THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

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The Establishment of the Academic Disciple of Psychology in the Republic of Ireland

Although psychology has only recently become an independent field of study in Ireland, scholarship in the subject can be traced back to the early Christian era when philosophical studies flourished in Irish centres of learning (Brady, 1990; Brady & McLoone, 1992; Brock, 2012; McKenna, 1986). In Ireland, as in Britain and elsewhere, psychology was seen as a philosophical discipline for many years. The word psychology first appeared in the title of an Irish academic post in 1909 when a Chair of Logic and Psychology was instituted at University College Dublin (UCD) in the newly-founded National University of Ireland. In 1947 Queen’s University Belfast launched the first psychology degree programme on the island of Ireland. Eleven years later in 1958 the UCD Diploma in Psychology (known as the UCD Dip Psych) was established by Eamonn Fechín O’Doherty (1918-1998). O’Doherty, a Catholic priest, had completed his PhD in psychology with Frederic Bartlett (1886-1969) at Cambridge. It included academic coursework, research, and a clinical placement. A distinctive feature of the programme was its Catholic ethos. The programme was open to honours graduates from other areas who brought to the course the experience gained in their various professions including teaching, medicine, social science, science and
engineering. This ensured that the first psychologists graduating in Ireland, who would be responsible for setting up and developing the clinical psychological services throughout the county, would be mature and experienced people.

In the decade following the founding of the UCD Dip Psych, undergraduate courses in psychology were established at UCD, Trinity College Dublin (TCD), University College Cork and the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG). Some of the staff in these departments had completed psychology degrees in the UK and North America. British and North American psychology has had a major impact on the development of academic and clinical psychology in Ireland. In 1999 an undergraduate programme was set up by the newly established psychology department at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. In 2007 a psychology department was established at the University of Limerick (UL) and an honours undergraduate degree in psychology was first offered in 2009. All six universities offered honours degrees programmes which conferred eligibility for graduate memberships of the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) and the British Psychological Society (BPS). Many graduates of these programmes aspired to work as professional clinical psychologists. Until clinical psychology training programmes became established in Ireland in the 1980s, and the profession became better regulated in the 1990s, an apprenticeship model dominated the field. Individuals with a primary degree in psychology took up positions within the Irish public health service, and learned their profession though practice and consultation with peers and senior colleagues.

The Development of Clinical Psychology in the Republic of Ireland

The Irish public health service, from the foundation of the state in 1922, was distinctive insofar as some services were offered by state-run facilities, while others were offered by
voluntary organizations established by predominantly Catholic religious orders, and in which professional posts were partly or wholly state-funded. Such organizations, which provided services for children and adults with intellectual disabilities and mental health problems, led the way in establishing clinical psychology services. They had a distinctive Catholic ethos. The first clinical psychological service was established in Dublin in 1955, by Dr Jock McKenna (1919-1998), a Scotsman, at the Saint John of God Child Guidance Clinic in Rathgar (McKenna, 1982, 1986). The impetus for this development came from the Irish Government and the World Health Organization, not from universities, since academic psychology departments had not yet been established. In the late 1950s a link was established between the UCD Psychology Department and the Saint John of God Child Guidance Clinic which provided clinical placements for UCD Dip Psych students.

From the mid-1950s onwards most clinical psychology posts were established first in child guidance clinics (McKenna, 1982, 1986) and intellectual disability services (McLoone, 1982), and later in adult mental health services. This progression from child and disability service to adult mental health services was in part due to resistance or opposition to the development of clinical psychology by elements within the hierarchy of the Catholic Church and the profession of adult psychiatry (Brock, 2013). Beginning in the late 1980s other specialisms such as clinical psychology and child protection, the clinical psychology of older adulthood, clinical neuropsychology, clinical health psychology, paediatric psychology, and clinical psycho-oncology began to develop. In the early years of the profession psychologists were primarily engaged in carrying out psychological assessments. However the role of clinical psychologists subsequently evolved dramatically (Carr, 2000). In Ireland in the first decades of the 21st century, clinical psychologists work with all age groups, are employed in many different settings and undertake a wide range of functions, including a variety of assessment and intervention procedures, consultancy, and research (Carr, 2012). Since the mid-1950s in
the Irish public health service, the career structure for clinical psychologists included trainee, basic, senior, principal and director grades. This career structure was modelled on a system developed in the UK. Assistant psychologist posts were first piloted in the Republic of Ireland in 2013.

From 2002, the growth of the clinical psychology workforce in the Irish public health service has been documented in a series of reports produced by the Heads of Psychology Services in Ireland (Kelly, Byrne, & Faherty, 2012). In 2002 there were 375 whole time equivalent clinical psychologists in the Irish public health service. By 2011 this figure had almost doubled, and risen to 710. This growth reflected the strong emphasis on developing psychology services in the Irish government’s 2006 mental health policy document – A Vision for Change - and the establishment of new clinical psychology training programmes at NUIG and UL.

Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI)

PSI was established in 1970 by a group of 96 psychologists at the Mater Hospital in Dublin (McHugh & McLoone, 1980; Swan, 2013). An academic journal - The Irish Journal of Psychology - and a newsletter – The Irish Psychologist – were first published by PSI in 1971 and 1974 respectively. The PSI Division of Clinical Psychology was established in 1979. This was preceded in 1975 by the PSI Policy Statement on Psychology in the Service of Health which set out parameters for the development of a clinical psychology service within the Irish public health service. The document includes sections on the functions of psychologists, the organisation and staffing of psychological services and on the qualification and training of clinical psychologists. The establishment of formal University-based courses in clinical psychology was strongly advocated. At the time, no such formal courses were
available in Ireland. However, some public health service units had begun to sponsor psychologists to complete clinical psychology courses in the UK, notably in Scotland.

