



THE PROFESSIONAL BOARD FOR PSYCHOLOGY

THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS COUNCIL OF SOUTH AFRICA

**POLICY ON THE CLASSIFICATION OF PSYCHOMETRIC
MEASURING DEVICES, INSTRUMENTS, METHODS AND
TECHNIQUES**

Preamble

The history of development and use of psychometric measuring devices, instruments, methods and techniques in South Africa have been tainted by the legacy of segregation which influenced certain stereotypical attitudes and culturally insensitive and inappropriate interventions. As a result very few tests are available that have been developed and applied with the necessary appreciation of cultural and other diversity concerns with a view to standardizing same for all South Africans.

The Employment Equity Act, 1998 states that:

Psychometric testing and other similar assessments of an employee are prohibited unless the test or assessment being used:

- (a) has been scientifically shown to be valid and reliable;*
- (b) can be applied fairly to all employees; and*
- (c) is not biased against any employee or group.*

The onus is thus on testers to not only be familiar with the broad domain of psychometric theory and research regarding the use of tests and test results, but to also be familiar with and contribute to specific empirical studies related to the psychometric properties of the tests they use.

In the view of this, it would be unwise for psychologists not to address the development and adaptation of culturally appropriate measures as a matter of great urgency. With the expected upsurge in test development and adaptation initiatives, it is important that test developers and users familiarise themselves with policies regarding the use and classification of psychological tests, as outlined in this document (see note 1 at the end of the document).

A. WHY DO WE CLASSIFY TESTS?

The use of a psychometric measuring device, test, questionnaire, technique or instrument that assesses intellectual or cognitive ability or functioning, aptitude, interest, personality make-up or personality functioning, is constituted as being a psychological act. This in view of possible harm and management implications of persons who may be adversely affected by test outcomes, requires appropriate professional qualifications, skills and experience. According to the Health Professions Act, Act 56 of 1974, only registered psychologists are permitted to perform psychological acts which, in relation to evaluation, testing and assessment:-

- "(a) the evaluation of behaviour or mental processes or personality adjustments or adjustments of individuals or groups of persons, through the interpretation of tests for the determination of intellectual abilities, aptitude, interests, personality make-up or personality functioning, and the diagnosis of personality and emotional functions and mental functioning deficiencies according to a recognised scientific system for the classification of mental deficiencies;*
- (b) the use of any method or practice aimed at aiding persons or groups of persons in the adjustment of personality, emotional or behavioural problems or at the promotion of positive personality change, growth and development, and the identification and evaluation of personality dynamics and personality functioning according to psychological scientific methods;*

- (c) *the evaluation of emotional, behavioural and cognitive processes or adjustment of personality of individuals or groups of persons by the usage and interpretation of questionnaires, tests, projections or other techniques or any apparatus, whether of South African origin or imported, for the determination of intellectual abilities aptitude, personality make-up, personality functioning, psychophysiological functioning or psychopathology;*
- (d) *the exercising of control over prescribed questionnaires or tests or prescribed techniques, apparatus or instruments for the determination of intellectual abilities, aptitude, personality make-up, personality functioning, psychophysiological functioning or psychopathology;*
- (e) *the development of and control over the development of questionnaires, tests, techniques, apparatus or instruments for the determination of intellectual abilities, aptitude, personality make-up, personality functioning, psychophysiological functioning or psychopathology".*

Thus, according to the Health Professions Act, Act 56 of 1974, tests, measures, questionnaires, instruments, etc. that tap psychological constructs must be used, interpreted, and controlled by psychologists. Certain psychological tests (see note ii at the end of the document) can, however, be used by psychometrists, psychotechnicians, registered counsellor, and other professionals (e.g., speech and occupational therapists) provided that:

- (a). the use of the test has been certified for that category of tester by the Psychometrics Committee of the Professional Board for Psychology;
- (b). the tester complies with whatever restrictions may be placed on the test's use relevant to the category of test user that he/she is registered as. For example, a psychometrist may administer, score and preliminary interpret certain psychological tests but not report on the results of such tests;
- (c). the tester seeks mentoring from a psychologist where specialist input would enhance the testing process and the understanding of the test results; and
- (d). the tester has been appropriately trained and has achieved the minimum competencies required to use the test.

