

Psychologists for Human Rights

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Abstract

Recently an increased interest among psychologists in the topic of human rights can be observed. We aim to raise awareness about the contribution psychologists can have in protection of human rights with the goal of supporting psychological well-being of individuals as well as of communities. So in this article we review the roots of human rights-based psychology in social psychology and applied fields of psychology, examine how psychological associations tackle human rights and present some examples of intersection of psychology and human rights in practice. The role psychologists have can be pursued at the individual level, in everyday implementation of psychological knowledge and skills, and more globally. Professional bodies of psychologists can have a stronger voice in society while advocating for human rights from the psychological perspective while also supporting their members in the promotion of human rights. In recent years more initiatives can be seen among psychological associations in their recognition of their role in upholding human rights. We describe the results of a survey that explored to what extent psychological associations addressed human rights in their work. The sample comprised 31 psychological associations from 29 countries worldwide. Most of them replied that they had undertaken activities related to human rights and mentioned human rights in their Codes of Ethics. Five of them have established a human rights section/committee/group. About half of the associations stated that they had some mechanisms for reporting about human rights violations within organisation, although fewer have developed procedures that relate to human rights reporting organisations in their countries. Further, human rights education for psychologists is tackled in the paper as the crucial step in linking the theory and practice. Finally, two areas of work are discussed, in which psychologists can address human rights: trauma and the climate and environmental crisis.

Keywords: human rights, psychology, psychological associations, education, trauma, climate change

Introduction

Psychology has always mattered in human rights and human rights have always mattered in psychology, at least implicitly. Lately, however, the intersection of psychology and human rights has become more explicitly articulated, more thematised in papers and books, and more discussed at conferences. Boards, sections, and groups related to human rights have been established within psychological associations on national and international levels, or independently of them. By learning about human rights and by protecting them, psychologists can help in supporting the psychological well-being of individuals as well as communities.

In this review paper, our aims are 1) to trace the path of human rights-based psychological approaches from their roots in early psychological studies; 2) to examine how psychological associations tackle human rights, and 3) to present the most important areas of work in which psychologists can address human rights.

Social psychology has its roots in the work of Kurt Lewin, who emphasised the importance of any psychological work of the social and indeed the political context and the relevance of social action (Lewin, 1946). The approach that he and others pioneered became in time differentiated into community psychology, social psychology and industrial/organisational (I/O) psychology (Ulrich & Wainwright, 2020).

Community Psychology and its sister field Critical Psychology (Grzanka, 2020) have both been concerned with the importance of power and how it impacts well-being and, as human rights are centrally also concerned with this relationship, they have had some overlapping areas of practice (Kinderman, 2007). As Kinderman points out, many clients of applied and community psychologists will have experienced human rights violations and a recent report on the situation in the UK by Philip Alston, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, detailed many ways in which austerity policies had failed those who would likely be psychology's clients (Alston, 2019). Consequently, the practice of applied and community psychologists has been seen to need to address these systemic issues as well as addressing individual needs. The recent work by the British Psychological Society Community Action and Resilience Group illustrates these approaches¹.

I/O psychologists have also been concerned with human rights through a rather different focus. Workplaces are often highly stressful and can be physically dangerous. Health and safety laws have been introduced in many countries and they have their origin in both a rights-based approach, but also from the work of (I/O) psychologists. Much of I/O psychology has been devoted to more organisational aspects of the workplace but in recent times there has been increased attention to values-based and rights-based issues. Olson-Buchanan et al. (2014) title "Using industrial and organizational psychology for the greater good: helping those who

¹ <https://www.bps.org.uk/coronavirus-resources/community-action>

help others” neatly encapsulates this turn, and this has been further developed in terms of access to decent employment as an issue for human rights and psychological practice (Otto et al., 2020b).

