

PSYCHOTHERAPY IN GUATEMALA

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The professional requirement for the practice of psychotherapy in Guatemala is the university degree in psychology, the *Licenciatura*, which is equivalent to a Master's degree in the U.S.A. One who has obtained that degree is entitled to work professionally as a psychologist in whatever area of psychology he chooses, and is called *Licenciado*. While basically the status required to work in the professional field is *Licenciatura*, going on to get a doctoral degree means advantages in salary and position, and of course at the university level one needs a doctor's degree to teach at a pre-doctoral level.

The psychologists who have chosen the clinical field describe themselves as clinical psychologists, counselors, and therapists. The difference in the way they describe themselves is due not only to the kind of therapeutic methods they use, but also to the fact that they do not have a clear view of each method and adequate experience in applying whatever psychological school is followed. They work with the knowledge they have acquired through books and through a little academic experience at the University. There are no pre-doctoral training facilities with which to learn to be a clinician. People do the best they can. There is, however, a trend toward major changes in undergraduate training at the State University. It is based on an integrated method, learning by Units, with active participation of the students in both planning and learning, with the teachers as orienters.

There is no psychiatric training program in Guatemala either; doctors who want to go into that field have to go to other countries for training. Physicians have, however, a lot of help gaining such training, especially economic help. Such help is not available in other fields, including psychology. For psychologists economic stipends are small and hard to get. As a consequence, psychologists are at a disadvantage in their relationship with psychiatrists. Psychiatrists have, however, become aware of the lack of training of psychologists in the clinical field, and they are trying to give supervision to psychologists who work with them.

The feeling of the psychologists is that the relation between the two is of friendly understanding. There is some idealization on the

part of psychologists, as might be expected of people who are so dependent on others for their training. Another disadvantage is that psychiatrists themselves lack the training to teach testing, a traditional responsibility of clinical psychology.

The public in general used to have the idea that psychologists treat only normal persons, and that psychiatrists treat the crazy ones. This is due to the medical background of doctors, and the somewhat dubious knowledge of what psychology is supposed to do. Some people think of psychological work as being much like the work of a witch doctor. Some colleagues, because of a lack of training, do give that impression. In general, at present people are seeking psychological help with the knowledge that in therapy psychologists do the same work that the psychiatrist does.

In the future, psychotherapy will seek a more dynamic and broad approach, with interest in group, family and the collectivity in general. Individual therapy is going to be employed only in those cases where no other alternative is left. More and more people are becoming conscious of a need to look for psychological help in overcoming environmental problems which cause them psychological pain and frustrations. Children's problems, particularly those of adolescents, are seen as a major area for psychological help. The current trend favors the development of a psychological view of life. The need for mental health is becoming almost an emergency in the minds of many. The objective is to make it available to all who need it, and not just to a few privileged ones who can pay for it. Mental hygiene or mental health orientation is considered a preventive method which all societies need so that they can function in a more healthy, humane and creative way. A less humanitarian possibility is that psychology may be used as an instrument of the establishment to bring about agreement and conformity.

Political, economic and cultural characteristics influence one another in a general cultural attitude to be found in "the underdeveloped countries" such as Guatemala. Most incomes are low. Thus, therapy is a luxury only sought when it is indispensable. Short-term treatment is most feasible. Some help is available in the state institutions, but these are few. A major one is the Hospital Neuropsiquiátrico de Guatemala. People go to this institution when problems have gotten out of hand and they are quite sick.

The government has no institutional provision for therapy treatment; for example, it is not deductible from income taxes as a professional service. A major reason for this is that there is such a great need for so many other services. Psychotherapy hasn't come to be seen as having high priority yet. We hope that in the future it will have more importance and that the government will provide funds and other aid to give people a chance to get psychological help.

We hope that society will come to understand this need for mental hygiene as basic to its better functioning.

Guatemalans are willing to accept relatives' problems and help cope with them without professional help. These problems are seen as inevitable, bad luck or God's will. Only when family members become psychotic do they feel the need for help.

In general many psychologists are discouraged because of their lack of training and consequently not having the skill they desire. We hope that in the future conditions will change either by having trained persons come to Guatemala to give them practical experience as well as theoretical learning, or that training facilities in other countries will be made more easily available. Nonetheless, psychologists make the best of what they know, and psychology is becoming more popular among people. It is an empirical sign of new consciousness when a society seeks preventive help. Psychologists are determined to try to supply such help.