

Work and Organizational Psychology in Albania

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Author biography

Valbona Treska completed her studies in clinical psychology in 2004 at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Tirana, Albania's capital city. Having gathered much experience counselling hundreds of couples in divorce, her PhD focused on the effects of divorce on children. She started her career as a psychologist working at one of the largest high schools in Albania; while at the same time acting as an expert psychologist in courts of all levels in the country. From 2011 she has been engaged as a lecturer in one of the non-public universities in Albania, both at bachelor and master's degree level. Since 2005, Mrs. Treska runs her own practice, and last year established Family; a center of psychological and legal services in Tirana. This is the first centre offering an interplay of psycho-legal services. In January, 2017 Mrs. Treska was elected as the first President of the Order of Psychologist in Albania for a four-year term.

Introduction

The Order of Psychologists in Albania (OPA) has applied to become a Constituent member of EAWOP at the next congress to be held in Torino, Italy, in May 2019 (see Figures 1 showing OPA's request for membership of EAWOP in 2018). OPA is one of the newest institutions established by law in Albania. There are about 800 members around the country. In order to be a member of the OPA, psychologists must have obtained the Bachelor's Degree, Master of Science's Degree or Professional Master's Degree (i.e., two study cycles in psychology or other equivalent studies in both scientific and professional disciplines). Further, individuals are required to have practiced the profession for one year under supervision, and to have successfully passed the state examination.

OPA's mission is to promote and to maintain high standards in the training and practice of the profession of psychology, as well as the protection of service users from the wrongful practice of psychology. In Albania since the profession of psychologist is regulated by law, no individual can practice psychology (in public or private organizations) without being a member of the OPA and having received the license for the individual practice of the profession issued by OPA.

Over the next pages I will introduce the practice of WOP in Albania, describing some of the issues the OPA is addressing.

Figure 1

OPA's presentation requesting membership to the Constituent Council of EAWOP, Turin 2018



Psychology in Albania before the establishment of OPA

Psychology in Albania started to take its first steps in the 1980s, but since the country was under the communist regime during those years, studies in this field were rather vague and characterised by the communist spirit; and were not contemporary. In 1996, a few years after the collapse of the communist regime, the Department of Psychology was established at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Tirana. After that, several other psychology departments opened in public and private universities. Since 1996, hundreds of students have completed their studies in psychology, but we do not know how many as the state authorities has never kept a nominal list (or database)

of psychology graduates over these years. This lack of information about the number of psychological undergraduates, along with their specialisation profile in the various areas of psychology, has led to the lack of clear policies on university curricula, particularly relating to masters and employment programmes, and the lack of impact on legal amendments for the implementation of the psychologist's role.

During these years there has been a lack of standardised assessment tools for psychologists, and for working protocols, as no clear definition of competence in certain disciplines of psychology. There have been sporadic trainings, and there has never been a Code of Ethics that sets standards of professional conduct. Everyone has made all possible efforts in the framework of the profession to generate financial income, without having a legal basis and a professional regulator. The rapid increase of the number of psychologists in the market and the need to regulate the profession led to the imperative of drafting special legislation and the establishment of the Order of Psychologists. The OPA was established by the Founding Assembly on 28 January 2017, based on a specific law (Law 40/2016 "On the Order of the Psychologist in the Republic of Albania", see Figures 2 and 3).

This law stipulates that in order to practice as a psychologist in the Republic of Albania, it is imperative to be a member of the OPA (i.e., to have completed Bachelor and Master's studies in psychology (both scientific and professional) and to have practiced the profession for one year under supervision, successfully passing the state examination).

