: interventions that address students' educational needs, vocational and professional guidance, prevention and intervention for improving the educational process, family training and advising, socio-educational intervention, research and teaching.

In the public sphere, psychologists may work as school guidance counselors (since 1977 when the Ministry of Education created the first Scholastic and Vocational Guidance Services) (Fernández Barroso, 1998). Ever since the LOGSE came into effect (Educational Reform Act, 1990), the education administration has been refining its model for school psychology intervention and educational guidance, at two levels of professional practice: (1) the Guidance Departments at each secondary school, acting as specialised support to mainstream teaching and a resource for vocational guidance at the school, serving the school itself, the pupils, teachers, families and other institutions; and (2) the district-wide Orientation Teams that serve primary schools, offering specialised assistance and support, whether didactic, psychological, social or organisational, in addition to functions specific to the district level. There are also province-wide Specific Teams (specialists in the treatment of autism, deafness, blindness or lack of motor skills) and Early Care Teams (that address the pre-school level).

In order to cover the openings for practitioners in the secondary Guidance Departments and in the Orientation Teams, an educational specialisation in Psychology and Pedagogy was created at the state level in 1991 (although Autonomous Regions with their own educational authority have the prerogative to establish the number of openings). Since then, openings for these positions are designated on a recurring basis by the state and by Autonomous Regions (Fernández Barroso, 1998).

Psychology of Social Intervention

The fundamental objective of this field is to reduce or prevent social and personal risk situations. This can be accomplished through direct intervention in specific problems that affect persons, groups or communities – offering them material or professional resources – or through promoting a better quality of life. The functions performed are direct care, advising and

consulting, community involvement, research, planning and programmes, programme assessment, management, administration and training.

Spheres of practice include the community, family and childhood intervention (family intervention and foster care, adoptions, residential care), senior citizens, disabilities, women, youth, social minorities and immigrants, co-operation for development and environmental psychology. Other new thrusts are sectors of intervention related to occupying free time and to the media (COP, 1998).

Training in social intervention has suffered from significant deficiencies until quite recently, in terms of the university degree programme. Very few faculties included the option to specialise in this area. New study plans developed in the 1990s have been correcting this situation. In addition to the learning gained through university studies, social intervention requires additional specific learning, which amounts to a kind of second specialisation. Thus we can speak of non-specific content (common to all sectors of intervention) and specific content (specific to each sector) (COP, 1998). The following aspects for the training of professionals must be documented and accredited by the COP:

1. Knowledge of the legislative, administrative and organisational framework with its main programmes and services.
2. Psychosocial characteristics of the sectors addressed by such intervention.
3. The most typical strategies and techniques for intervention with individuals, groups and communities.
4. Theoretical models of social intervention.
5. Methodology: planning, needs assessment, programme assessment.

Legal Psychology

Legal Psychology as a specialty is pursued in a sphere that straddles the worlds of Law and of Psychology, either in the theoretical, explanatory and research thrust, or in application, assessment and treatment.

Legal Psychology encompasses the study, explanation, promotion, assessment prevention, advising and/or treatment of those psychological phenomena that influence a person's legal behaviour. It uses the methods of scientific psychology and applies them to different spheres: psychology applied to the courts, penitentiary psychology, psychology of delinquency, judicial psychology (testimony, swearing), police and armed forces psychology, victimology and mediation.

Given the complexity of the work carried out by the legal psychologist, the COP has established that Legal Psychology requires specialised training. In order to practice as a legal psychologist one must have a psychology degree and be licensed by the COP. In addition, the COP stipulates three non-exclusive channels by which one can gain access to this specialty. The first is to have completed COP-recognised coursework at accredited public or private institutions, universities or other official centres. The second is to accredit practical work in Legal Psychology done under the supervision of organisations or persons recognised for this purpose, and the third is to have accredited one's professional experience in the area (Urta Portillo & Romero Rodríguez, 2006).