Turning finally to Social Psychology as both an experimental and applied discipline, there are connections with human rights in many ways, although not always explicitly. As Stalnaker (2018) explains in a wide-ranging article, psychologists were instrumental in supporting the enactment of antiracist legislation in the USA. There has been a range of social psychological areas of study that intersect with human rights. The damaging effects of inequality, a key issue from the human rights perspective, have been well documented in recent times (Wilkinson, 2004, 2005; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010, 2020). The psychology of inequality, however, presents some puzzles and social psychologists have developed some useful ways of understanding how it develops and is maintained, as well as the noted damaging impacts (Jetten & Peters, 2019). Alongside this, and connected with the practice approaches of Community and I/O psychologists, have been social psychological approaches to health (Haslam et al., 2018a). The right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health is a key part of the human rights framework and social psychologists have been uncovering the greatly underappreciated role of social conditions and social relationships as determinants of health (Haslam et al., 2018b).

When in 1948 the United Nations accepted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), no psychologist was involved in the process of drafting the Declaration. Initially, the UDHR laid down a set of common standards for the relationships between states and citizens, meant to secure freedom, justice, and peace for every human being. The UDHR was intended for every person of any age and culture (Morsink, 1999). Human rights became the *lingua franca* of people around the world to promote and implement these highly valued rights. The equal worth of every human being or human dignity is understood as the philosophical and political foundation and justification of human rights. It is the one explicit principle underpinning the International Bill of Human Rights, consisting of the UDHR, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. It is reflected in the first paragraph of the preamble of the UDHR, which states: ‘Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world’, as well as its Article 1: ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights’ (Nowak & Zenz, 2020). The UDHR and related human rights standards and values are an attempt to render the concept of human dignity operational (De Baets, 2008).

The human rights principle of *dignity*, together with the principles of *inclusion* and *freedom* to development (Hagedaars & Thompson, 2020) align with psychology’s mission of contributing to the well-being of humanity. In methodology, theory, research and professional practice, psychologists deal with unequal power

relations in the lives of people and peoples. Human rights offer security and protection, a safe basis to becoming a human in a humane world, a basis for freedom to explore the world, to develop as a person. Persons can develop secure attachments to the groups to which they want to belong, to the state and to institutions and early psychological work on social identity theory shows how powerful these attachments can be (Tajfel et al., 1971). As such it is a basis for democracy and peace.

The processes of ‘othering’ are fundamental to understanding the principles of dignity, inclusion and freedom (Tripathi, 2016). Dehumanising starts with ‘othering’ a person or a group. ‘Othering’ refers to the marginalisation of those who are distinctly different from the majority ‘us’. Differences in beliefs and customs are used to define ‘them’ as the out-group, opposite to ‘us’. Othering comes in many forms, in exclusion, in demeaning attitudes, in hostility at the workplace, in objectification (e.g., of women). The process of othering is subtle and often non-intentional, stemming from normative thinking, from ‘the power of self-evidence’. Nevertheless, othering can be devastating for the persons and groups involved. The power of normative thinking leads for example to migrants always falling outside the norm. Even when they do their best to become part of the norm, they always fall between two stools. Othering serves often a political and economic purpose, with a huge psychological impact on people and peoples.

We can say that psychology and human rights have a double relationship: The UDHR provides a normative framework for psychologists and is an inspiration for practice, research, education and conceptualisation. And, by virtue of their knowledge and expertise, psychologists can and should contribute to human rights protection and promotion. The human rights field expanded after the Second World War in parallel with professional psychology. In the 1970s, Amnesty International was founded in 1961 with an appeal by a British lawyer Peter Benenson to obtain amnesty for prisoners of conscience all over the world². Although treatment of war victims already existed since Pierre Janet (1859 – 1947), psychologists became experts in trauma therapy in the eighties when Charles Figley started the International Society of Traumatic Stress Studies (Kolk van der, 2015). During the Cold War, the focus changed from imprisonment and torture to a more universal application of human rights. Those efforts were initiated mainly in the Global South, advancing the decolonisation agenda.

On a global level, more psychologists became committed to human rights. An amount of research has been done about reduction of prejudices (Pettigrew et al., 2007), authoritarian leadership, groups interrelationships, protection of children, and empowering minorities. Psychology itself became subject to a critical view from a feminist perspective. Carol Gilligan (1982) criticised the inbuilt gender preferences of some research and theories.