In view of the specific conditions under which psychological tests may be used by people other than registered psychologists, it is necessary to classify tests to facilitate the determination of the category of tester who may use them. The Psychometrics Committee of the Professional Board for Psychology has been mandated by the Board to, among other things:

"classify and advise on regular revision of any device, instrument, method, technique or test aimed at aiding persons or groups of persons in the adjustment of personality, emotional or behavioural problems or at the promotion of positive personality change, growth and development or for the determination of intellectual abilities, personality make-up, personality functioning, aptitude or interests."

Classification of a test by the Psychometrics Committee of the Professional Board for Psychology does not impose any new restrictions on a psychological test (the Health Professions Act, Act 56 of 1974, imposes such restrictions). Instead, classification allows for the relaxing of conditions under which a test can be used, which makes the test more freely available.

There are two general psychological test classification categories, namely:

1. **Psychological Tests** - which, although they can be used to varying extents by psychometrists and psychotechnicians (see notes ii, iii and iv at the end of the document), need to be under the control of psychologists as regards:
 - a. selecting the test
 - b. administering and scoring it
 - c. interpreting it
 - d. reporting on it.

2. **Prescribed Tests used by other Professionals.** The Professional Board for Speech, Language and Hearing Professions, and Occupational Therapy and Medical Orthotics/Prosthetics, are in the process of furnishing the Psychometrics Committee with lists of tests that may tap psychological constructs which they use. The relevant Boards and the Psychometrics Committee will discuss these lists and reach agreement on the prescribed list of tests for the various professionals as well as the nature of the psychometrics and assessment training which trainees receive.

B. TEST CLASSIFICATION PROCESS

1. Procedure to be followed when developing a new measure or adapting an existing measure

It is recognised that while tests are being developed, or adapted for use in South Africa, a wide range of standardisation and psychometric data need to be collected. In such instances, testers will find themselves in the position of using a test that has not yet been classified. Consequently, the onus is on the test developer to:

- a. notify the Psychometrics Committee regarding:
 - i. the proposed name and purpose of the test,
 - ii. the time period during which it is envisaged that the standardisation and psychometric data will be collected,
 - iii. when the test will probably be submitted for classification purposes; and
- b. notify testers who will use the test for the purposes of collecting standardisation and psychometric data regarding:
 - i. the fact that the test should be viewed as being in its development phase and that the reliability and validity of the data obtained from it cannot yet be guaranteed,
 - ii. the time period during which it is envisaged that the standardisation and psychometric data will be collected, and
 - iii. when the test will probably be submitted for classification purposes to the Psychometrics Committee.

On receiving such notification, the Psychometrics Committee will:

- i. record the name of the test in the Committee's annual publication, *List of Tests Classified as being Psychological Tests*, under a separate heading: "Tests Currently being Developed/Adapted"; and
- ii. take note of the time period during which the test should remain listed as being in the "Development Phase" and when it is anticipated that it will be submitted for classification purposes.

Should the test not be submitted for classification purposes within a reasonable period of time, the Psychometrics Committee reserves the right to remove it from the *List of Tests Classified as being Psychological Tests*, pending the test developer not being able to convince the Committee that the test is still either in the development phase or will shortly be submitted for classification purposes.

2. Information Required when submitting a Measure for Classification

Before a test can be classified, information needs to be obtained regarding:

- a. the name of the test, name(s) of the test developer(s) and distributors, date when the test was published;
- b. the content domain(s) tapped by the test. This provides information on whether or not the test measures a psychological construct;
- c. its psychometric properties and the nature of the norm group(s), where appropriate;

- d. the context in which the test is used (e.g., assessment/ screening of normal/dysfunctional behaviour);
- e. whether it is administered in a group context or individually;
- f. the nature of administration - standardised, dynamic or interactive, computerised;
- g. the nature of the scoring - objective, non-objective, computerised;
- h. the nature of the test interpretation - straightforward (cut-points), computer-generated, minor decision-making required, high level decision-making and psychological expertise required;
- i. the complexity of feedback and reporting - structured, semi-structured, requires high-level integrative skills and expertise.

Using the above information, a classification can be made regarding whether or not it is a psychological test.