Figure 2
The founding of the OPA at its assembly in 28 January 2017



Figure 3
The President at the founding of the OPA, 2017



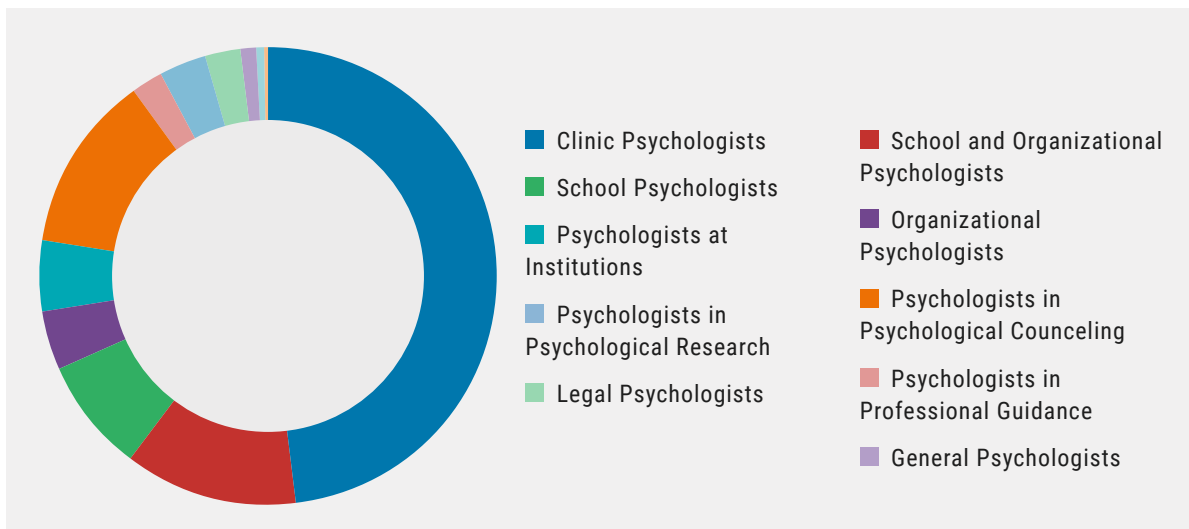
After the establishment of OPA we immediately started to focus on strengthening the role of psychologists in the country, building records with accurate data of psychologists who operate in the market, identifying problems, drafting policies and strategies for providing job opportunities for all profiles of psychology, including Work and Organizational Psychologists.

Work and Organizational Psychology in Albania today

Primarily, Work and Organizational Psychology (WOP) are among the branches that have educated the highest number of psychologists in Albania. Current data tells us that of the 2000 psychology graduates, there are 1200 WOPs, mainly from the public

universities in Albania. Based on the OPA membership register, this category is second to clinical psychologists with currently 120 licensed WOP practitioners, out of a total of 500 licensed psychologists in Albania (see Figure 4 for a breakdown of all the psychological profiles in Albania).

Figure 4
The numbers of psychologists in each profile in Albania



However, regardless of the high number of graduating WOPs, regrettably this profile is practiced by few psychologists in Albania; with only a few individuals being employed by major international companies operating in Albania. The number of such employees is no more than 10 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5
The number of practicing WOPs in Albania



Under these conditions, and based on the information received from OPA, it is clear that WOP in Albania is currently a little known and rarely practiced field. There are many reasons for these issues. Among them is the historical background of our country. By the early 1990s, the entire country's economy was state-run and centralised, due to the dictatorial communist regime. During that period, psychology was considered to be a decadent, bourgeois science, unnecessary for the "new man" that the system had created. Furthermore, Organizational Psychology was considered an exploitation instrument of the capitalist class against the working class.

With the change of the system and the outset of the democratisation processes of the country, awareness about the role of the science of psychology in general grew. But, the large state-owned companies were dissolved and reduced to hundreds of small companies employing only a few workers and/or to family businesses. At the beginning of that period, small and medium-sized companies dominated the Albanian market, in which, not only the role of the WOP was quite unknown, but the concept of "human resources" was also vague. Only during the last ten years, large business companies are consolidating within the country's economy, and are becoming well-structured and employing a considerable number of workers.

On the other hand, the lack of job opportunities has constrained those psychologists completing their studies in WOP to practice other specialties or branches of psychology, since the profession of psychologists was unregulated by law. Therefore, these psychologists could not retain their academic background, nor practice WOP, thus being unable to adapt to the latest socio-economic developments in the country. It is important to highlight that training in the field of WOP was entirely absent during this period and totally lacked standardised instruments that would help WOPs in their practice.