Depending on the area of specialisation, a programme of specific content must be studied, in addition to interrelated content from other areas. In the case of Family Psychology, for example, one studies Family Law or Protection of Minors. In Penitentiary Psychology, studies include the context of the prison system, the psychological effects of imprisonment and Penitentiary Law. Other peripheral knowledge is also required, including General Principles of Law, jurisdictional orders, basic concepts of Civil, Penal, and Trial Law, and complementary concepts from Penitentiary Law, Canon Law, Labour Law and Laws pertaining to Minors (Urta Portillo & Romero Rodríguez, 2006).

Work and Organisational Psychology

Work and Organisational Psychology is one of the large areas of psychology in Spain. Given the breadth of functions and spheres involved, it is necessary to group them into large areas such as commercial research and marketing, management and administration of organisations, human resource development and organisation, and work and health-related conditions.

Commercial research includes conducting market studies, product research and advertising. Work is usually carried on in private enterprises large enough to have these kinds of services. Management and administration, whether of the enterprise or of its human resources, involves activities related to advising, analysis of communications, rating job positions, qualitative improvement in human resources, etc. Finally, regarding work and health-related conditions, the psychologist's function focuses on preventing incidents and on direct intervention with persons: the essence is to analyse and intervene in all processes occurring within the organisation, from the organisation outward, and from individuals in their connection with the organisation (COP, 1998).

These functions may be performed for either public or private organisations. A psychology degree is required in order to practice as a work and organisational psychologist (in either the public or private sector). Current curricula include 'Organisational Psychology' as a core subject, and many universities include 'The Psychology of Work' as a required course (Beléndez, 2002). In addition to this general criterion, a body of more specific knowledge is needed, such as: human resource management, personnel selection, testing to assess attitudes, motivation and personality, Labour Law, hiring, economics, didactic methodology, organisational knowledge, statistics, business management, ergonomics, on-the-job health and safety (COP, 1998).

- Human resources management
Techniques for analysing and preparing job descriptions
- Personnel selection
Personnel screening
- Assessment testing
Vocational and professional counsel and guidance
- Labour law
Qualitative and quantitative market analysis techniques
- Hiring, economics
Quality and quality certification
- Knowledge of organisations
Economic Psychology (Marketing and Communication).
- Statistics
Clinical Psychology for business
- Business administration
Techniques for managing, leading, and co-ordinating work teams
- Ergonomics
Techniques for Hygiene and Prevention of Occupational Hazards
- Labour-related health and safety

Psychology of Road Safety

At the present time, one of the characteristic activities of psychologists working in this field is driver examination, carried out in private assessment centres; another area of work has to do with assessing fitness to carry arms.

However, the road safety psychologist is not limited to these activities, but has a broad field of action due to the growing emphasis on the 'human factor' in the *vehicle-road-traffic* triad, where humans are considered to be one of the most important elements in preventing accidents. Within this area of practice, professional functions include designing strategies for relating to 'machines', creating simulation environments, and designing strategies relative to traffic rules and regulations, as well as frequent collaboration with other professionals, for example, for childhood road safety education, prevention campaigns, criteria unification, and so on (Martínez, 1995).

In order to be accredited as a Road Safety Psychologist, one's psychology degree must have included a specific subject on Road Safety Psychology, otherwise the course must be taken later, either at university or at any other officially recognised institution (4.5 minimum credits). This basic training must be complemented by other auxiliary knowledge such as: anatomical-structural, physiological and biomechanical foundations of transportation and road safety, the theory of training and functional analysis of transportation and road safety, and the organisation and structure of transportation and road safety. When one's preparation is to be applied to populations with special needs, specific content must also be included from fields such as disabilities, senior citizens, disadvantaged sectors, and so on (Nicolás Martínez, 1995).

