

# Postgraduate schools in clinical psychology for adult working students in Japan:

Unique circumstances of the clinical psychology profession

臨床心理士養成大学院における社会人学生

—特異な臨床心理士の専門性—

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to describe Japanese postgraduate schools in clinical psychology for adult working students, with special attention on the unique circumstances of the clinical psychology profession. The argument is that these circumstances can turn ‘knowledge acquired from experience’, typically the strength of adult working students, into a disadvantage. Indeed, these students are likely to face difficulties when their clients confuse the clinicians’ former experience as a worker and their current position as a clinical psychologist. Improvement in their practical training in postgraduate school is now crucial, leading to the recent creation of a professional school system that can address this issue. However, this system has not yet been widespread in Japan, thereby been creating a dilemma for some schools.

**Keywords:** postgraduate schools, clinical psychology, adult working students, Japan

## Introduction

Many people have consulted others to help solve emotional problems. This appears to be more common than seeking help for legal or accounting advice. When people hold a consultation with others about emotional issues, they may be looking to their own life experiences and ethics to provide suitable advice.

However, for clinical psychologists, who are experts in such issues of the mind, assessing other people’s emotional problems using one’s own sense of values and experience is inappropriate. A clinical psychologist is expected to be ‘a specialist who helps clients in their self-realisation while respecting the unique individual sense of values of each and every one of them’ (Foundation of the Japanese Certification Board for Clinical Psychologists: FJCBCP, 2009, 3). In other words, what is required of clinical psychologists is specialised knowledge and expertise along with other qualities that allow them to think from the client’s perspective and value, rather than drawing on their own life and work experiences.

This ‘unique circumstance’ is what makes the work of a clinical psychologist difficult. For this reason, ‘knowledge acquired from experience’, which is commonly considered to be the strength of adult working students,

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can instead be a substantial disadvantage for those in the field of clinical psychology (Tatara, 2009). In addition, as indicated by Agari (survey visit to the FJCBCP: 20 September 2010), most adult working students must overcome many difficulties including insufficient knowledge about clinical psychology. Moreover, the instability of life as a clinical psychologist is also an issue given the few permanent positions available in Japan. This paper discusses the challenges faced by Japanese institutions for training clinical psychologists, with a particular focus on adult working students.

### **The work and qualifications required of clinical psychologists**

The title 'clinical psychologist' (rinsyo-shinrishi) is a license granted only to those who pass the examination conducted by the Foundation of the Japanese Certification Board for Clinical Psychologists (FJCBCP). Such licenses were first granted in 1988 and hence do not have a long history. However, in the ensuing 20 years, nearly 20,000 certificates have been issued (Hamano, 2009).

The professional work required of Japanese clinical psychologists is composed of the following four categories (FJCBCP, 2009, 4):

- 1) Clinical Psychological Assessment (Rinsyo-Shinrishi Satei)
- 2) Clinical Psychological Interview (Rinsyo-Shinrishi Mensetsu)
- 3) Psychological Community Care (Rinsyo-Shinriteki Chiiki-Enjyo)
- 4) Surveys/research/publications pertaining to (1)–(3) mentioned above.

The first two, 'assessment' and 'interview', are technical terms in Japanese clinical psychology, created to make a clear distinction between the conventional medical terms 'psychological diagnosis' (diagnosis) and 'psychotherapy' (therapy). For example, a medical diagnostic examination and a clinical psychological assessment are used in distinct situations, as follows.

A 'diagnosis' consists of an assessment of the examined subject from the viewpoint of the person who conducts the diagnosis. An 'assessment' is an act that consists of an assessment from the viewpoint of the assessed (diagnosed) person. Assessing a student who 'does not want to go to school' as having a school phobia or depression is a 'diagnosis'. It is based on one-sided diagnostic criteria, according to which the fact of attending junior high school implies, for children, attending willingly. However, an 'assessment' is the task of evaluating the characteristics (meaning) of 'the child not wanting to go to school' from the child's perspective, not on the basis of the sense of values of the child's school teachers or parents (FJCBCP, 2009, 5).

