

WOJCIECH ORONOWICZ

SHARING PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS WITH NON-PSYCHOLOGISTS – ETHICAL AND PROFESSIONAL ASPECTS*

Abstract. The problem of sharing psychological tests with non-psychologists concerns the sharing of chosen psychological tools with people without full psychological education. An analysis of the principles of sharing psychological tests was attempted. The Workgroup of Psychological Tests of The Polish Psychological Association (Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych Polskiego Towarzystwa Psychologicznego) makes psychological tools available in 4 categories, each of which includes various psychological tests. The issues of concern are the platform “Epsilon,” which has been recently introduced by The Workgroup of Psychological Tests, a training program, which is supposed to endorse the basics of psychometrics, or the possibility to access psychological tests from the category “for psychologists only,” given to people with a “doctor of psychology” degree. It is necessary to discuss the subject of the use of psychological tests by people without adequate psychological education. Easy access to the tests by non-psychologists can be harmful to the prestige of the psychological profession.

Key words: psychological tests; ethical principles of psychologists; psychometrics

INTRODUCTION

A psychological test is a measuring tool that may supply useful data, but using the wrong test may lead to erroneous, socially harmful decisions.¹ For

Wojciech Oronowicz – a psychology student at the Institute of Psychology of the Jagiellonian University in Krakow; e-mail: wojciech.oronowicz@snps.pl

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¹ Elżbieta Hornowska, *Testy psychologiczne: Teoria i praktyka* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2003), 21.

this reason it is worth paying special attention to the level of knowledge and the skills that the people who use psychological tests have.

Controversies are aroused if people who do not have detailed knowledge of psychology and psychometrics use psychological tools. As Brzeziński remarks:²

[...] a psychologist, if he does not want to fulfill only the function of somebody who uses a test (speaking more precisely, something that maybe only skillfully imitates a real test) like a pupil who nicely reads a text in a foreign language without understanding it, has to explore not only the theoretical foundations (what is meant here is the psychological theory) that determine if the test has a scientific value, but also its model (psychometric) assumptions and the resulting limitations as far as the qualitative (statistical) interpretation of the test score is concerned.

A psychologist should consciously select psychological tools for a certain diagnostic problem, which means that he should know well the given psychological tool and its connections with psychological and psychometric theory.³ A reliable use of a psychological tool requires proper psychological knowledge; and it is not enough to know theoretical foundations of the studied phenomenon, but one also has to have the knowledge about psychometrics and methodology that will enable him to evaluate the quality of the tool independently and critically. The ability to evaluate the criteria of psychological tests – that include objectivity, standardization, reliability, validity and test norms⁴ – and observing the ethical questions are especially important.

For many years psychological tools were used by psychologists only, however, recently also non-psychologists were granted the permission to use some of them. The question of sharing tests with non-psychologists was first raised in the debate on the use of them only in business. The debate was connected with the suggestion that proper certification should be introduced with levels for different users of the tests, which would also include non-psychologists. Then the debate developed towards sharing psychological tests with people without education in psychology also outside business, which has led to the present situation in which selected psychological tests are shared with non-psychologists.

It is possible that the first conference lecture on the question of sharing psychological tests with people who are not psychologists was given in May

² Jerzy Brzeziński, "Aktualność klasycznych tekstów z psychometrii dla metodologicznej i etycznej poprawności praktyki diagnostycznej odwołującej się do wyników testów psychologicznych," in *Trafność i rzetelność testów psychologicznych. Wybór tekstów*, Jerzy Brzeziński (ed.) (Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 2005), 19.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Cf. Jerzy Brzeziński, *Wybrane zagadnienia z psychometrii i diagnostyki psychologicznej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 1984).

2014 at an Academic Conference of the Polish Psychological Association.⁵ The lecture was summarized in “Biuletyn Oddziału Krakowskiego Polskiego Towarzystwa Psychologicznego.”⁶

The lecturer [W. Oronowicz] discussed the present state of the accessibility of tests, the problem of the accessibility of some of them, he described selected training courses making it possible to purchase and to apply particular tests, and cited arguments for and against sharing psychological tests with non-psychologists against the background of the obliging ethical principles. This lecture was a contribution to a debate that was held by the Clinical Psychology Department KLIPS of the Scientific Circle of Psychology Students of the Jagiellonian University. After a stormy debate unofficial talks about psychological tests were still going on for a long time. Psychologists practicing their profession, academics as well as representatives of the Chief Management of the PPA and the Workgroup of Psychological Tests of the PPA took part in them.