Psychology in Spain: by the numbers

Gender

The psychology profession in our country is primarily female: 72.58 per cent of licensed professionals are women, and only 27.42 per cent are men. Distribution of this variable in the different specialties is not uniform, with certain observable peculiarities in the spheres of Work and Organisational Psychology, academic areas, Sports Psychology and areas related to the military (Fernández Hermida et al., 2000) (Table 1). These results will be explained in more detail in a later section on the social and political value of psychology in Spain.

These data are consistent with the fact that the percentage of the male professionals is greater than the percentage of females in these work sectors (university professors, sports, defence and police work). This difference seems to persist despite the female predominance in professional psychology.

Age

The mean age of licensed professionals in the year 2000 was 36.51 years, with a standard deviation of 8.14, a minimum of 22 and a maximum of 68. These results reveal a

mostly young professional: 22.5 per cent are less than 30 years of age, and 30 per cent are over 40 (Fernández Hermida et al., 2000).

Specialties and theoretical orientation

The primary theoretical orientation in our country in the year 2000 was the cognitive-behavioural model, followed by models taken from psychoanalysis and systemic orientation. The remainder had very minor representation (Fernández Hermida et al., 2000). These figures, as well as their distribution by specialty, can be observed in Table 2.

In a more recent study (Santolaya Ochando, Berdullas Temes & Fernández Hermida, 2002) with over 7000 licensed psychologists, a 68.36 per cent majority claimed to work in Clinical Psychology, far greater than the next most frequent occupation, Educational Psychology, at 12.28 per cent. This study also showed that the theoretical orientation most representative of psychologists from the different specialties was the cognitive-behavioural approach, with a 49.08 per cent preference.

Psychology at the universities

Of the 66 universities offering face-to-face learning in 2003–2004 (Guía de Universidades y Carreras, 2003), 44 per cent offered studies in psychology, as well as the two distance universities, UNED (public) and UOC (private). If we differentiate between public and private, there is a greater offering at the public universities: 47 per cent of the 47 face-to-face, public universities offer studies in psychology (22 universities), as compared to 37 per cent of the 19 private universities (seven universities). In summary, a total of 31 universities (29 face-to-face and two distance learning) offer studies in psychology leading to the official degree (Hernández Gordillo, 2003).

Studying psychology is very popular. With 57,000 students in the 2002–2003 academic year, it occupies third place in a ranking of degree programmes, surpassed only by Law and a grouping of all business and economic degrees. It has undergone gradual

Table 1: Distribution by gender in each specialty.

Specialty	Male	Female
Clinical	30%	70%
Educational	27%	73%
Work and Organisational	44%	56%
Social and Community	32%	68%
Road Safety	18%	82%
Legal	32%	68%
Teaching and research at university	58%	42%
Sports	52%	48%
Military	63%	38%

Source: Fernández Hermida, Berdullas Temes, Santolaya Ochando & Muñiz (2000).

Table 2: Distribution (in percentages) by field and by theoretical orientation.

	CBM	BM	E	PP	SO	HP	OP	TA	GT	PEM
Clinical	48.00	14.29	9.69	12.17	5.34	4.35	5.15	0.58	0.24	0.19
Educational	53.92	12.66	20.63	3.54	4.05	3.92	0.89	0.51	0.13	0.25
Work and Organisational	48.28	14.37	25.00	2.59	4.60	4.89	0.29	1.44		
Social and Community	51.18	9.84	16.14	2.76	16.14	2.36	1.18	0.39		0.39
Road Safety	50.00	13.39	29.17	2.78	2.78	1.39				
Legal	44.26	13.11	24.59	6.56	6.56	3.28	1.64			
Sports	70.59	17.65	11.76							
Military	60.00	6.67	26.67	6.67				6.67		

Legend: CBM=Cognitive Behavioural Models; BM=Behaviour Modification, E=Eclectic; PP=Psychoanalysis-inspired Psychology; SO=Systemic Orientation; HP=Humanist-inspired Psychology; OP=Orthodox Psychoanalysis; TA=Transactional Analysis; GT=Gestalt Therapy; PEM=Phenomenological-Existential Models.