Therefore, for clinical psychologists specialising in the practice of assessment, certain types of human qualities are required, qualities which allow them to determine whether their judgements are based only on their own values or biases (Higashiyama, 2002).

Next, the interview, which is the Japanese clinical psychologist's core professional act, is considered to be a 'path towards a supportive effect that is provided through involvement and a limitless respect for the clients' sense of values' (FJCBCP, 2009, 7). Moreover, the other human qualities, which underlie feelings such as understanding, comprehension, and sympathy for the client, are essential for achieving the high level of required support.

Opinions are divided regarding whether these two kinds of human qualities depend on 'nature' (something innate) or 'nurture' (something acquired through education and training). Nonetheless, there is now a consensus that

fully expanding both qualities is the most important educational goal in the training of clinical psychologists. In reality, the curriculum assigned for postgraduate schools is required to emphasise on practical training (FJCBCP, 2009). In other words, the improvement of practical training activities in field-work is deemed to be essential for the education of active, trustworthy clinical psychologists.

Nevertheless, practical training and practice seminars have been formalised by many institutions. According to Otsuka (2009, 7):

Some institutions have two playrooms, some have three interview rooms, but these are merely formalities, and inspections have shown that in some places, these are actually used, while in others, these are never used. In some cases, these facilities have been built simply as a formality. Because it would be complete nonsense if graduate students do not get even a single experience during their two years of training, it is important to create a system that allows students to learn through personal experience.

In light of this issue, it is undoubtedly important to understand the current state of clinical psychology training in Japanese institutions.

### **The current state of clinical psychology training in Japanese institutions**

In Japan, there are two types of clinical psychology training institutions that confer a master's degree: 'designated postgraduate schools' (type 1 and type 2) and 'professional schools'. The designated postgraduate schools are composed of 'postgraduate schools which have been assigned by the FJCBCP according to the designation system to maintain the professional quality of clinical psychologists at a certain level and plan improvements in order for them to be capable of responding to the expectations of the society' (FJCBCP, 2009, 15). As of 2009, there were 157 designated postgraduate schools throughout Japan (type 1 schools: 137; type 2 schools: 20). In the same manner, professional schools are 'specialised in the high-level training of professionals such as clinical psychologists' (FJCBCP, 2009, 17). As of 2009, there were five professional schools.

The designated postgraduate schools (type 1) are stipulated to meet the following conditions:

- 1) The official title of the course/major (course/speciality area) of the postgraduate programme should be 'Clinical Psychology'.
- 2) The teaching staff in charge of the course/major (course/speciality area) in the postgraduate programme must consist of five or more persons who have the qualification of 'clinical psychologists', including four or more full-time faculty teachers (professor, associate professor, full-time lecturer). One of these must be a professor.
- 3) The school must have an attached clinical psychology counselling room with more than one year of past activities and achievements before the application to become a designated postgraduate school. This room must also systematically allow for 'fundamental practical training in clinical psychology' and 'practical training in clinical psychology'. The counselling room must have an office room, three interview rooms, two playrooms and one teaching staff stationed in the counselling room. In addition, there must be out-of-campus training facilities where practical training can be reinforced.

As shown in (3), the establishment of practical training facilities is a prerequisite for receiving approval as a designated postgraduate school. Notwithstanding this, many facilities have been built merely as a formality and not

often used by the students, given the considerable rise in the number of designated postgraduate schools.

Designated postgraduate schools have suddenly increased their number thanks to the increasing social demand for clinical psychologists and clinical psychology education. Since the beginning of the designated postgraduate school system in 1996, the number of postgraduate courses available in Japan has been limited (the number of applicants always exceeds that of admitted students considerably). To address this situation, training courses for clinical psychologists have been founded quite quickly, in part to simply attract more students. Agari (2001, 147) mentions three issues regarding the postgraduate school designation system:

[Firstly, as of 2001,] ... only 11 (17%) of the 64 designated schools offered clinical psychology (including equivalents) as a major. Most have remained as organizations with problems in their system. In consideration of the institution's stability, its teaching staff and its facilities, it is preferable for an institution to have an undergraduate programme composed of a department of clinical psychology and a department of psychology, and a graduate programme composed of the clinical psychology major. The number of such designated postgraduate schools is expected to rise. [Secondly,] many of the designated schools barely meet the criteria regarding the number of teachers. Moreover, in some cases, the teachers' areas of expertise deviate from the specified specialty. [Thirdly,] the improvement of the quality of the fundamental practical training in clinical psychology is a very important issue. Clinical psychologists need clinical knowledge and skills. Does the currently provided practical training respond to such needs? Does it really put students in charge of various cases and accumulate experiences? How are case conferences and supervision being used in order to produce good results? These are particular matters that should be followed carefully for a while.

