

**DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE (SOP) FOR
PSYCHOLOGISTS WORKING IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS**



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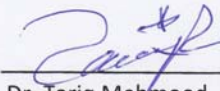
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Certificate of Approval

The thesis entitled "Development of standard operating procedure for psychologists working in special schools" has been accepted by the Department of Education, University of Management and Technology Lahore in partial fulfillment of requirement for the Degree of M.Phil in Education.



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Abstract

Psychologists working in special schools collaborate with special education teacher for the rehabilitation of persons with special needs. The topic of the research was “Development of standard operating procedures for psychologists working in special schools”. The purpose of the study was to develop a manual prescribing specifically all the responsibilities and possible roles of psychologists in special schools. The objectives of the research were to highlight the need for clear standards for psychologists working in special schools, investigate the existing roles and responsibilities of psychologists, highlight the perception of special education teachers as well as administrators about the roles and responsibilities of psychologists, in order to develop a standard operating procedure (SOP) for psychologists working in special schools in consultation with administrators, special education teachers and psychologists. In this descriptive research researcher developed a scale on the basis of related literature. The scale consisted on 30 items covering seven areas. These areas include assessment and interpretation; direct intervention for students; consultation and training; program development; school psychology program; professional practice and development; and communication and relationship skills. The data were collected through purposive sampling from 70 psychologists and 100 special education teachers from different districts of Punjab Province. The data was analyzed statistically and conclusions were drawn. Frequencies of responses were computed and the items bearing up to or above 75% percent agreement were selected for SOP. Item no. 1.3, 2.4, 3.1, 3.4, 3.7, 5.2, 5.3, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 are not selected and their agreement percentages are respectively, 72%, 43%, 65%,

62%, 60%, 67%, 59%, 46%, 66%, 70%. All the areas in the scale were selected except one which is professional practice and development. The inter-rater reliability of psychologists and special education teachers was 0.73. The result showed that respondents have almost same perception about the roles and responsibilities of psychologists regardless of their gender, age, income. There is a significant difference in the opinions of psychologists and special education teachers about the roles and responsibilities of psychologists working in special schools. On the basis of the results, a standard operating procedure (SOP) was developed and validated by the 6 experts from the relevant fields. An open-ended question at the end of the scale was analyzed qualitatively and suggestions by the respondents were incorporated in the SOP in order to further improvement.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Psychologists can play a very important role in the development of children with disabilities. These children face many psychological problems like emotional disturbance, behavioral problems, aggression, anger and many other problems (Kirk, Gallagher, & Anestisia, 2003). These all problems interfere in their academic, social and emotional life and the children cannot find their full potential. Therefore, psychologists can play a very important role while working in schools of special education where these children with disabilities get education and learn other social and vocational skills. They perform their duties by working in collaboration with the teachers and parents of the children with disabilities and can provide many services directly or indirectly to manage the problems of these children.

School psychologists are considered as the experts of mental health of school going children. Despite the traditional role of the school psychologists, Sheridan and Gutkin (2000) view psychologists as experts of issues regarding learning and schools. It is the moral responsibility of the school psychologists to cater with the problems of students other than assessment and diagnosis of the children. They should be involved in addressing the social and human ills and play role in reducing the effects of these ills on children (New Nouveau Brunswick, 2001).

According to Reynolds & Gutkin (as cited by Koch, 2001) Lightner Witmer was the founder of school psychology. He was an expert of psychology and a teacher who had special training in solving the problems of children in schools. He blended his training of experimental psychology when he introduced with the clinical and school psychology. There were many practitioners in school psychology

that had school teaching experience which was very helpful for them to understand their duties in a school.

According to Fagan (2002) the movement of mental testing in 1890-1930 influenced the model of training for school psychologists. Those years were very informative for schools psychology. As Sheridan and Gutkin (2000) explained the school psychology is based on the medical model, which emphasis on the diagnosis, assessment and the treatment of the problems or pathology. Fagan (1992) claimed that compulsory schooling was the most defining action for school psychology, other pupil personnel services, and the resulting link between school psychology and special education. The most important strength of the services of school psychology was compulsory schooling (Fagan, 1992, 2002; Oakland & Cunningham, 1999; Reschly, 2000). The increasing enactment and enforcement of compulsory attendance laws between 1890 and 1930 dramatically changed public education (Fagan, 1992).

Fagan (2000) claimed that compulsory schooling facilitated the emergence of special education, the increasing segregation in the public education system, and provided a fertile ground for the rise of pupil personnel services which includes at a minimum guidance counselors, school psychologists, vocational counselors, and school social workers (Fagan, 2000).