Source: Fernández Hermida, Berdullas Temes, Santolaya Ochando & Muñiz (2000).

growth, reaching its maximum during 1999–2000, with a slightly downward trend since that time (Hernández Gordillo, 2003). A later section, Profile of psychology students in Spain, will address the likelihood of students with a psychology degree obtaining employment as psychologists (or other types of work).

The social and political value of psychology in Spain

As we have seen in earlier sections, professional psychology in Spain has experienced a large increase in the number of practitioners in recent years and in the variety of areas of intervention. The increasingly female and diversified nature of the profession are unquestionable facts. Some fields of work

continue to be predominant, namely the field of clinical psychology, followed by educational psychology and the psychology of work and organisations. Other fields are becoming established (road safety, sports, etc.) with the subsequent demand for specialised professionals with specific training profiles.

However, although this development is positive, it also has a series of consequences on society's image of psychology: the rapid opening of professional spheres can produce a confused perception of what psychology can contribute within these new fields of work. In some cases this expansion gives rise to professional practice without proper qualifications, when new professional spaces are approached by other recently created professions in search of their own identity and when various areas of professional intervention are not clearly differentiated – producing conflict among the different specialties of psychology itself. Added to this is the inadequate postgraduate training for the emerging professional needs of psychologists (Buela Casal, 2004).

University students

According to a study by García et al. (2004), university students, whether enrolled in psychology or in other degree programmes, were unable to show a congruent, systematic idea of the image and value of psychology. Most students from other degree programmes thought of psychology as a human science, but did not know exactly what its object of study was, though they considered it closely related to Psychiatry and Pedagogy. In addition, they rated psychology as having a low level of scientificity, they assigned its scope of work to education and mental health, and identified psychoanalysis with psychology. Finally, there seemed to be a noteworthy conflict of interests in the answers given by Pedagogy students, who consider it something of an interference that psychologists are able to work in primary education. (Recall that since 1991 both psychologists and teachers

make up the Guidance Departments in secondary schools and the Orientation Teams that serve primary schools.)

In another study (Sierra et al., 2005), psychology students placed their discipline within the health sector; 98.90 per cent of those surveyed stated that psychologists can help prevent health problems, and 95 per cent indicated that one of the core aspects of psychology is to encourage healthy behaviours. Another important finding was that most students perceived psychology as a health care discipline, although independent of more established disciplines such as Psychiatry. Nonetheless, even though most students consider psychology as a health care discipline, they do not feel that all psychologists are prepared to diagnose and treat emotional and mental problems.

Psychology practitioners

In general, licensed psychologists hold a rather favourable opinion of psychology as a health care discipline; they consider that there is much affinity between the disciplines of psychology and medicine, especially in the case of Clinical Psychology (Buela Casal et al., 2005).

The general population

Among the early studies of the image of psychology in the general population, the work by Seisdedos (1983) stands out due to its sample size. Results indicated that, generally speaking, the population surveyed considered psychology to be useful, although this consideration diminished in older respondents and respondents with a lower professional and cultural level. In addition, women were found to have a more favourable attitude toward psychology than men. However, this study also found that a positive opinion of the usefulness of psychology had some association with a belief in occult sciences.

