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Administrative Problems & Patterns of Correctional Psychology Departments in Canada ¹

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Abstract

Administrative problems and patterns of correctional psychology departments in Canada were surveyed. In addition, to comparing the results of the two major employers of correctional psychologists in Canada, a comparison was made with existing data gathered on psychology departments in mental health settings.

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ACQUISITIONS

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Within recent years psychologists' involvement in the area of corrections has increased to the point where they are contributing meaningfully in a variety of ways (cf. Brodsky, 1972; Wicks, 1974). One index of how psychology will develop in the field will be reflected in the structures of psychologists departments and their perceptions of the problems encountered. While such information exists for psychologists in the "mental health" field (Wildman & Wildman, II, 1974), with isolated exceptions (E.g., Gendreau, 1976) there has been no documentation of the administrative problems and patterns of correctional psychology departments.

This study surveys the functioning of psychology departments in corrections in Canada. The questionnaire was that of Wildman & Wildman, II (1974) thus affording a comparison of the results obtained with theirs. This comparison was made as it is often remarked that the work environment of correctional psychologists pose more difficulties than others e.g., schools, hospitals. Also of interest in Canada is that Federal institutions, compared to Provincial ones, generally have more security and security problems, handle longer sentences (2 years or more) and usually house inmates who have lengthier criminal histories. Thus, a comparison was made between psychology administrations in these two contrasting correctional systems.

METHOD

The survey methods were similar to those reported previously (Gendreau, 1975). For each province the request for information was channelled through the appropriate Ministerial authority. For the Federal system the Chairman of the Psychology group of the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada was contacted. The survey was initiated during April of 1976.

For the purposes of this survey questions #1 and 21 of Wildman & Wildman II (1974) questionnaire were revised, #20 was eliminated, and 2 of 5 items of question #5 were eliminated. The response rate was 100% from the Federal system and 5 provinces. One province did not reply while 5 provinces either were just developing psychological services at the time of the survey or did not have any psychologists employed in their correctional systems.

RESULTS

The sample consisted of 13 psychology administrators from Ontario, 20 from the Federal system and one each from British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. (The percentage of respondents answering each item of each question (with the exception of #2) were recorded. The sample size for each question was 37.) As it turned out only the Ontario system organized their departments on a Chief Psychologist format thus many respondents found #3 - 4 difficult to answer. Questions #6 - 7 then, are a more accurate reflection of departmental administration and decision making.

Questionnaire Data

1. What is your official title?

Director of the Department	3%
Chief Psychologist	22%
Senior Psychologist	16%
Coordinator	3%
Other	56%

2. Please check the number of personnel in the psychology department (total n recorded).

Psychologists, Ph.D.	31
M.A.	52
B.A./Hons. B.A.	11
Interns	11
Other	6

3. How is your department administered?

Line authority over all psychology personnel by the Chief Psychologist	22%
Line authority over some psychology personnel and functional authority over others	11%
Chief psychologist exercises functional authority over psychology personnel	14%
Chief psychologist has practically no authority -- serves as consultant and/or coordinator	19%
Other	34%

4. How are the decisions made in your department?

Made by Chief Psychologist	18%
Made by Chief Psychologist after considerable discussion with staff	34%
Made by a committee composed of staff members who vote	14%
Other	34%

5. What are the financial arrangements within the Department?

Central budget for all personnel and operating expenses	19%
Central budget for some items and other items are budgeted to units or other sections of institution	33%
No central budget -- All funds handled through other units or central office of institution	42%
Other	6%

6. What percent of the administrative decisions (General non-professional questions such as work hours, meetings, budgeting etc.) affecting the functioning of psychology personnel at your institution are made by psychologists?

0% by Psychologists, 100% by Non-Psychologists	17%
25% by Psychologists, 75% by Non-Psychologists	36%
50% by Psychologists, 50% by Non-Psychologists	8%
75% by Psychologists, 25% by Non-Psychologists	33%
100% by Psychologists, 0% by Non-Psychologists	6%

7. What percentage of the professional decisions affecting the functioning of psychology personnel at your institution (decisions dictating the manner in which a psychologist practices psychology) are made by psychologists?

0% by Psychologists, 100% by Non-Psychologists	2%
25% by Psychologists, 75% by Non-Psychologists	2%
50% by Psychologists, 50% by Non-Psychologists	14%
75% by Psychologists, 25% by Non-Psychologists	44%
100% by Psychologists, 0% by Non-Psychologists	38%

8. To what extent do you feel that the efforts of your department are appreciated and valued by management and other professionals at your institution?