² <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1977/amnesty/history/>

Psychologists' associations in the Majority World (Hagedaars & Thompson, 2020), especially in formerly colonised countries like in South Africa after the fall of the Apartheid regime, developed policies for a more just psychology in their regions.

It took until 2013 before the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA) decided that psychology should expand its focus to be more directed at the needs of society (EFPA, 2013). EFPA emphasised the responsibilities of the profession of psychology for promoting human rights and actively opposing human rights violations and established the Board Human Rights and Psychology (BHR&Psy). Its mandate was to raise awareness of the relation between human rights and psychology, and to articulate the responsibilities of individual psychologists and member associations to do what is within their scope and capabilities to promote human rights, prevent human rights violations and alleviate the traumata of these violations.

In recent years more initiatives can be seen among psychological associations in their recognition of their role in upholding human rights. Large international associations like the International Union of Psychological Science, the Caribbean Alliance of National Psychological Associations, the International Council of Psychologists (ICP) and more recently, the Global Psychology Alliance (GPA), offer opportunities for statements, research, and actions. In 2016 the Australian Psychological Society (APS) apologised to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for not always having respected them, and expressed their commitment to pursue more respectful ways of working in future (APS, 2016). Very recently, the American Psychological Association's (APA) governing Council of Representatives apologised at its meeting on 29th October 2021, acknowledging that APA was complicit in contributing to systemic inequities, and hurt many through racism, racial discrimination, and denigration of communities of colour, thereby falling short on its mission to benefit society and improve lives (APA, 2021). The #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements, and the climate and environmental crisis also pose a challenge for psychologists and their associations.

In December 2020, an independent and open Global Network of Psychologists for Human Rights (GNPHR) was launched, initiated by the ICP and former members of the EFPA BHR&Psy. This Network offers a platform for information, education and action for psychologists, dedicated to psychology and human rights³.

Contemporary Support for Human Rights in Psychological Associations

As a point of support, exchange, shaping of professional standards, and development, psychological associations can add value to what psychologists achieve as individuals. Associations can also have a stronger voice in society when it comes to advocating for relevant topics. On one hand, psychological associations

³ <https://humanrightspsychology.org/>

can inform, educate, and encourage their members to promote human rights, and on the other, the associations themselves can act socially engaging in protecting human rights. The effectiveness of professional psychological associations can therefore be evaluated, at least in part, by how well they focus on human rights in their mission and practice.

In autumn 2020, the GNPHR and EFPA BHR&Psy wanted to explore to what extent psychological associations included human rights in their formal structure and documents. For this purpose, we developed a questionnaire (T. Wainwright, N. Sveaass, U. Wagner, and M. Plavšić). It consisted of seven ‘yes-no’ type of questions as well as opportunities for further elaboration of the answers. The following topics were included: activities undertaken with respect to human rights; existence of a human rights committee, board, section, or division within the association; existence of a code of ethics within the organisation; existence of reporting mechanisms with the organisation if human rights violation was identified; and contacts with reporting human rights agencies.

The invitation to psychological associations was sent out via EFPA (38 associations) and the GPA (49 associations excluding EFPA’s). The questionnaire was available online. By autumn 2021, altogether 31 psychological associations replied from 29 countries: Australia, New Zealand, 1 country from Africa, 1 from North America, 4 from South America, 6 from Asia, and 15 from Europe. Almost all associations were national (29), one was regional within a country, and one was a federation of associations.

Most of the associations ($N = 18$) replied that they had undertaken activities related to human rights. The activities covered a wide range of actions, initiatives, events, services and documents. Actions showed direct response to threats or violations of human rights. They, for example, involved: submission to the Human rights commission on seclusion and restraint in mental health and educational facilities, and writing statements, announcements and articles in the newspapers related to human rights violations. Initiatives referred to more indirect forms of protecting and promoting human rights, through activities such as: support for new family law at referendum, organising of the expert meeting about human rights for psychologists, involvement in actions of the standing committee human rights of EFPA, and publishing of papers and special issues of the journal regarding human rights. Events comprised actions directed at raising awareness among colleagues or wider audience about human rights. Following examples illustrate them: evening with human rights associations, afternoon deep democracy, conferences, round tables, and public lectures. Services, offered by some associations, include mostly various forms of education about human rights, psychological support, and advocacy. One association mentioned having a document, i. e. a position statement (*Social Justice and Responsibility to Society*). One association highlighted that they often threaded human rights throughout their various activities including most of their submissions to government and other organisations. Several associations

referred to their websites with extensive lists of activities, resolutions, statements, reports etc. These were associations from Australia, the UK, New Zealand, Norway, the USA, and the Netherlands.