Lacayo, Sherwood, and Morris (as cited by Metcalf, 2001) developed a list of 13 items about school psychologist activities which include: Psychological and educational assessment; personal time; counseling services to school staff; counseling services to individual students; review of the referrals and report writing; meetings with the school staff and arrangement of conference; conduct and attend different conferences, workshops and training during their service at school; counseling the parents of the students; conducting the different in-service training courses for teachers; Driving from one

educational facility to another; conducting researches and program evaluation for students; counseling to group of students and counseling with the teachers of students with disabilities.

School psychologists also develop education and public policies to be implemented. Depression is a prevailing problem in children with disabilities, so the elimination of depression should be the duty of the schools and it should also deal at the national level. The goals of school psychology should also include the social agendas or issues.

According to Reschly & Yesseldyke (2002) school psychologists are trained in many areas like child development, school and family systems, cognition, academic assessment as well as behavioral assessment and intervention and they have a very important role in collaboration of school and family of the children with special needs. School psychologists can include families in school issues related to children and provide them guidance regarding the problems of their children. This includes directly involving families in children's schooling, as well as providing consultation and education to school staff members about the importance of effective strategies for involving families. The school principals and teachers underestimate the roles of school psychologists in the collaboration of families and school and they think that school psychologists are only supposed to diagnose the children and their placement in schools. Because of this attitude of school principals and teachers, they cannot use the full potential of school psychologists in creating a collaborative environment in their schools.

Many surveys regarding the possible services a school psychologists' provide in schools conducted in United States and the results of these surveys showed that the most dominated role of the school psychologists is assessment, the results also explained that due to the assessment, the school psychologists' other roles are underuse i.e. counseling, intervention, etc in schools (Smith, 1984).

There is a continuous research regarding the possible roles of school psychologists. The education experts claim that the major role of school psychologists is an assessor for the children in

schools. According to Gilman and Gabriel (2004) the continuous debate regarding the roles and responsibilities of school psychology expand the scope of their profession. The provision of counseling services by the school psychologists to individual or groups of individuals were also started (Gilman & Gabriel, 2004).

According to Lecapitaine (2000) school psychologists can play a very important role in the diagnosis of at-risk students. Previously, the role of school psychology was confined to the testing and dealing with the students with special needs. Now a day, the functions the school psychologists perform include different services like dealing with the families of the children and communities.

The children with special needs face different psychological problems like anxiety and depression which create a need for the psychological services of school

level and the necessary steps should be taken. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the main reason of disability around the world is major depressive

psychologists in schools to treat the problems of these children. The treatment of the psychological problems of persons with disability should take into account at national

disorder (Murray & Lopez, 1996). In the United States, rates of severe depression have increased exponentially during the past century, especially for children (Klerman & Weiss-man, 1989). Now children are becoming victims of depression 10 times more than they were three generations ago.

There are some districts in which school psychologists are providing some services in special education like assessment, identification and referral but not the other activities which the school psychologists supposed to do like counseling, intervention, crisis intervention and consultation with parents and the other schools staff. In other districts, they may be the only mental health professional housed at a school and provide a full range of services that include assessment, consultation, and

counseling with regular- and special-education students and personnel. Few districts underuse the services of school psychologists in special education (Klerman & Weissman, 1989).

School psychologists not only work directly with the students rather they also assist or guide the individuals who have to deal with these students. These adults (e.g., teachers, parents, administrators, and other school personnel) are often referred to as key players or stakeholders in order to emphasize the importance of their role in intervention. The role of these persons is very important in intervention for the students. At every stage of assessment from first to the last stage, these persons have very important role. The stages include identification of the problems of the children, assessment of the level of the problems, intervention planning and execution of the planned program and then finally deriving the outcomes and evaluate them. School psychologists should have a discussion with these important persons who are the stakeholders and then develop an intervention plan for the child rather presenting an intervention plan to them without asking for their views. This strategy should also be used for writing the psychoeducational reports for the children. The school psychologists should also consult with these stakeholders before writing the final recommendations for the child after completing the assessment. These persons are more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the child and they can add the best for the child in recommendations and then the areas in which the child have problem will be dealt according to the recommended strategies (Nastasi, Varjas, Sarkar, & Jayasena, 1998).

The psycho educational report of the children is a form of written guidance and consultation for the stakeholders, so it should be prepared after the detailed discussion with other persons who deals with the child. The discussion between the school psychologists and parents, teachers, administrators and other school staff can be very beneficial in different ways for example, it provides the information about many problems in the system of the school which should be dealt, it also provides the information

about the school curriculum and the school psychologist become more aware of the school environment in which they work (Bradley-Johnson & Johnson, 1998).