3. Process followed when Classifying a Measure

- a. The **process** followed by the Psychometrics Committee when classifying and evaluating a test is as follows:
 - i. Test developers/distributors submit 2 copies of all the test materials and manuals to the Psychometrics Committee together with their proposed classification **and an evaluation fee of R10,000 per test.**
 - ii. Independent reviewers review the test and submit a report to the Psychometrics Committee regarding their evaluation and classification of the test. It is not the policy of the Psychometrics Committee to appoint test developers as reviewers. In fact, should any of the expert reviewers at any time feel that for whatever reason they are unable to objectively and impartially review a test, it is their duty to inform the Psychometrics Committee of this and to recuse themselves from the matter if needs be.
 - iii. The test developers are informed of the findings of the independent reviewers and are given the opportunity to respond to this information and to attend to some of the psychometric deficiencies pointed out if they so desire.
 - iv. The test developers are requested to send their test material for language editing and a certificate from the language editors be sent together with the test.
 - iv. The Psychometrics Committee reaches an informed decision regarding the classification of the test.
- b. During the review process, tests are not only classified by the Psychometrics Committee, but are also evaluated by them. To this end, psychological tests need to adhere to the following **minimum standards**:
 - i. The construct(s) tapped by the test should be clearly delineated and evidence should be provided to indicate that the test meets its intended purpose.
 - ii. There should be a test manual which details how to administer, score and interpret it, as well as providing the necessary technical information (see points iii to viii).
 - iii. Its psychometric properties should be acceptable. In this regard it should be noted that the validity and reliability of a test are inter-linked. Despite empirical evidence in support of its validity, a test cannot be considered to be valid unless it is also reliable. Furthermore, the reliability and certain aspects of a test's validity need to be established for each group and purpose for which it is intended to be used.
 - iv. The process of developing the test should be documented.
 - v. If parallel language versions exist, their equivalence needs to be established and the linguistic proficiency required by the test-takers should be stated.
 - vi. An indication as to whether the item content is culturally-reduced or culture specific in nature should be provided.

- vii. Empirical evidence should be provided concerning the appropriateness of the tests for groups of different cultural, ethnic, socio-economic or linguistic backgrounds who are likely to be tested.
- viii. The population(s) represented by any normative or comparison group(s), the dates the data were gathered, and the process used to select the normative sample, should be indicated in the manual.

C. Having classified and evaluated a test, the Psychometrics Committee issues a **certificate** which contains the following information:

- i. Name of test
- ii. Classification
- iii. Date on which classification decision was made
- iv. Points to be noted

It is mandatory for test developers to include the certificate on the first page of the test manual. By insisting that the certificate be included in the manual, it is hoped that test developers and testers will take personal responsibility for not developing or using tests that are not psychometrically sound.

D **Notes:**

- i. The information in this document reflects the working position of the Psychometrics Committee of the Professional Board for Psychology as regards test classification. Regular consultation with stakeholders has informed and continues to inform the working position of the Committee.
- ii. To enhance the ease of reading this document, the term "test" has been used in a generic sense. Consequently, throughout the document where "test" is used, the reader should assume that terms such as "psychometric measuring devices", "questionnaires", "instruments", "techniques", "projections", "apparatus" are also meant to apply.
- iii. Fair testing practices entail administering tests in the language in which the test-taker is sufficiently competent. This is difficult to achieve at present as there are not sufficient psychologists, psychometrists, and psychotechnicians in South Africa who are fluent in African languages. With this in mind, a psychologist may wish to use an assistant who is fluent in an African language. The onus is on the psychologist concerned to ensure that the assistant is suitably trained to be able to assist with giving the test instructions, recording and subsequently translating verbal test responses, and generally assisting during the test administration process.
- iv. ***Only persons registered with the Professional Board for Psychology under the auspices of the HPCSA may administer, score, interpret and give feedback on psychological tests. However, interpretation and feedback are limited to registered psychologists, and psychometrists registered in the category Independent/Private practice.***

Psychometrists, irrespective of registration category, will not be permitted to use:

Projective techniques (for example TAT, CAT, Rorschach);

Specialist neuropsychological measures; and

Measures that are used for the diagnosis of psychopathology (for example MMPI-II).

- v. it is not permissible to use the tests that are currently being developed or or in the process of classification for clinical or selection purposes for financial enrichment.