A STUDY OF GRADUATES’ SATISFACTION AND COMPETENCES ACQUIRED WITH AN OFFICIAL MASTER’S DEGREE AND THEIR ADJUSTMENT TO THE LABOUR MARKET

Adriana Selaya¹, Dolores Seijo², Mercedes Novo², Ramón Arce², Francisca Fariña³

¹Unidad de Psicología Forense. Universidad de Santiago de Compostela (SPAIN)
²Departamento de Ciencia Política y Sociología. Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, Grupo de Innovación Docente en Psicología Jurídica y Forense (INDOPSIFORENSE) (SPAIN)
³Departamento AIPSE. Universidad de Vigo. Grupo de Innovación Docente en Psicología Jurídica y Forense (INDOPSIFORENSE) (SPAIN)

Abstract

Introduction: According to American Psychological Association the application of Psychology to Law i.e., the Legal and Forensic Psychology is among the most demanded professional profiles from Psychology. Nevertheless, the applications of Psychology to Law lead into different professional profiles (e.g., forensic psychology, victimology, mediation, offender/victim treatment) requiring specific training. Due to the diverse roles that legal and forensic psychologists may play, their training must have general and specific competences and skills for an effective professional development. Once these competences were appropriately defined and introduced, these should be continuously assessed and, if required, modified. Thus, the main objectives of this project were to assess the adaptation of the competences acquired with the “Master en Psicología del Trabajo y las Organizaciones, Jurídica-Forense y de la Intervención Social” to the labour market and to assess the level of satisfaction perceived by master students.

Method: an ad hoc questionnaire was created to evaluate perceived satisfaction and acquired competences. With the responses, a database was created, and descriptive analysis were performed.

Results: the results about satisfaction with the master’s degree showed that the great majority of graduates are highly satisfied with it, indicating that either its general, theorical or practical training and its competences and employability are above average. Regarding to the competences, those defined as general were presented separately from the specific ones. The general competences were assessed positive and significantly over the mean score (rest value) and perceived as “very appropriate”. On the subject of specific competences, the statistic mean is perceived as “proper enough”, which means that are perceived as effective and important for a professional job. The perception that employers have regarding to the adjustment of the skills that the graduates show, was also evaluated as positive and significant. The results indicate that their performance is, in general, adequate.

Conclusions: the results of this report encourage and validate the legal and forensic psychologist role trained in this master’s degree. In that way, it is possible to carry out teaching improvements to adjust the training plan to professional necessities. In addition to that, graduates finish the master's degree with great satisfaction and a high labour insertion. It is worthwhile then to spotlight the importance of carrying out evaluation procedures once finishing the degrees. Accordingly, it is important to emphasise that more subjects of study related to legal psychology are needed in the degree’s training plans.

Keywords: competences, satisfaction, labour integration, graduate’s evaluation, psychology.

1 INTRODUCTION

Legal and Forensic Psychology is probably the greatest forgotten area on psychological studies with the arrival of the Bologna Process. In Spain, this subject either has disappeared at all in some universities or has been relegated as a simple elective subject in others, despite the great development the discipline has in our country [1]. This slow forgetting is happening while other areas has several subjects, mandatory or elective too, but the catalogue for them is broad [2].
We cannot let this continue occurring, because as the American Psychological Association (APA) says: “the skills and expertise of forensic psychologists are in high demand” [3]. One possible solution may lie in highlighting the importance of this area. It is worthwhile defining what Legal and Forensic Psychology is and which are the competences that a legal psychologist should have.

Legal Psychology is the professional and research area of Psychology whose object of study is the behaviour of people within a legal process. It includes the study, explanation, promotion, evaluation, prevention and, in case, advice and/or treatment of psychological, behavioural and relational phenomena that have an impact on people’s legal behaviour, using methods of Scientific Psychology [4].

Legal Psychology comprehends several areas differentiated by its application or way or place of intervention and so, each professional field will refer to a possible interaction between Psychology and Law [5]. The Official College of Psychologists established in 1998 the main professional profiles and thus the prospective professional areas of legal psychologists, which are mentioned below [4].

In the first place, we have Forensic Psychology or Psychology applied to the courts. It is called Forensic as it is held in the forum; in other words, it answers the technical questions a judge raises. In this area is included the Juvenile Forensic Psychology and Family Forensic Psychology.

Second, we have Penitentiary Psychology, which evaluates prisoner’s personality and behaviour and propose the personal treatment program or establishing the penitentiary regime.

Then we have Judicial Psychology, which includes Juror’s psychology and one of the most demanded area: Psychology of Testimony. The latter consists in applying knowledge from Social and Experimental Psychology to evaluate the credibility of a declaration that a witness, victim or defendant gives to the court.

Next there is Military Psychology where the psychologist is in charge of recruiting and training personal for the police service and armed forces.

Continuing, Legal Psychology also includes Victimology, in which psychologists attends and gives treatment to victims of violent crimes and create prevention campaigns to risk groups.