PSI published a range of policy documents relevant to clinical psychology notably - Guidelines for the Employment of Psychologists in the Health Sector - in 1998. A revised version of this document was accepted by the Irish Department of Health in 2000, when PSI became recognized as the body for scrutiny of clinical psychology qualifications from candidates trained outside Ireland. In 2006 the Irish health and social care professionals act was introduced. This marked the beginning of an Irish government initiative to introduce statutory registration for clinical psychologists. In 2014, negotiations between PSI and CORU (the government body overseeing statutory registration) about this issue are ongoing.

Training in Clinical Psychology in the Republic of Ireland

Since the 1950s small numbers of Irish psychologists have obtained their clinical training abroad, mainly in the UK or North America. It was not until the late 1970s that accredited professional training programmes were first established. There have been two diploma courses in clinical psychology in the Republic of Ireland. A BPS diploma in clinical psychology training scheme, was set up with clinical placements offered by the public health service in the Dublin area (known then as the Eastern Health Board) and the academic teaching based in the TCD Psychology Department, under the direction of Sheila Green at TCD and Maureen Gaffney in the Eastern Health Board. This ran from 1978 until the 1990s. The PSI Diploma in Clinical Psychology, which was modelled on the BPS diploma, was established in 1991 and ran until 2007. Placement rotations were developed in the Irish public health service in some regions. Between 1997 and 2007 the University of Ulster offered taught modules to cover the academic elements of the PSI Diploma, through an MSc programme directed by Roger Woodward.
Four university-based accredited professional training programmes were established in the Republic of Ireland between 1977 and 2004 at UCD, TCD, NUIG and UL. The UCD masters programme in clinical psychology was established in 1977 under the direction of Therese Brady, and a similar programme was set up at TCD in 1992 under the direction of Maureen Gaffney. Both were accredited by PSI and BPS. In 1997 the UCD and TCD 2-year masters programmes were converted to 3-year doctorates in clinical psychology, under the direction of Alan Carr at UCD and Maureen Gaffney at TCD. Similar doctoral programmes were established at NUIG in 2003, under the direction of Brian Maguire, and UL in 2004, under the direction of Patrick Ryan. Both were accredited by PSI. All four of these programmes were based on the UK clinical psychology training model. They involved a research thesis, academic tuition and placements of supervised clinical practice. Tuition and placements spanned a range of populations including child and adult mental health, disability and other specialisms. In the late 1990s Kevin Tierney became academic Director of the TCD programme and Sinead Fitzgerald, the clinical director

Publications
Active research programmes in topics relevant to clinical psychology have been conducted at all universities in the Republic of Ireland since the 1970s, although the volume of publications increased markedly the 1990s, especially following the establishment of the four doctoral programmes in clinical psychology. A variety of clinical psychology text books have been produced in the Republic of Ireland, notably the UCD handbooks covering the child, and adult mental health and intellectual disability aspects of the doctoral curriculum (Carr, 1999, 2006; Carr & McNulty, 2006; Carr et al., 2007), a volume on clinical psychology and older adults (Ryan & Coughlan, 2011) and an introductory clinical psychology textbook for undergraduates (Carr, 2012).
The media

In Ireland clinical psychologists have had significant media presence in the newspapers, on local and national radio, on TV and the internet. In the 1970s until his death on 1979, Ian Hart (1939-1979), a pioneering clinical psychologist, appeared on many Irish TV programmes speaking mainly about his research and clinical work with juvenile delinquents and adolescent drug misuse. From the late 1980s until her death in 2011 Patricia Redlich was a practicing clinical psychologist, columnist, and ‘agony aunt’ with the Irish Independent, a national newspaper. Maureen Gaffney, who was director of the TCD clinical psychology programme for much of the 1990s, regularly broadcast on national radio and television speaking on a range of issues. Tony Bates and Marie Murray, both of whom directed various clinical psychology and mental health services in the 90s and the new millennium were regular columnists with the Irish Times and published books on aspects of clinical psychology for a public audience. David Coleman and Eddy Murphy, both graduates of the UCD clinical psychology training programme, were central to very popular TV series in the new millennium. Eddy contributed to a reality TV programme on weight reduction. David hosted a series of programmes on ‘wilderness therapy’ for adolescents and families, and a developmental psychology programme tracking the growth of a cohort of children in the 21st century. Gary O’Reilly, joint director of the UCD clinical psychology programme, developed an internet-based, computer assisted cognitive behaviour therapy assisted programme for adolescents called – Pesky Gnats - which became the most highly accessed eCBT programme for adolescents in the world.

Conclusion

In Ireland clinical psychology emerged in the mid-1950s as an integral part of the public health service for people with mental health problems and intellectual disability. The structure
of the profession and training system which evolved were based on the UK model. The number of clinical psychologists, the range of specialisms in which they work and roles that clinical psychologist fulfil have developed significantly especially during the 21st century. PSI, psychologists within the public health service, and the four clinical psychology training programmes have worked together to foster the growth of the profession. Clinical psychology research and textbooks have been published by Irish clinical psychologists, and they have also had significant media presence. Clinical psychologists also had a significant impact on major societal issues such as CSA. Statutory registration is the next major profession development on the horizon for the profession of clinical psychology in the Republic of Ireland.

References