In a later study, Berenguer and Quintanilla (1994) found that, although knowledge of psychology and of psychologists was generally adequate, there was a certain igno-

rance about some disciplines of psychology, as well as a certain confusion between psychology and other related disciplines such as Psychiatry (for example, 37 per cent believed that a psychologist can prescribe medicines), Sociology (83.5 per cent believed that a psychologist was required to have knowledge of this discipline) and Pedagogy (74.30 per cent considered this an important part of training in psychology). It was also striking that 16.8 per cent of those surveyed considered that it was possible to practice as a psychologist without having a university degree. As for the tasks they carry out, most of those surveyed identified the psychologist with diagnosis of emotional problems (87.1 per cent), application of tests (85.3 per cent), psychotherapy (71.9 per cent) and relaxation (66.2 per cent), thereby establishing an eminently clinical profile of the practitioner. The second main task of the psychologist, in the opinion of this sample, falls into the school context, in third place is found the work and organisational psychologist, followed by psychologists working in road safety. Regarding the respondents' personal experience with psychologists, 21 per cent had had some contact with a psychologist, they expressed a high level of satisfaction with their work and rated their personal characteristics quite positively. Most instances were within a clinical or school context, revealing once again that these two areas are the most significant in society.

Although the trend observed in earlier studies has been found in other more recent ones, there has been some progress in the image and understanding of psychology. For example, Yllá and Hidalgo (2003) found that knowledge and the acceptance of psychology have improved significantly and that it is even gaining ground from psychiatrists. In fact, a large part of the population studied expressed their preference for professional contact (attention) from psychologists as compared to psychiatrists. Moreover, the solution to the problem was perceived as better when receiving psychological care than from psychiatric care, especially when

dealing with emotional problems, emergency situations or catastrophes (Buela Casal et al., 2005).

Psychology studies in present-day Spain

The creation of specific areas of knowledge in the mid-1980s has meant great progress for these areas in terms of their professional visibility and development, making it possible for many areas of psychology content to be taught within other degree programmes. In some universities there are psychology departments or specific areas devoted to psychology even though the psychology degree is not offered as such. Currently the different areas of psychology are present in 21 degree programmes in Social and Legal Sciences faculties and in nine degree programmes in the Health Sciences field (Gil-Roales, 2005).

There are three ways to obtain the psychology degree. The first and most common is through public universities offering face-to-face learning (23 of 48 offer this degree programme); the second is through the National University of Distance Education, and the third is through private universities (psychology is offered at 10 of the 22 private universities), some of them Catholic. Only one private university currently offers the possibility of distance education (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya) (Hernández-Gordillo, 2003). Despite the fact that psychology can be studied at a large percentage of universities, particularly along the Mediterranean coast, Jaen, Seville, Madrid and the Cantabria coast, psychology occupies the seventh position among all degree programmes offered in Spain in terms of forced student relocation (Gil-Roales, 2005).

Currently, psychology studies in Spain, along with all other degree programmes across Europe, are completing the process of adaptation to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), for the purpose of 'improved coherency, effectiveness and universality of the knowledge conveyed' (Gil-Roales, 2005). This process culminates in the launching of four-year degree programmes,

where psychology will have a number of common subjects and competencies³.

This education reform has necessarily involved a series of profound changes both in the teaching and assessment of the material as well as in teacher training. Being aware of the importance of these changes and of the need for their constant evaluation, in the last five years there have been numerous studies focused more than ever on analysing, improving and detailed evaluation of university teaching adapted to the EHEA. These have often been triggered by teaching innovation conferences organised at each university. Thus, we can say that in general this reform has prompted a change in teaching in higher education, with a move from primarily lecture-based teaching to teaching that combines execution of practical exercises, seminars, self-instructional activities, etc., always with the objective of acquiring a broad range of competencies and skills recognised for this subject matter, whether transversal, generic or specific, as indicated in the psychology 'white book' (*Libro Blanco del Grado de Psicología*, 2005). Additionally, an increase in the use of electronic resources and the internet has meant a large increase in the creation of multimedia materials for students' assistance or for required consultation, and in elective or freely configurable courses (online or partially online). These options maximise the possibilities for adapting the student's curriculum to his or her choice of profession (Alonso et al., 2009; Guasch, Álvarez & Espasa, 2010; López-Fernandez & Rodríguez-Illera, 2009; San Martín, Jorquera & Boneti, 2008;).