More than those of other professions	49%
About the same as those of most professions	38%
Less than those of most other professions	13%

9. To what extent do you agree that the administrator of the department will necessarily be subjected to hostility and criticism from staff members and management and that he runs a high risk of eventually being disposed?

Strongly Agree	0%
Agree	12%
No Position or Undecided	38%
Disagree	29%
Strongly Disagree	21%

10. Do you think psychology departments should have a chief psychologist who has line authority over all psychology personnel?

Yes	68%
No	22%
Uncertain	10%

11. Do you think psychology departments should have a central budget and control all expenditures in regard to personnel and other operating expenses?

Yes	75%
No	19%
Uncertain	6%

12. How should decisions be made in a psychology department?

Made by a Chief Psychologist	3%
Made by Chief Psychologist after considerable discussion with staff members	76%
Made by a committee composed of voting staff members	16%
Other	5%

13. Do you think psychology departments should have more influence in making non-professional decisions at your institution?

Yes
No
Uncertain

59%
32%
9%

14. Do you think psychology departments should make all the decisions affecting how psychologists practice psychology?

Yes
No
Uncertain

70%
27%
3%

15. Does management in your setting want a strong centralized psychology department, or would they prefer one that is not too strong and decentralized?

Weak, decentralized
Strong, centralized
Neither strong nor weak

27%
24%
49%

16. Is it possible that in many cases management may use decentralization (where the budgeting for and/or authority over psychology personnel resides in units or sections directed by non-psychologists) as a means of making psychology less effective and less of a threat?

Yes
No
Uncertain

59%
24%
17%

17. Is it probable that most psychology departments have one or several individuals who want to take over control of the department and would do so if they could get away with it?

Yes
No
Uncertain

27%
41%
32%

18. Is it quite possible that management might team up with several unhappy staff members because then each group could achieve its goal by working together against the administrator of the department?

Yes
No
Uncertain

23%
34%
43%

19. Would it be good to have administrators of psychology departments protected by a Professional Standards Committee that would specify how psychology departments would operate; whether or not the chief psychologist would have line authority over psychology personnel, whether there should be central budgeting, how decisions would be made, and to protect the chief psychologist against poor support from management and from difficult and calculating staff members?

Yes	59%
No	30%
Uncertain	11%

20. To what extent do you feel that psychology can make a greater contribution in corrections than any other profession?

Strongly Agree	44%
Agree	36%
Uncertain	11%
Disagree	9%
Strongly Disagree	0%

21. This item asked for a ranking of factors that "hinder" the progress of psychology at your institution". Table I lists these factors most frequently mentioned. As most respondents ranked only a few factors an overall average ranking for each factor was not tabulated. It should be noted, however, that the factors most frequently nominated tended also to be the highest ranked by each respondent. For example "inadequate number of personnel" was listed by 72% of the respondents and in most lists was usually ranked as the first or second most serious problem.

-- Insert Table I about here --

A Comparison of Federal & Ontario Psychology Departments

The great majority of psychology departments in corrections in Canada are in the Ontario provincial system or under Federal jurisdiction (89%). Fifty-four percent of the psychology department administrators in Ontario are Chief Psychologists some of whom have Regional responsibilities.

The remaining administrators are Consultant Psychologists or Psychometrists in small institutions. In the near future all psychology department administrators will be under Regional Chief Psychologists. Ten percent of the Federal psychologist administrators carry the title of Chief Psychologist and 15% carry the designation "Senior" psychologist. The majority of Federal psychology administrations (75%) are either run on a committee consensus system or by Directors of Socialization who are usually not psychologists. Forty-one percent of the psychology staff in Ontario have Ph.Ds compared to 15% Federally. While 69% of Ontario respondents reported no control over budgets, 70% of Federal administrators claimed at least partial to full control. Furthermore more Federal psychologists felt they should have complete control (#11) of budgets (84% vs. 69%).

There was unanimity among Ontario psychologists for having Chief Psychologists with line authority over psychology staff (#10, 12). Only 50% of the Federal people wanted a Chief Psychologist format and 40% opted for other decision making processes i.e., staff consensus.

Interestingly, more Federal psychology administrators reported (#16) that management used decentralization to make psychology less effective (75% vs. 38%) and have discipline problems within their departments (#17, 30% vs. 15%).