Finally, we have Mediation as an alternative way of receiving a solution to the court problems, carried out by the parts in conflict with the help of an impartial third: the mediator.


As shown above, there is a large variety of professional fields, so legal psychologists should have a specialised academic training which develop the necessary competences and skills [2] that this profession requires.

First of all, a definition of competence is needed. Competences imply the integration of a series of elements (such as knowledges, techniques, attitudes, procedures and values) that a person perform to solve any possible problem, demonstrating the ability to solve it with success [6].

Thus, for a legal psychologist is necessary to have law knowledge, particularly civil and family law and criminal law (including penitentiary law). It is important then to highlight every interaction between Psychology and Law [5]. In that way, Muñoz et al. (2011) define which interventions a legal psychologist may develop in the different judicial courts, establishing the main competences these professionals should have [2].

It was necessary to create the first official master’s degree in Spain to meet the existent social needs and to the dimensioning of the area, crystallised by the specialised publications [7]. In addition, this training should also be very specialised, as so are the professional competences and skills. In this way, these competences are reflected on the degree’s training plan, via the establishment of the general or specific objectives, as well as the transversal competences, for a comprehensive professional performance [8; 9].

For that same aim, the “Agencia para la Calidad del Sistema Universitario de Galicia” (ACSUG), carries out every year an analysis about the labour situation and satisfaction of Galician graduates [10]. The purpose of these surveys is to analyse on a quantitative and qualitative level, the rate of employability of the graduates, as so as the relationship of the kind of degree studied and the labour insertion and the applicability of the educational training [11].
Taking all of that, this research is pertinent and necessary as it intends to evaluate the competences acquired with the “Master en Psicología del Trabajo y las Organizaciones, Jurídica-Forense y de la Intervención Social” (MPTOJFIS) [8]. Some evaluation methods have been developed to assess these competences [11; 12; 13] and constitute the evaluation basis of this research. These methods are carried out as they’re considered reliable methods to evaluate learning outcomes [14].

1.1 Objectives
Thus, the main objectives of this project are to evaluate the adaptation of the competences acquired with the “Master en Psicología del Trabajo y las Organizaciones, Jurídica-Forense y de la Intervención Social” to the labour market and to evaluate the level of satisfaction perceived by graduates.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Procedure
First of all, students were informed about this project and that it would be necessary -and voluntary- to sign an informant consent which allows to contact them after finishing the degree.

An ad hoc questionnaire was created to evaluate different variables organised by 9 blocks: socio-demographic, academic data, satisfaction with the degree, adequation of the competences to the labour market, job search, training after de degree, perceived labour inclusion barriers, current job and first job after the degree. In that way, the questionnaire has a total of 107 items. To the current research, the ones related to perceived satisfaction and acquired competences were included.

In addition to that, another questionnaire was created, in this case for employers to assess the competences their master’s graduates’ employees have and if they adequate properly to the professional field, their business and the labour market.

With the questionnaires created, participants were contacted online, and they received it via Google Forms.

Once the responses were received, a database was created to cluster them into the main blocks of variables. Next the data were descriptively analysed.

2.2 Participants
Ninety-nine graduates were contacted. Participants had graduated in years 2010-2011, 2011-2012, 2012-2013 y 2013-2014. The 80.8% were women and the mean age of the sample was 27.29 years (SD=3.26; range 23-41 years).

The 63.3% (n=62) of the sample accessed to the master’s degree with a Psychology Degree (old plan), followed by the 35.7% (n=35) from the new plan. There was a participant that didn’t indicate her/his main degree.

In regard to the admission marks, the mean was 7.37/10 (range 6.11-9.28). The mean mark obtained in the master’s degree was 8.5/10 (range 6.70-9.77).

2.3 Data analysis
A database was created and analysed with statistical program IBM SPSS Statistics 23.0 for Windows.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Satisfaction with the master’s degree
Out of 99 participants, the 94.9% (n=94) of them would return to course the Master facing the 5.1% (n=5) that wouldn’t. Regarding to if they would study at the same University, the 90.9% (n=90) gave an affirmative response against the 9.1% (n=9) of negative responses. The 94.9% (n=94) of participants would recommend the master’s degree to other students against the 5.1% (n=5) who wouldn’t.
In reference to the satisfaction with the master’s degree, several areas were assessed with a Likert scale with 5 values: no satisfaction, little, some, appropriate and much. Results are shown in Figure 1.

### 3.2 Adaptation of the acquired competences to the labour market

The perception of graduates about the adequation of the competences reflected in this training plan to the labour needs was assessed. General and specific competences were evaluated separately.

First of all, results about **general competences** (see Appendix I) are shown. The mean value given by graduates, $M=4.08$, show that general competences were perceived as “very appropriate”.