Five associations reported having established a human rights section, committee, or a group. The oldest, Norwegian, was founded more than 20 years ago (Sveaass, 2019). It was followed by the Dutch in 2014, at the same time as the EFPA established a task force, which in 2015 developed into a board. The Croatian association founded its section in 2017. The human rights group within the British association was established in 2020.

Because of the connection between psychology, ethics and human rights, it was assumed that psychological associations had codes of ethics and that human rights were mentioned in them. This assumption was confirmed: two-thirds of the organisations ($N = 22$) informed about having a Code of Ethics and about three-quarters of them ($N = 16$) stated that human rights were mentioned in these codes.

If members identify a human rights violation and want to report it to a reliable and trustworthy point, an efficient reporting mechanism within a psychological association is necessary. About half of the associations ($N = 17$) confirmed to have some sort of reporting mechanisms, either as more general (complaint) procedures or as procedures in the scope of ethics. The general procedures comprised answers as having a professional advisory service, reporting familial violation followed by counselling, reporting to the board of directors, council, vice-chairperson, board of trustees, disciplinary board/committee, and institutions. Other associations mentioned procedures related to the code of ethics, commission of professional ethics, or ethics office. One of the associations explains that they do not have such mechanisms because they have several external mechanisms within the country for reporting violations, such as the Human Rights Commission. Apart from internal mechanisms, an association that is committed to human rights protection is familiar with human rights reporting agencies and, when necessary, contacts them or co-operates with them. Almost half ($N = 14$) of the associations replied to have such relationship, half of them ($n = 8$) contacting them at least once a year. Only six associations reported having formal relations with human rights reporting agencies, while most of the psychological associations said that they had contacts with advocacy groups or civil society organisations. Examples of co-operation are: developing guidelines, organising educational events or conferences, and having regular meetings with the ombudsperson.

From the survey conducted with approximately one-third of psychological associations worldwide, we can draw several conclusions related to the extent they include human rights in their formal structure and documents. They mostly undertake activities related to human rights, both as a reaction to their violation and as their protection. When they have codes of ethics, psychological associations mostly include human rights in them, and only a few have a human rights group within the association. Although specific reporting mechanisms about human rights violations

are rarely developed within psychological associations, more general reporting mechanisms are seen to fit the role, while relations with other human rights agencies are not a standard. It was noticeable that psychological associations differ in their answers. Fewer associations provided extensive evidence about their activities and inclusion of human rights in their structure and have a longer history of protecting them, such as Norway, Australia, New Zealand, and the Netherlands. If we look at how Freedom House rates people's access to political rights and civil liberties in 210 countries and territories worldwide, we can find these four countries ranked in the top 5% (Freedom House, 2021). If we look at psychological associations as societal assets for promotion and protection of human rights, we see that they can already offer good examples. However, a clearer articulation of human rights-based approach in most psychological associations would demonstrate a stronger commitment both to its members as well as to society.

One important way to involve psychologists in human rights is the inclusion in academic education and continuous professional development of psychologists (Tibbitts & Hagenaaers, 2020a). The core of human rights education is:

- a. Education *about* human rights, which includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights norms and principles, of the values that underpin them and the mechanisms for their protection.
- b. Education *through* human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners.
- c. Education *for* human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect and uphold the rights of others (Tibbitts & Hagenaaers, 2020b).

The content of human rights education includes: knowledge of human rights laws and conventions that are particularly relevant for psychologists; learning to act ethically and to deal with moral dilemmas; reinforcement of advocacy and action capacities of the psychologist. Human rights need not only to be incorporated in the content of the curriculum of psychology education, but also to be reflected in the practice of the schools and institutions providing human rights education.