Designated postgraduate schools undergo a field inspection in the third year after designation; then, in the sixth year when the designation period expires, the schools carry out a continuous screening. Specifically, 'the field inspections and designated continuous screening range from the name of the postgraduate school and the constitution of the institution to which the designated area belongs to, the adequacy of the number and contents of the teaching staff in charge, the actual condition and management of the facilities for practical training in clinical psychology and the attached clinical psychology counselling room for paid consultations, the status of maintenance of out-of-campus training facilities and the state of implementation of classes based on an adequate educational curriculum' (FJCBCP, [http://www.fjcbcp.or.jp/shitei\\_1.html](http://www.fjcbcp.or.jp/shitei_1.html)). Accordingly, the issues presented by Agari were expected to improve over time. These efforts, regardless of problems, have instead increased partly because the number of designated postgraduate schools has continued to increase since 2001.

As a result, the limitations of the designated postgraduate school system have become exposed, and professional schools have started to attract people's attention as preferable to clinical psychology training institutions. This also means that the training of clinical psychologists has changed from an emphasis on quantity to an emphasis on quality.

The characteristic feature of professional schools is an improved curriculum, relative to that of designated postgraduate schools. For example, in designated postgraduate schools, students must complete a master's dissertation and take at least 26 credits from the subjects designated by the FJCBCP. In professional schools, on the other hand, more than 44 credits must be taken during the same two-year period. In particular, through the proactive use of practical training for teachers and with the requirement to reinforce such a practical training, students are generally required to submit practice reports instead of a master's dissertation. The institutions are therefore more focused on clinical activities rather than on basic research. In addition, while four full-time teachers are required

for designated postgraduate schools (type 1), more than seven are required for professional schools.

The earliest professional school in the field of clinical psychology in Japan was the Postgraduate School of Human-Environment Studies at Kyushu University: this school was established in 2005. Subsequently, those of Kagoshima University, Hiroshima International University and Tezukayama University were founded in 2007; the school of Kwansai University was created in 2009. However, the establishment of professional schools did not accelerate and as of July 2010, no such schools exist in East Japan; there is none in Tokyo. The transition from the designated postgraduate school system to the professional school system has not progressed well. To understand this, it is important to discuss the dilemma of professional schools.

### **The dilemma of professional schools**

The curriculum of professional schools has been largely enhanced compared to that of designated postgraduate schools, especially in terms of field practice. It develops the specific human qualities required of clinical psychologists and therefore elevates the quality and level of educational attainment.

However, a number of issues have also emerged. One of them is that student capacity of professional schools is too large. The student capacity per grade per academic year (2010) was 30 for Kyushu University, 15 for Kagoshima University, 20 for Hiroshima International University, 20 for Tezukayama University, and 30 for Kansai University. The student capacity was larger than that of conventional designated postgraduate schools.

A lower student capacity is needed to provide a more carefully planned education. Despite that, professional schools are independent institutions and self-sustainability would be impossible without a certain student capacity. It is therefore difficult to reduce the student capacity from its current levels.

The transition from designated postgraduate schools to professional schools means an increase in the burdens on teachers, both in terms of management and education. In terms of education, practical training activities have increased in number. Access to the space needed to conduct practical training and communication between teachers and clinical staff is also more frequent. In terms of management, professional schools have to take care of their own management and administration because they are independent institutions within their universities. Moreover, under the Japanese accreditation system that was introduced in 2004 as a national new evaluation scheme, assessments are made per institution according to a seven-year cycle with the only exception of professional schools. These schools have to prepare themselves for undergoing special evaluations according to a five-year cycle in order to be accredited independently.