One important point of divergence with other countries is the large number of dates offered for taking official exams. Aside from the usual semester exams in February or June/July, in Spain there are make-up exams scheduled in September and December. The latter are open only to students who have yet to pass a limited number of courses (upper-

limit percentage established by the respective faculties).

The profile of psychology students in Spain

The profile required of psychology students includes interest in the study of human beings and their diverse, multicultural reality, with an ability to establish suitable interpersonal relationships and to be self-critical, skill in handling and making daily decisions and basic proficiency in English (www.ehu.es/p200-eeesct/es/contenidos/informacion/eees_grado_psicologia/es_grado/informacion_general.html). Students are admitted preferentially from the *Bachillerato* track in Health Sciences, followed by those who studied Experimental Sciences and Legal Sciences. Last to be admitted are students from secondary education tracks in Humanities and Artistic Studies, since they have serious gaps in the prior knowledge needed for this degree programme (*Libro Blanco del Grado de Psicología*, 2005).

As for sociodemographic variables, the psychology white book describes the profile of psychology students as 'female, between 23 to 25 years of age, enrolled in a clinical psychology track and who combine studies with some outside employment' (*Libro Blanco del Grado de Psicología*, 2005).

As for graduates, it is interesting to note that their mean level of satisfaction with their education in psychology is very high, and they consider that the theoretical content conveyed to them to be important (*Libro Blanco del Grado de Psicología*, 2005). Most graduates find paid employment related to psychology within 10 months of graduation, although 60 per cent of the students were first hired before completing their studies. These employment contracts are obtained primarily through personal connections (30 to 40 per cent), or by sending CVs in response to job advertisements in the press (25 per cent) (*Libro Blanco del Grado de Psicología*, 2005).

³ For more information, see the *Libro Blanco del Grado de Psicología*, 2005.

The content of psychology studies in Spain

The *Libro Blanco del Grado de Psicología* (2005) has established a number of common elements that must be fulfilled by every undergraduate psychology degree in Spain. They are:

- A pre-eminently generalist nature.
- Composed of blocks of educational content and basic foundations common to the discipline, arranged from the perspective of complementary content and geared toward developing professional competencies required by the future psychologist.
- Including compulsory and elective educational blocks that provide complementary training to reinforce specific and transversal competencies. This will ensure that the 180 European credits (ECTS) from the first years contain basic, non-professional content. Figure 3 shows the specific competencies for Spain's psychology degree.
- Multi-faceted. Includes a first look at the fields of application and professional directions of psychology. The fields must have a professional nature, namely: (1) Clinical Psychology; (2) Educational Psychology; (3) Psychology of Work, Organisations and Human Resources; and (4) Psychology of Social and Community Intervention. The first three profiles are common to the European Diploma and the Europsych-EDP project (2003) (Bartram & Roe, 2004; Lunt, 2002). The fourth stems from the need identified by the *Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos* to analyse and intervene in social interactions, an area experiencing much increase in the demand for workers in the last two decades. A number of transversal competencies, specific competencies and areas of basic knowledge have been defined for each of these orientations⁴.
- Inclusion of a practicum that brings students closer to the professional world,

giving them exposure to different applied fields of psychology, and allowing them to be more informed when choosing their future educational path.

- Basic initial training that allows them to gain entry to the different fields of psychological professional activity in the labour market without any professional specialisation.

Similarities and differences with mainstream psychology in the US

Psychology in Spain today is experiencing great growth and development. Evidence of this can be seen in the proliferation of specialised publications, the growing number of professors in university departments, increased membership in the *Colegio Oficial de Psicólogos*, and the large offering of meetings, seminars, conferences, Master's degrees, etc. (Carpintero, 2004). As for research, we can affirm that psychology in Spain has the same experimental character as in the US and in the rest of Europe, with absolute predominance of the cognitive-behavioural thrust as compared to behaviourist, systemic, gestalt or psychoanalysis.