Slightly more (62% vs. 50%) Ontario respondents felt the need for a Professional Standards Committee (#19) while Federal respondents were more in favour of psychologists making all the decisions affecting the practice of psychology (#14, 80% vs. 54%) and were more positive about psychology making a greater contribution (#20, 50% vs. 38%).

Ontario and Federal respondents agreed on most of the problems hindering the progress of psychology at their institutions (Table I). There were three exceptions. Federal respondents mentioned custodial (65% vs. 46%) and medical (50% vs. 15%) domination as more of a problem and the inadequate training of psychologists as less of a problem (20% vs. 46%).

Discussion

In 1967 a survey of psychology in Canada (Appley & Rickwood, 1967) made no mention of psychologists in the field of corrections. By 1970, however, there were 47 full-time psychology staff in corrections (Norton, 1970). As this survey indicates the number of correctional psychologists has increased considerably.

At present the Ontario and Federal systems offer an interesting comparison of psychological administrative styles. The Federal system eschews the typical Chief Psychologist format commonly found in mental health settings. As expected Federal respondents reported problems with custodial regulations but also medical domination (cf. Botterell, 1974, p. 18). Nevertheless their reported administrative authority over administrative and professional decisions compared favourably with their Ontario colleagues. In fact, they claimed to have more budgetary control. Federal psychologists were divided on whether they should opt for a Chief Psychologist format. The relative decentralization of Federal psychologists authority may partially contribute to internal departmental problems (#16-17) reported by Federal respondents. Ontario Chief Psychologists are in the fortunate position of reporting few problems in regard to custodial and medical domination. This is likely due to the type of resident they receive and the fact that Ontario corrections has avoided the stereotypical medical model approach (e.g., Balch, 1975) of service delivery.

As noted previously correctional work has often been perceived unfavourably in contrast to, for example, employment in mental health related settings. Wildman & Wildman II (1974) have provided normative data on administrative problems of psychology departments in mental health settings. A rough comparison between this studies results and Wildman & Wildman's deserves comment. In corrections psychologists have to contend with custodial restrictions. In some settings the medical model posed a problem but not to the extent noted by mental health respondents. Interestingly enough, a greater percentage of the Wildman respondents reported more problems (see Table I) in the areas of "insufficient authority for psychology", "lack of unity", "lack of good departmental control", "rebellious staff" and "other disciplines". The above may be in part due to the problems inherent in administering large departments where decentralization may adversely affect communication and administrative authority (Wildman & Wildman II, 1974). In this survey median correctional department was 4 staff, the Wildman survey reported a median of 11.

Indeed, correctional psychologists reported some optimism as they felt they could make a stronger contribution (#20, 80% vs 60%) and were appreciated more by management (#8, 49% vs 32%) than the Wildman respondents. They seemed to be more satisfied with their salaries and with the public relations and education for psychology in their settings (Table I). Whether they are justified in holding these opinions is beyond the scope of this survey, in summary, however, correctional psychology in Canada appears to be growing and to date correctional psychology administrators report having quite adequate authority over its practice (#6.7).

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Footnotes

1. The survey was carried out by the author while serving on the Committee on Psychology within Criminal Justice, Canadian Psychological Association, 1976.

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2. Reprint requests addressed to Paul Gendreau, Regional Chief Psychologist, Rideau Correctional Centre, Box 100, Burritt's Rapids, Ont.

Table I

Listing of factors that psychology administrators nominated that "hindered the progress of psychology at your institution"

Factor	% Mentioned	a)
Inadequate number of personnel	72%	(58%)
Inadequate budget	59%	(58%)
Custodial domination	51%	(NA)
Lack of understanding of the value of psychology	49%	(47%)
Medical domination	38%	(64%)
Inadequate training of psychologists	32%	(41%)
Insufficient authority for psychology personnel	30%	(48%)
Not enough scientifically valid assessment & treatment technique	24%	(40%)
Lack of unity among psychology staff	14%	(44%)
Other	14%	(9%) ^b
Lack of good control over department	11%	(37%)
Poor salaries	8%	(48%)
Rebellious staff members	8%	(46%) ^c
Petty regulations	8%	(NA)
Other disciplines at the institution	5%	(40%)
Not enough public relations & public education for psychology	5%	(42%)

a) the percentages in this column were taken from Table 2 of Wildman & Wildman II (1974) by dividing the number of respondents (222) by the number of times a factor was listed as a problem.

b) calculated from footnote #2, Table I of Wildman & Wildman II (1974).

c) calculated from Table I of Wildman & Wildman II (1974).

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