These sorts of dilemma hinder the transition from designated postgraduate schools to professional schools. In addition, as indicated in the previous section, this transition requires seven or more full-time teachers. According to the law, full-time teachers in professional schools will no longer be included as full-time teachers in undergraduate courses after 2013. As a result, it will be difficult to find the required seven individuals. Moreover, given the difficulty of creating new positions, the law that more than 30% of the teachers at professional school must be practitioners makes the situation even more pressing. At the founding phase of a designated postgraduate school, most universities forcibly revamp basic psychology into clinical psychology positions. Thus, requesting the creation of additional positions for the transition to a professional school would be quite challenging and would create strong opposition inside the university.

However, the transition from designated postgraduate schools to professional schools may also offer some advantages. For example, in the case of Hiroshima International University, when the designated postgraduate school was changed into a professional school, the school moved from the main campus on the outskirts of Hiroshima (where it was very difficult to find large numbers of clients, hence limiting practical training) to the satellite campus in the city centre of Hiroshima. This transition ended successfully, and the number of applicants wishing to enter

the school increased dramatically (survey visit to Hiroshima International University: 27 August 2010).

Increasing the number of professional schools would represent an important move in the effort to train clinical psychologists ready to play an active part in responding to societal demands. However, a binary structure composed of a designated postgraduate school in parallel with a professional school is not necessarily problematic. The reason is that the designated postgraduate schools intended mostly for the training of academic researchers holding the qualification of clinical psychologist are also vital for the lasting development of clinical psychology. For example, Nagoya University, which is one of the top research universities in Japan, declares its intention to train 'clinical practitioners capable of conducting research' and 'researchers capable of clinical practice'. Kobe University and Tsukuba University also place great emphasis on providing guidance for the master's dissertation. Thus, the idea that all institutions for the training of clinical psychologists should be reorganised as professional schools is misguided, particularly in view of the example of the Japanese law school system which contended with the similar issue of 'legal professionals capable of conducting research' (Tanaka, 2011).

Within the binary structure where designated postgraduate schools and professional schools coexist, most adult working students go to a designated postgraduate school, not a professional school because the capacity of the professional schools is very limited, although the majority of these students initially intend to become clinical psychologists, not researchers. They are likely to face some problems during their studies or soon after graduation. The following section describes these problems as well as the current state of acceptances for adult working students in clinical psychology training institutions.

#### **Acceptance of adult working students in clinical psychology training institutions**

Only a few institutions for training clinical psychologists systematically establishing 'specialised classes and courses for working students and in-service teachers attending postgraduate school' (Nakagawa, 2010, 2). The percentage of adult working students in clinical psychology training institutions has been lower than that in other postgraduate schools involved in professional training. The characteristics of students enrolled in Japanese institutions for the training of clinical psychologists can be confirmed with quantitative data from a previous study by Homma (2010).

According to an awareness survey conducted with postgraduate students enrolled in clinical psychology training institutions all over Japan (585 valid responses), 21.6% (126) were men and 78.4% (457) were women. Nearly 90% of the respondents were enrolled in designated postgraduate schools (type 1). These results agree with findings from previous surveys such as that of the Japanese Society of Certified Clinical Psychologists (2006). In terms of age, nearly 80% of the respondents were in their twenties. Regarding the status of the respondents prior to admission to postgraduate school, 25% were working people and 35% of them were educators (teachers: 16.7%, non-teachers: 18.2%) (Homma, 2010, 25).

In terms of motivation for entering postgraduate school, factors such as 'way of living' and 'awareness of the career path' (either a desire to make a turning point in one's life or simply choose another occupation) were significantly higher in working adults than in other student groups. Homma (2010, 29) explained this as follows:

Most of them have entered the school while working or after quitting work. In addition, unlike students who entered directly from undergraduate faculties, most of them have abundant social experience, a higher age and most of them enter postgraduate school with a clearer sense of purpose than students who attained their master's degree directly. These tendencies could be the main reason why they had a strong sense of 'way of living and career awareness'.