The future of psychology in Spain

One future course of action has to do with increasing the level of competency of psychology practitioners through postgraduate training that is closely aligned with the social needs that require their services.

Another fundamental step is to establish agreements that allow the accreditation of specialised training through both private and public entities, thus gaining official recognition for specialised degrees, following the model of the specialised degree in Clinical Psychology.

This process will take time, but there is the determination to bring it about. Only the search for professional excellence and its recognition can preserve and expand the professional spaces that have opened up in

⁴ For more information, see pages 84–87 of the *Libro Blanco del Grado de Psicología* (2005): www.upm.es/innovacion/cd/04_eees/libros_blanco/libroblanco_psicologia_borrador.pdf

Figure 3: Specific competencies of Spain's psychology degree.

A Definition of the functional goals to be carried out
1 Know how to analyse the needs and requests of target users in different contexts
2 Be able to establish goals for basic psychological action in different contexts, by proposing and negotiating these goals with target users and affected parties
B Psychological assessment, psychodiagnosis and formal reporting
3 Be able to plan and carry out an interview
4 Be able to describe and measure variables (personality, intelligence and other aptitudes, attitudes, etc.) and cognitive, emotional, psychobiological and behavioural processes
5 Be able to identify differences, problems and needs
6 Be able to make diagnoses by following characteristic professional criteria
7 Know how to describe and measure interaction processes, dynamics and structures within a group or between groups
8 Be able to identify problems and needs within a group or between groups
9 Know how to describe and measure interaction processes, dynamics and structures of an organisation or between organisations
10 Know how to analyse the context where individual behaviours, group processes and organisational processes occur
C Development of products and services based on psychological theory and methods
11 Know how to select and administer instruments, products and services and be able to identify pertinent persons and groups
D Psychological intervention: prevention, treatment and rehabilitation
12 Be able to define objectives and prepare a basic intervention plan in accordance with its purpose (prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, placement, companionship, etc.)
13 Know how to choose the proper basic psychological intervention techniques for meeting objectives
14 Be able to use strategies and techniques for involving target users in the intervention
15 Know how to apply basic intervention strategies and methods with target users: psychological counsel, advising, negotiation, mediation, and so on
E Programme and intervention assessment
16 Know how to plan programme and intervention assessment
17 Be able to measure and obtain relevant data for intervention assessment
18 Know how to analyse and interpret the results of an assessment
F Communication
19 Know how to provide suitable, precise feedback to target users
20 Be able to prepare oral and written reports
G Ethical commitment
21 Know and comply with the deontological obligations of psychology

Source: *Libro Blanco del Grado de Psicología* (2005).

recent years. Likewise, psychology as a science will develop at its best in an environment where professional psychology is fully established and socially recognised.

Psychology in Spain will make an important contribution in the sphere of public health (David, 2002). Development of cross-cultural, quality of life assessment instruments will be promoted (Reig Ferrer, 2003) as well as health assessment via the internet (Reig Ferrer & Cepeda Benito, 2003). In closing, Santolaya (2002) expressed an intuition that psychology as health care would be one of the fields that experiences the most development in the coming years. In any case, it seems that psychology, whether or not it is recognised as a health care profession, will continue to make important contributions to the treatment of illness and to maintaining health, and will continue to demonstrate its usefulness in society (Buela Casal, 2004).

Conclusions

Since psychology as a discipline first made its appearance in Spain, it has gone through several phases with markedly different developmental rhythms. Although recognition of psychology as a science came later than in other European countries, once this milestone was reached it has evolved quickly. Today we can say with all confidence that the study of psychology, in terms of content, in terms of the number and distribution of pupils, and in terms of psychology research is comparable to other European countries and even to mainstream psychology in the US. In this regard, an increasing number of experimental studies emerge from our country, mainly rooted in the cognitive thrust. All this, along with the substantial professional visibility of psychology in Spain, both in intervention and in prevention, makes it a strongly founded science with a promising future.

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