There are various factors which influence the roles and functions of a school psychologist. Much literature exists which documents a consistent history of school psychologists' discrepant opinions between the actual and desired roles. Therefore, it is important to examine the factors which maintain the status quo, since there is compelling evidence that school psychologists desire a change. A factor that is influential in defining the functions of the school psychologist is the opinions and expectations by the consumers of the services. The literature demonstrates that others' expectations of school psychologists are primarily as evaluators of special education. While trends seem to indicate that some consumers desire additional services, the primary role of school psychologists is still as providers of assessment for the purposes of special education. This appears to have contributed to the maintenance of that role, as it impacts expectations of the services to be provided. Another relevant influence on role definition is related to the power and influence of the administrators. School administrators influence the role, functions, responsibilities and services of school psychologists (Senft & Snider, 1980; Tindall, 1964).

So, there are lots of confusion about the exact roles and responsibilities of psychologists working with children with disabilities. There is a dire need to have a sufficient job description for the psychologists working in special schools so they can be clear about their roles and responsibilities which they have to perform in schools. The aim of this study is to develop a standard operating procedure (SOP) for psychologists working in special schools.

Justification and Likely Benefits

The study will benefit the field of special education in the following manners:

Special schools administrators

The development of standard operating procedure for psychologists working in special education schools will be very beneficial for school administrators because in the form of SOP, they will have clear job description for the school psychologists and they also can evaluate them on the basis of certain measures mentioned in SOP.

Teachers of children with disabilities

Teachers who teach children with disabilities can get benefit from the psychologists working in schools. The development of standard operating procedure will make the roles and responsibilities of the psychologists more clear while working in collaboration with special education teachers. In many schools special education teachers are unaware of the services they can get from the psychologists and also psychologists are not sure with their duties. When the standard operating procedure will be followed in schools, everyone will have a clear vision about the roles and responsibilities psychologists should perform in the schools and how they are helpful to children, teachers and parents of children with disabilities.

Children with disabilities

There are many students with disabilities in school who are suffering from the emotional problems such as depression and many other behavioral problems including aggression towards others; self-injurious behaviors; behaviors that are inappropriate like sexual and social behaviors like hugging the unknown persons or masturbation on public places; self-stimulatory behaviors like hand mouthing and repetitive movements of hands; withdrawal behavior; and uncooperative to the persons who manage them (Hudson, 2005). So these children

need counseling, psychotherapies and many other techniques which psychologists can use with them but because the absence of the sufficient job description in schools, they are unable to get those services from psychologists which can be very helpful for them. As a result of standard operating procedure (SOP) the psychologists will be clearly known about the psychological services they should give to the students as their responsibility.

Parents of children with disabilities

School psychologists must work in partnership with parents whereby they empower parents to make informed decisions concerning their child's placement. As a result of the development of standard operating procedure the responsibilities of the psychologists for parents of children with disabilities will also be specified. Parents can help school psychologists and special education teachers in the management of their child because they know more about his strengths and weaknesses. So, working in collaboration with parents is also an important role of psychologists mentioned in SOP.

Objectives of the study

The study was conducted to:

1. Highlight the need for clear standards for all psychologists working in special schools.
2. Investigate the roles and duties of psychologists in special education.
3. Highlight the opinion of special education teachers about the roles and duties of psychologists working in special schools.
3. Develop a standard operating procedure for psychologists working in special

schools.

Questions of the study

The study was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. What are the standards for psychologists working in special schools?
2. What are the roles and responsibilities of psychologists in special education?
3. What is the opinion of the special education teachers about the roles and duties of the psychologists working in special schools?
4. Can a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) be developed for psychologists working in special schools?

Plan of Work and Methodology

SOP was developed for psychologists working in special education schools. The scale was field testes on a sample of 70 psychologists and 100 special education teachers.

Step One: Development of a Scale

First of all the researcher had taken a document PC I for the posting of psychologists to work in special education schools and centers, from the directorate of Special Education. On the basis of PC I and the related literature about the roles and responsibilities of psychologists in special education schools, a scale was developed consisted on 30 items. The participants were required to respond on a 5 points Likert scale.

Step Two: Pilot testing

The scale was pilot tested on a sample of 15 psychologists and 15 special education teachers working in different government and private schools and centers of special education in Lahore.

Step Three: Field study of the Scale

A list of 300 schools and centres of special education both in public and private sector all over Punjab was taken from the directorate of special education. A scale was posted to all the psychologists working in those schools and centres. Only 70 psychologists were responded. The researcher collected data from special education teachers and few psychologists by personal visits.

Step Four: Development of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

On the basis of the collected information a standard operating procedure (SOP) was developed to specify the roles and responsibilities of the psychologists working in special education schools and centers.

Step Five: Validation of the Standard Operating Procedure

After the development of standard operating procedure 5 experts were selected from the relevant fields and the validation process of standard operating procedure was done.