However, it should be noted that the debate on sharing psychological tools was not held only in private.

In the issue of sharing psychological tools with non-psychologists one of the four positions may be taken:

1. All psychological tests should be available to the public. It is a position which practically means that no restrictions are put on propagating the tests.
2. Some psychological tests should be reserved for psychologists only, some may be made available to a definite group of people (who will take additional courses), and the remaining part may be available to a definite group without additional courses. This is a position that seems to be taken by the Workgroup of Psychological Tests of the PPA.
3. Some psychological tests should be reserved for psychologists only, and the remaining ones may be made available to a definite group of people who will take additional courses.
4. All psychological tests should be available to psychologists only.

1. CONDITIONS FOR SHARING PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS

At present the Workgroup of Psychological Tests of the PPA shares psychological tools dividing them into 4 categories: A, B1, B2 and C.⁷ To make

⁵ Wojciech Oronowicz, “Udostępnianie testów psychologicznych dla osób niebędących psychologami w świetle norm etycznych,” *Academic Conference of the Polish Psychological Association „Legal Aspects of Practicing the Profession of a Psychologist”*, Krakow, May 2014.

⁶ Anna Szuta, “Report on the PPA Conference „Legal Aspects of Practicing the Profession of a Psychologist”, Krakow, May 2014,” *Biuletyn Oddziału Krakowskiego Polskiego Towarzystwa Psychologicznego* 2014, 7.

the issue of sharing psychological tests with non-psychologists fully understandable particular categories have to be presented in detail with indicating the number of tests that belong to each category, and so must conditions that must be fulfilled in order to receive them:⁸

- A – for psychologists; for other professionals [...]
- B – for psychologists; for other professionals who have completed a course/ courses, with an additional division into:
 - B1 – tests that require completing a general course in psychometrics concluded with an exam [...]
 - B2 – tests that require completing a general course in psychometrics concluded with an exam, and then completing a course devoted to the particular test (or a group of similar tests) [...]
- C – for psychologists only [...].

Category A includes 44 psychological tests. Among them there are such tools as Courtauld Emotional Control Scale, Multidimensional Coping Inventory, Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale, Rokeach Value Survey, Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis II Personality Disorders (SCID-II) or Satisfaction With Life Scale. Category B1 includes 8 tests, and among them there are, among others, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale or Social Competencies Questionnaire. Category B2 includes 12 tests (among others Assessment of Intellectual Potential – 2, Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire INTE). Category C includes 51 tests shared with psychologists only.

As qualifications required for the access to category A the Workgroup of Psychological Tests of the Polish Psychological Association mentions the following conditions: „Completed university or postgraduate studies with the MA degree from departments that prepare the student to work with people (pedagogical, social and medical studies) – submitting a copy of the diploma is required. In the case of psychotherapists – any university studies, with submitting a copy of the diploma required.”

It is worth noting here that the term “completed university or postgraduate studies with the MA degree from departments that prepare the student to work with people (pedagogical, social and medical studies)” includes a very broad range of professions.

Availability of the tests to such a broad range of people may in practice lead to the use of psychological tools by representatives of many professions

⁷ The website of the Pracownia Testów Psychologicznych Polskiego Towarzystwa Psychologicznego (Workgroup of Psychological Tests of the Polish Psychological Association), www.practest.com.pl [accessed: 09.07.2015].

⁸ Ibid.

(the more so because also those who have completed postgraduate studies are mentioned here). In the directive issued by the Minister of Science and Higher Education on 8 August 2011 about the areas of knowledge, fields of science and art as well as about disciplines of science and art⁹ in the area of social sciences the following are mentioned:

- the domain of social sciences – including sciences dealing with security, the country's defences, media studies, studies of public policies, science of cognition and social communication, pedagogy, psychology, sociology;
- the domain of economy – including economy, finances, science of management, science of commodities;
- the domain of jurisprudence – including the studies of administration, law, canon law.

In the area of medical sciences and science of health the domain of medical sciences (medical biology, medicine, dentistry) are distinguished. Hence both a psychologist and someone who has completed a school of journalism, a graduate of state security department or of physical education may have access to any psychological tools belonging to Category A.