OPA Objectives in WOP

The fact that OPA has made an application to become a Constituent member of EAWOP has not been an incidental decision. One of OPA's key objectives is to strengthen the role of WOPs in Albania. For this purpose, OPA has built a multi-dimensional and ambitious strategy which extends in several directions, to develop awareness

of business and society in general about the role of the organizational and work psychologist (OPA Annual Report, 2017, p. 14).

Because there is a lack of common practice, it is important that companies in Albania become aware of the role and benefits of WOP. OPA are planning to organise a range of activities such as workshops, conferences, multi-lateral meetings with representatives of companies and business organizations, in order to raise the awareness of company representatives of the importance of WOP. Within this year, a meeting will be held in collaboration with the National Chamber of Commerce, in order to explain in detail, the assistance that the WOP can provide directly to the companies, aiming at promoting employment in this sector.

Further. another of OPA's major objectives is to lobby for the issue legal and sub legal acts stipulating the mandatory employment of psychologists in the structure of public administration, as well as in the structure of public or private companies who have over 50 employees. Assistance and expertise from EAWOP in this regard will be of particular importance. The publication of information and awareness brochures supporting these objectives will help us to achieve this goal.

Training and updating the knowledge of WOPs

Increasing the professional capacities of WOPs will be an essential element of the success of this project. As the Albanian economy has a tendency to rapidly follow the globalisation pace, and within the framework of Albania's expected accession to the European Union, the preparation and development of WOPs needs to keep pace with business needs. It is imperative that the skills of WOPs are updated with contemporary professional knowledge through conducting intensive training and development. This year, OPA developed for the first time an on-going education system. Thus programme is compulsory requiring all psychologists to attend compulsory on-going training and development complying with approved criteria, in order to preserve their right to practice their profession in a particular field. This system will provide WO psychologists with specific competency development.

Encouraging the use of standardised instruments in WOP

One of OPA's short-term objectives is to encourage the use of standardised assessment

tools in psychology. Being aware of their complete lack so far, OPA has undertaken a series of initiatives promoting the standardisation of internationally recognised, valid and reliable instruments. In January, 2018 OPA organised an important activity with regard to WOPs. It was training from “Giuniti psychometrics”, an Italian company providing psychometric tests, on the topic of: “The role of the work psychologist, tools and areas of intervention “; where among other things, several standardised tests were presented in the Albanian language (see Figure 6). This was a popular event with over 130 psychologists attending.

Figure 6
“Role of the work psychologist, tools and areas of intervention”, Tirana, January 2019



Establishing the Division of Work and Organizational Psychologists

The OPA is a new institution, which in less than two years has achieved great success in regulating the psychology profession, despite its financial difficulties. Within this short time, most of the practicing psychologists have been licensed, and for the first time the ethics and deontological norms imposed for implementation have been set. In this context, it is necessary to set up protocols for each area of psychology, and set clear standards of practice that will benefit both the WOP and the profession. Thus it is of paramount importance that respective Divisions are set up according to their field of competence, which, besides the above, are thought to be a catalyst for the growth of the psychologist’s role in society. Within this year, we aim to establish the Division of Work and Organizational Psychologists in order to lobby and protect the interests

of this category of psychologists, as well as to promote professional and professional development in this field.

Conclusions

The OPA are aware of the great daily difficulties that start with overcoming social mentalities to encouraging the continued professional growth of its members.

However, since the application of psychology in Albania is still in its early stages, this profession is still young for the Albanian society, the OPA is aware that the margins of change that can and should be made are as great.

The greatest need for achieving these set objectives is to get the best international expertise and exchange experience with experts from the most developed countries in the field of psychology, in order to apply best international practices that will enable a fast and sustainable development of psychology in our country. The requirement to become a Constituent member of EAWOP is within the framework of this strategy, in the light of strengthening the role of the WOP in Albania and increasing professional practice.

Reference

OPA Annual Report (2017). Retrieved from <http://www.urdhriipsikologut.al/botime-pdf-per-shkarkim/annual-report-2017-order-of-psychologists-english/>