Surprisingly, the survey conducted by Homma (2010) on the characteristics of adult working students also indicates

that they were likely to be strongly 'oriented towards becoming researchers'.

For adult working students who have such a mind-set, what forms of embarrassment might they feel after entering postgraduate school, during learning and training, or in their new workplace after graduation? It is significant to consider the concrete example of a man in his 40s with 14 years of work experience before entering a designated postgraduate school (Ishikawa, 2010).

For 10 years, he operated a small private school that provided learning support. At the same time, he accepted consultations regarding children or students who had refused to attend school. After that, he also worked as a local government employee for 4 years. Following completion of the designated postgraduate school, he worked part-time as a school counsellor and as a psychologist at a psychotherapy centre. Interestingly, he seemed more embarrassed when he began working as a clinical psychologist, rather than during the time he attended postgraduate school. There were two main causes of this embarrassment.

First, when the client confused his former experience as a worker and his experience as a clinical psychologist, he felt a strong sense of anxiety (Ishikawa, 2010, 61). In other words, he felt stress due to the client's overestimation of his experience as a clinical psychologist. As indicated earlier, particular qualities required of clinical psychologists cannot necessarily be fully developed through social experience. Rather, these qualities must come from the knowledge acquired from the experience of clinical interviews.

Second, there was also uncertainty owing to his unstable status as a part-time clinical psychologist. The intensity of situational changes at the workplace also brought a strong sense of insecurity relative to his previously guaranteed position as a civil servant (Ishikawa, 2010). The difficulty of finding a full-time position as a clinical psychologist is one of the characteristics of this profession. Among the health professions, full-time employment as a clinical psychologist is the most difficult to obtain. The license of clinical psychologists is not a national qualification. As a result, according to the law, they do not perform medical procedures and hence work outside the scope of the health insurance system. Almost all school counsellors employed in educational settings work part-time once a week and cannot earn a living unless they work at several schools. Although the possibility for full-time positions as a bureaucrat (psychology) are offered in the fields of welfare and justice administration, recruitments are often regulated by an age limit; those roads are therefore all but closed to adult working students.

These two causes of embarrassment may be common to clinical psychologists who were adult working students. Other students might also suffer these embarrassments either before or while attending a postgraduate school. If this is correct, those with stable employment who enter clinical psychology training institutions to pursue higher studies should perhaps be regarded as courageous. This perspective further suggests that adult working students may be naturally more motivated upon entrance to postgraduate school given the future difficulties they may face. Similarly, it is understandable that most adult working students aim to become researchers due to the greater chances of finding full-time positions.

Thus, although many clinical psychology training institutions accept adult working students, increasing the number of students accepted without solving the employment problems after graduation will only make it a breeding ground for misery. In addition, a special curriculum should be prepared to help them deal with clients who perceive them as special due to their previous working experience.

## **Conclusion**

The unique circumstances surrounding the specialised profession of clinical psychology has denoted that social experience, typically, the strength of adult working students, is not necessarily beneficial. Furthermore, adult working students aiming for professional careers as clinical psychologists appear to be particularly courageous given the limited number of permanent positions. However, for that reason, it is desirable that institutions for training clinical

psychologists should be not only capable of accepting enthusiastic adult working students who have decided to pursue higher studies, but also capable of providing them with the particular educational programmes they need.

Professional schools sound right places for adult working students simply because these schools provide the students with more practical education. Nonetheless, it is still difficult to determine whether adults with work experience should pursue their training at professional school or designated postgraduate school. While many have decided with firm determination to pursue further studies and become clinical psychologists, many are also worried about professional instability. Some therefore change courses towards becoming researchers while attending school.

This issue could be solved by creating joint professional and designated postgraduate schools within one university, as in the case of Kyushu University. Such an arrangement would make it possible for students to take up both educational programmes (survey visit to Kyushu University: 25 August 2010). Nonetheless, only a limited number of large institutions could achieve an advantage of this magnitude. It should therefore be necessary to consider other methods (e.g. cooperation between a professional school of a university and a designated postgraduate school of other university).

In order to ensure that the profession of a clinical psychologist becomes attractive to working adults, improvements in various areas of the employment environment are now required.

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