Also the recent modification of the conditions for access to the tests causes alarm. A possibility has been introduced of purchasing tests belonging to Category C (for psychologists only) by people who have the title of "doctor of psychology," and have not completed studies in psychology.¹⁰ In this case the people may purchase tests for research reasons only. In the author's opinion the assurance of the use of psychological tests for research aims only that is given by the purchaser does not seem sufficient. A doctor's degree in psychology can be earned by representatives of professions other than that of a psychologist, and this is why having a doctor's degree cannot be a sufficient condition for using psychological tests belonging to Category C. A doctor's degree in psychology is not equivalent to full psychological education that is obtained during the five-year-long studies completed with an M.A. degree. It is also worth noting that the term "doctor of psychology" used by the Workgroup of Psychological Tests of the PPA does not exist.

Also the platform "Epsilon" introduced recently arouses concern. With its agency it is possible to conduct computer examinations with the use of

⁹ Rozporządzenie Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego z dnia 8 sierpnia 2011 r. w sprawie obszarów wiedzy, dziedzin nauki i sztuki oraz dyscyplin naukowych i artystycznych (Order of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 8 August about the areas of knowledge, fields of science and art as well as about disciplines of science and art).

¹⁰ The website of the Workgroup of Psychological Tests of the Polish Psychological Association.

chosen psychological tests offered by the Workgroup of Psychological Tests.¹¹ Serious doubts are caused by the fact that neither reliability nor validity of any tool in its computer version has been tested. The Workgroup of Psychological Tests also gives the information that the “Epsilon” platform makes it possible to use the norms worked out for the test in the version “paper-and-pencil,” however, a justification for this is not given. A change of the “paper-and-pen” version to a computer version is a significant interference with the standardization of the tool. As Hornowska remarks:¹² “Let us emphasize it: any departure from the standard conditions of the testing that are described in the test manual causes that the testing is no longer a testing!”

2. TRAINING IN THE FOUNDATIONS OF PSYCHOMETRICS FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT PSYCHOLOGISTS

A training called “The rudiments of psychometrics for people who are not psychologists” raises serious doubts. The training lasts for two days, includes 11 hours of classes (with two lunch breaks) and is concluded with a two-hour written exam.¹³ The training covers, among other ones, the issues of reliability, validity, the procedure of administering the test or ethical and legal aspects of using tests. The training comprises basic questions that are indispensable for using tests, but the time devoted to them does not seem to be sufficient. The curriculum of psychological studies provides for much more time for the problems of psychometrics.

A two-day training concluded with an exam in the rudiments of psychometrics along with a diploma certifying completion of university or post-graduate studies in pedagogical, social or medical sciences with an M.A. degree is, according to the Workgroup of Psychological Tests PPA, a sufficient condition for recognizing a person as competent to conduct Category B1 psychological tests. It should be stressed that psychological tools are always based on theoretical foundations that a student learns during his five-year studies. The curricula of psychological studies provide for hundreds of hours of methodology and psychometrics classes. Can this be substituted with an eleven-hour training? Is a selective training really sufficient to teach

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Hornowska, *Testy psychologiczne*, 27.

¹³ The website of the Workgroup of Psychological Tests of the PPA.

one to responsibly administer tests – or perhaps holistic psychological knowledge concerning the psychological functioning of a man is necessary?

3. ETHICAL PROBLEMS OF SHARING PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS WITH NON-PSYCHOLOGISTS

The fact that the ethical-professional code of the Polish Psychological Association does not apply to non-psychologists seems to be an important problem. On the other hand, the Workgroup of Psychological Tests of the PPA requires that before the first purchase of psychological tools (no matter if the purchaser is a psychologist or not) the client signs the following “client’s declaration:”

I hereby declare that I have the necessary qualifications to use the tests that I am purchasing from the Workgroup of Psychological Tests of the Polish Psychological Association, according to the rules described in the Standards for tests used in psychology and pedagogy (GWP, 2007) and in the ITC Guidelines on Test Use (www.practest.com.pl).

“I commit myself to observe the basic rules concerning protection of the test that are listed below:

1. Not to disclose the questions/test tasks to subjects before the start of the test, or to any other people who are not entitled to use the tests.
2. To keep the test materials in such a way that will not let unauthorized people have access to them.
3. Not to sell or lend test materials to unauthorized people or organizations.
4. To observe the copyright with respect to test materials, that is not to copy the test sheets or booklets, keys or handbooks, and also not to modify tests without prior editor’s consent.”

A written commitment (preceded by a declaration that one is a person with sufficient qualifications) does not seem to guarantee a proper use of psychological tools. The above declaration proves, in my opinion, that the Workgroup of Psychological Tests of the PPA does not attach great significance to ethical questions.

It should also be considered if sharing psychological tests with non-psychologists is not in conflict with ethical principles.