The **general objectives** perceived as better or more proper were “To orient the professional activity from a respectful perspective and to consider the ethical and deontological principles” ($M=4.42$) and “To orient the professional activity from a respectful perspective and to promote the peace culture and the fundamental rights” ($M=4.37$). The objectives less valued as adequate to the labour market were “Techniques and skills for advanced investigation” ($M=3.86$) and “To resolve problems in new and interdisciplinary contexts” ($M=3.84$), with both being perceived as “appropriate”.

Regarding to **specific competences** (see Appendix II), results are shown in Figure 2. Taken generally, specific objectives were perceived as “appropriate”, with a value of $M=3.87$.

The **specific objectives** perceived as more proper were “To write up and to elaborate expert’s reports” ($M=4.44$); “To orient the professional activity by respect, equality, impartiality and objectivity values” ($M=4.37$) and “To know how to manage specialised documental sources to search for information” ($M=4.26$). The less valued objectives were “To elaborate intervention projects on Organizational Psychology” ($M=3.32$); “To know, assess and interpret the relation between individual differences and its influence on organizational effectiveness” and “To know at an advanced level several techniques and tools which allow to understand, assess and/or solve labour problematic situations”, both with a value of $M=3.47$.

![Figure 1. Punctuations of Graduates satisfaction](#)
3.3 Adequation of the competences by employers

In order to confirm or not if the general and specific competences acquired respond to employers’-and labour market’s- needs, their perception was analysed. From the eleven responses obtained, one was not computed as it wasn’t complete. Results are shown in Figure 3, being all the punctuations above the median and with a general activity perceived as “quite proper” ($M=3.29$).

4 CONCLUSIONS

The main objectives were to evaluate the adjustment of the competences acquired in the master’s degree to the labour market and to assess the satisfaction it generates to graduates. Thus, principal conclusions are presented below.

A. High satisfaction, high labour integration for graduates

Results show that graduates are very satisfied with the degree in each of the evaluated areas and so are results related to the employability, assessed as very high after studying this degree. This could be due to the increasing request for this kind of professionals and to the officiality of the degree. This results are in line with those the ACSUG [10] had obtained. In that way, Fitri Abu, Ilias, Abd and
Zulkeflee [15] state that the quality of the service has a positive and significant relation with alumni’s satisfaction and thus, improving this quality could improve the graduates’ satisfaction.

B. It validates the formative plan of the master’s degree. Needs and teaching improvements and practical and theoretical adjustment of the training plan.

Thus, it has been indirectly assessed that the formative plan is adapted to the professional needs. Knowing the alumni’s main necessities and those of the labour market, is possible to carry out teaching improvements and to keep adjusting the training plan to the professional needs in a theoretical and practical way. As Alves et al. [16] indicates, “an effective information exchange between higher education and the labour market, so that higher education institutions can be shaped, by the demands of the market”.

C. It helps to define the legal and forensic professional role

Through the validation of the degree’s competences, as it has been proved its adjustment to the professional performance requested, a definition of the professional role [5] can be done. In addition, as these competences are perceived as adequate by employers, these role and competences are those a legal and forensic psychologist should have.

D. The importance of graduate’s consultation processes.

These processes allow the validation and, if it’s needed, the modification of the training plans. It is important to emphasise the necessity of consulting groups of interest in program evaluation; as higher education models of evaluation are brought up [17]. It is worthy to highlight that the 99% percent of the total of graduates to the selected dates were contacted, and so these results could be extensible to the totality of graduates.

E. University: a social value

It is needed then to highlight the importance of having proper University formative plans and the social value it implies [18], as it allows the specialised development in a professional world in an area like forensic psychology [19; 20; 21], which is sometimes carried out by professionals that doesn’t have accreditation enough to do it [22].

F. The importance that basic training plans include legal psychology related subjects

It is worthwhile then to think about the current Psychology Grade’s formative plans, as legal and forensic subjects are disappearing and so are opportunities of training professionals in a high-demanded area, which requires, as it has been shown with this study, very specialised and specific competences.

Therefore, and as a general conclusion, the raised objectives are resolved in a favourable way to this master’s degree, having been assessed that it is adapted and adjusted to the professional role that is needed and, in addition, with high levels of satisfaction among its graduates.

Limitations

Despite the conclusions and contributions developed in here, some limitations should be considered. The questionnaire was developed in Google Forms, for both graduates and employers. However, as it has been highlighted, the sample is formed by 99% of graduates, and consequently the representativeness of the sample is high.

Another possible limitation is that only ten employers answered the questionnaire and it could exist a bias in them, as one person responded always with the same punctuation.

Finally, the sample is formed by different profiles for accessing the degree and the labour market, as the evaluated years include graduates of the old formative plan and of the European Higher Education Area (Bologna Plan) (initiated in 2007).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Consolidación y Estructuración de Unidades de Investigación Competitivas en el Sistema Universitario de Galicia (Xunta de Galicia). Grupo PS1 Universidade de Vigo.
REFERENCES