As outlined before, there is a good story to tell about how some areas of psychological practice align with human rights. However, this is not the full story as psychology has a past that includes some significant contributions to human rights violations (Wainwright & Leone, 2020). These have ranged from the promotion of the pseudoscientific ideas underpinning eugenics to similarly unscientific racism (Saini, 2019). Furthermore, the history of psychology's role in these awful practices is still not taught sufficiently. As an example, the role of psychology in the development of South African Apartheid is a relatively untold story (Cooper, 2014; Dingfelder, 2013). Cooper explains (2014, p. 32):

“Hendrik Verwoerd, a professor of psychology at the University of Stellenbosch, [...] became prime minister [in 1958] and enacted some of the most horrendous Apartheid laws in the country — laws that categorized all citizens by race, forced blacks and other groups to move to slums, and eventually disenfranchised the vast majority of South Africans. Academic psychologists played a large role in propping up Apartheid as well, producing pseudo-science to support segregationist theories.”

An important task that psychology faces in the coming years is to address the educational gap between what we know about the connection between human rights and human flourishing and the role psychologists can play. Psychologists learn about human rights in various contexts, non-formally, informally, and, least of all, formally. Human rights courses at the in-service levels of education for psychologists are non-existing or scarce (e. g. at the University of Oslo), while human rights topics can be found cross-curricula, mainly in social psychology and clinical courses (De Palma, 2020). As a consequence, evaluation of teaching and learning programmes in human rights education for psychologists is also lacking. However, education, in general, demonstrates positive correlation with human rights variables (see overview in Carriere, 2019) and human rights education shows positive impact on various groups of people (e. g. Severo & Giongo, 2021; Struthers, 2021). Rare studies in higher education reveal that even short-time human rights education during seminars can improve the knowledge about human rights and increase positive attitudes and commitment related to human rights (Stellmacher & Sommer, 2008). Evaluation of an educational programme that applied a human rights-based approach in the field of social work showed better insight into human rights violations as well as readiness to engage in human rights issues (Quzack et al., 2021). The two recent books on both practice and education (Hagenaaars et al., 2020; Rubin & Flores, 2020) provide extensive materials that can be used in psychology education and developing curricula for psychology programmes at all levels. For the purposes of this discussion of educational practice, three chapters in Hagenaaars et al. (2020) are particularly relevant and cover how to plan human rights education for psychologists (Tibbitts & Hagenaaars, 2020a), the competencies needed for teaching and learning (Plavšić et al., 2020) and personal accounts of this area of educational practise (Butchard et al., 2020).

To further enhance commitment to human rights, psychologists’ associations can incorporate human rights in their Codes of Ethics. Codes of Ethics have aspirational and enforceable goals. More emphasis lays on the enforceable ones – ‘Do no wrong’ – than on the aspirational – ‘Do well’. To promote human rights, the aspirational ones need to be monitored and followed by actions.

For educational purposes, it would be valuable to establish theoretical and empirical foundations for human-rights based educational models, with well-defined learning outcomes and examined impacts in psychologists’ competencies in the various work settings.

Fundamental rights awareness asks for a critical reflection on the science of psychology and its intersection with human rights principles and values, particularly as it relates to the hidden exclusion and undervaluation of persons and groups as a result of the historical development of psychology and its philosophical bases. Historically, psychology has not always been an inclusive science and practice (Teo, 2005). Indigenous psychologies show the diversity in psychological approaches, bearing in mind that all psychologies are indigenous and that never ‘one psychology’ can impose its views on others. On the contrary, psychology will be enriched by incorporating theories and research from more perspectives. ‘We have always been indigenous’ (Roe, 2014).

The Most Important Areas in which Human Rights are Mentioned and Violated

In considering the implications for psychologists for how they address the human rights implications for their work, the field is very wide. Here we discuss two areas; one that has been well developed and is regarded by psychologists as well within their scope, namely trauma; the other is one where psychologists and social science more generally has been significantly behind the curve – the climate and environmental crisis (Moore et al., 2022).

Trauma

The consequences of human rights violations can, of course, be traumatic. Those psychologists working with trauma are therefore often facing those who have been subject to human rights violations. This has then led to convergence between the expertise of psychologists who work with trauma and those working with people who have suffered human rights violations.