Art. 2. of the Psychologist’s Professional Code of Ethics published by the Polish Psychological Association reads:¹⁴ “Psychologists are aware of the special responsibility resulting from the character of their profession. They

¹⁴ *Kodeks etyczno-zawodowy psychologa*, Polskie Towarzystwo Psychologiczne 1991, www.ptp.org.pl [accessed: 10.04.2015].

should know the limits of their competences and they do not undertake tasks exceeding their abilities. They make efforts to secure possibly the highest level of their work.”

If a psychologist is really aware of the special responsibility resulting from the character of his profession as one of public trust, can he at the same time agree to the use of psychological tools by people who do not have specialist knowledge?

Art. 12 of the Psychologist’s Professional Code of Ethics published by the Polish Psychological Association reads:¹⁵ “Psychologists show constant care for the prestige and level of their profession. They do not share special techniques of psychological diagnosis with people who are not prepared to use them competently. Psychologists oppose the undertaking of work in the field of psychology, and especially the use of special diagnostic and therapeutic techniques by people who do not have the psychological qualifications.”

A possibility to purchase psychological tools that non-psychologists have remains, in my opinion, in contradiction to the article that is presented above.

Art. 48 of the Psychologist’s Professional Code of Ethics published by the Polish Psychological Association¹⁶: “Psychologists do not provide any fragmentary trainings for non-psychologists in the scope of functions and work requiring a full education and qualifications of a psychologist.”

If we do not recognize a two-day training in the basics of psychometrics as a fragmentary training, in my opinion it will be difficult to find a more obvious example of such a case. From the evidence presented earlier it directly issues that a general training in psychometrics is provided to non-psychologists and leads to fulfilling by non-psychologists the functions and to doing the work that require psychological qualifications.

Rule 8f of the Psychotherapist’s Code of Ethics should be also quoted:¹⁷ “Psychotherapists do not promote the use of psychotherapeutic or psychological diagnostic techniques by people without adequate training and adequate qualifications.”

Sharing psychological tools that make it possible to make a diagnosis with people who do not have a full psychological education is not in accordance with the above rule.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ *Kodeks zasad etycznych psychoterapeuty*, Komisja Etyki Sekcji Psychoterapii Polskiego Towarzystwa Psychologicznego 2007, www.psychiatria.pl [accessed: 10.04.2015].

4. THE CONSEQUENCES OF SHARING PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTS WITH NON-PSYCHOLOGISTS

Supporters of the opinion that psychological tools should be shared with non-psychologists may argue that part of the tests are recommended for the use by various professional groups (not only by psychologists) by the very authors of particular tools, and they there is no reason to put a limit to sharing them. However, it has to be noted that the problem becomes more complicated if a certain tool serves making a diagnose or issuing certificates.

Sharing psychological tests with people who are not psychologists is reduced to acting only in the interest of professional groups other than psychologists. Such acts certainly do not serve well the professional circle of psychologists. It has to be added that the reasons for providing additional training in the scope of work done by psychologists to other professional groups are not known.

Sharing tests with other professional groups leads to lowering the prestige of the psychologist's profession. If psychologists are deprived of the right to the exclusive use of their working tools it has an unfavorable influence on the profession's image and reputation.

The development of the situation in the present direction may lead to deterioration of the situation on the work market, especially for young psychologists. If we provide trainings for other professional groups in the scope of work done by psychologists we deprave professionals of jobs. The phenomenon of substituting psychologists in their work may occur. The situation also leads to a harmful mixing of professional competences.

The question of maintaining a psychologist's professional secrecy is not meaningless; psychology students are sensitized to it, and Art. 21 of the Psychologist's Professional Code of Ethics of the Polish Psychological Association¹⁸ emphasizes it. Having psychological tools in their disposal may lead non-psychologists to achieving confidential and private information about their clients; and they do not have the proper knowledge about the principles of the doctor-patient privilege. The question of the profession of the psychologist's privilege is discussed in detail by, among others, M. Stepulak.¹⁹

¹⁸ *Kodeks etyczno-zawodowy psychologa.*

¹⁹ Marian Z. Stepulak, *Tajemnica zawodowa psychologa* (Lublin: Wyższa Szkoła Ekonomii i Innowacji w Lublinie, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The changes in the conditions of sharing psychological tools that have been observed in the recent few years may cause – in the author’s opinion – a lowering in the prestige of the profession of the psychologist. The actions aiming at abolishing limitations to the access to psychological tools go in the direction that is harmful for the profession and they seem only advantageous for other professional groups. A debate should be started over the use of psychological tests by people who do not have an adequate psychological education.

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