In “Confronting Humanity at its Worst: Social Psychological Perspectives on Genocide”, Newman (2019) sets out to help us understand how genocides come about and what their consequences are. The themes covered are helpful in framing this area of practice: Predispositions; the genocidal mindset; Evil is not inevitable; Never again. New research in social psychology has questioned some of the taken-for-granted ideas on obedience to authority and conformity, moving the ground to resistance and human rights protection. Psychologists have also been engaged in how to deal with the aftermath of genocide. The work of Minami (2020) in Rwanda is a counterpoint to the awful experience of genocide and speaks to the humanity in people. Minami describes the action-based psychosocial reconciliation approach that applies principles of Japanese Morita therapy and principles of intergroup contact theory, based on work of Allport, Pettigrew and other social psychologists. The aim of the approach is to foster attitudinal change between conflicting parties. This approach offers an alternative to forgiveness-seeking, so that perpetrators offer survivors their concrete services as acts of apology.

Psychological approaches to trauma in the context of human rights violations are nowhere as stark as in those who have been subjected to torture. In his book “They Came For Me” Schlapobersky (2021) describes his time in detention in South Africa as a young student. He now is a group analyst and a founding trustee of The Medical Foundation for Victims of Torture which is now called Freedom from Torture (<https://www.freedomfromtorture.org/>), a leading human rights charity. In his book, there is an appendix on the “Principles for the Political Application of Psychotherapy” again showing the areas of overlap between psychology and human rights.

Climate Change, Campaigning, and Activism

The phrase “No human rights on a dead planet” coined by Amnesty International, neatly summarises the way human rights and the climate and environmental crisis are interconnected and Kurt Lewin’s commitment to social action has become an imperative for all psychologists. That this is a crisis follows from the nature of the complex systems that control our global weather – they are becoming unstable and getting close to tipping points where we will see non-linear impacts (Lenton et al., 2019). These tipping points in the physical realm have also a parallel in the way people behave – so-called social tipping points (Moser & Dilling, 2007; Otto et al., 2020a) where very rapid, even revolutionary change is possible. A recent book by social psychologists called ‘Together Apart: the psychology of Covid-19’ (Jetten et al., 2020) indicates how closely tied are public trust and government honesty to effective public health measures – the framework in which human rights are firmly located.

Most initial attempts by psychologists to engage with this area tended to be isolated examples (Bazerman et al., 1997), but over the years psychologists and other social scientists have become involved, and the overlap between academic and research endeavours and activism have become increasingly blurred as they take account of the gap between the way that the crisis needs to be addressed and the current efforts (IPCC, 2021).

As an example of how psychologists work is being recognised, a recent study of 10,000 children across ten countries conducted by psychologists and others (Marks et al., 2021) was quoted by the UN secretary-general. In addition to feelings of worry and anxiety, the authors reported that climate anxiety and distress significantly correlated to perceived inadequate governmental response to climate change and associated feelings of betrayal.

The group that led this study was the Climate Psychology Alliance⁴ which brings together psychologists, counsellors, psychotherapists, and many others to campaign using psychological science, values and practice.

⁴ <https://www.climatepsychologyalliance.org>

Alongside this is that those who have contributed least to the climate and ecological crisis are paying the highest price, and the impact that the politics of fossil fuels have on indigenous peoples is a key issue (Atallah & Ungar, 2020; Feygina et al., 2020; Johl & Duyck, 2012; Rouf & Wainwright, 2020).

Accounts of how scientists and others move from concern to activism have been the topic of research (Hoggett & Randall, 2018; Roser-Renouf et al., 2014). More directly activist psychologists include Psychologists for Extinction Rebellion⁵ and Psychologists for Future⁶. All of these campaigns feature both climate change and climate justice, again linking together the themes of psychology, human rights and social change.

The role of leadership in extreme weather events, as illustrated by the Australian bushfires experience, is taken up by social psychologists Jolanda Jetten and colleagues (Jetten et al., 2021), where they show how social identity is a key issue in how a community, whether local or national, responds to such disasters. The model is called the Social Identity Model of Post-Disaster Action and connects again the way a state fulfils their obligations to its population – including its human rights obligations – under conditions of severe challenge.

Future Research on the Intersection of Psychology and Human Rights

Research with a clearer focus on the intersection of psychology and human rights is necessary if we want to explore the benefits of a human rights-based-and-oriented psychology. As this field of psychology is broadening, an integrated and systematic approach to research will be needed. A lot of psychological research has already focused on the principles of human rights but did not name ‘human rights’ in the research proposals. For example, research done on discrimination and prejudices. Research on human rights conducted in diverse disciplines, like law, is of interest for psychologists as well, as recently published research handbooks on human rights and poverty’ (Davis et al., 2021) and on torture (Evans & Modvig, 2020) show.

To have a more accurate picture of the role psychologists played in human rights violations, as well as in the promotion and protection of human rights, it is worth examining the history of psychology, and the under- or overrepresentation of certain groups, reflecting social, political and economic power relations (Canetto & Burn, 2020). A critical re-evaluation of psychological research is needed to see whether persons or groups are dehumanised, excluded or stereotyped. Can remnants of the history of slavery and colonisation be found in theories and methods of psychology?

In order to do more human rights-based research, minority groups, the voiceless, the poor, and the not-so-well-educated, need to be involved in determining the

⁵ <https://xrpsychologists.co.uk>

⁶ <https://www.psychologistsforfuture.org>

relevance of a research topic and the formulation of the research question. It is recommended that they participate in the study, and most importantly, they should have access to the findings.

Bullock and Zakowski (2020) wonder how the broad discussion of psychology and human rights will impact the discipline. They raise the fundamental question of how the profession can shift from 'do no harm' to 'do well' and actively promote human rights. To the extent that psychology as a discipline embraces promoting human rights, dignity, and justice as a disciplinary aspiration, guidelines for international collaboration, research, education, and service will bring about change. The guidelines and approval of research proposals need to include the right for people to benefit from the results of scientific research in this context (Chapman & Wyndham, 2013).

Next to the more fundamental research, applied psychology will profit from developing human rights-based research, like in clinical and social welfare settings that draw on social psychology theory concerning trust and shifting social norms. In clinical settings, psychologists need to be careful in 'labelling' patients (Kinderman, 2006).

From a human rights perspective, it is unfair to use assessment instruments which are not constructed, validated, and standardised for the population they will be used on (Hagedaars, 2019). Messick (1995) has argued that test users have to take into consideration the relevance of test use and should consider the consequences, including the societal consequences of what is done with the test scores. For example, if score distributions on a test lead to continuation of unequal selection and representation of members of minority groups, the use of that test should be challenged. A human rights approach to assessment will seek to define principles of fairness and equitable distribution in a broad perspective, including the need for positive discrimination of disadvantaged groups (women, ethnic minorities) and principles of restorative justice.

Needless to say, there is an enormous research agenda. We need to know how human rights and psychology are connected, make a list of research priorities, collect existing research and publications, develop guidelines for research and ethical human rights-based actions, and ensure that scientific results reach policy-makers.

Conclusion

We are living in times when human rights are under threat and so there is an urgent need for everyone to work for their retention and implementation. Human beings are social beings, in need of belonging and connection. Therefore, human rights-based interventions should always focus on the person AND on the context in which the person lives. This is not always simple and can pose dilemmas, as we can see in discussions about how to intervene in domestic violence

(<https://www.bih.org.uk/vaw>). Equal respect for all is the basis of a human rights based-and-oriented psychology. That includes respectful relationships and a dignified environment.

Our belief is that associations of psychologists should consider human rights promotion as a core value of their mission. They can monitor human rights compliance and actively make plans to stand up for human rights. Associations can at the same time focus on the interests of psychologists as well upon the well-being of society.

And to conclude, this quotation sums up for us the essence of what we need to do as psychologists:

“... [T]he global village is facing continuing poverty and inequality, as well as rising populism and extremism. Psychologists accustomed to looking beyond the boundaries of their own context have the urgent task to deploy their expertise for advancing individual well-being and community building in the village.” (Poortinga, 2021, p. 53).

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