



# Training Opportunities for Forensic Practitioners in the Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

Opportunities and training programs for forensic psychologists remain in the early stages of development. In the Philippines, forensic psychology is relatively a recent area of study. In fact, there is only one university in the country that grants a degree in forensic psychology. This research explored the actual training opportunities for psychology practitioners. The study utilized a qualitative research design using in-depth interviews to five (5) participants who are presently practicing forensic services. It was found out that forensic psychology practitioners in the country agreed to establish a special interest group to set ground rules and regulations and to standardize ethical guidelines for the profession.

**Keywords:** Forensic practice, Forensic psychology, Forensic psychology training opportunities

## INTRODUCTION

For the last twenty years, the field of forensic psychology has witnessed an expansion of opportunities for didactic training and supervised experience in forensic practice in the graduate school, predoctoral, internship, and postdoctoral levels. There has been a steady increase in the number of doctoral programs in clinical and counseling psychology that feature at least one course or offer practicum experience. There has also been an increase in the number of predoctoral clinical internships offering supervised experience in forensic practice. However, despite the increase in formal forensic training of any kind offered by predoctoral and internship training sites, there are still relatively few doctoral programs that focus on forensic training, and with limited internship programs [1].

According to DeMatteo D. et al, regardless of the precise definition, it is clear that the field of forensic psychology has experienced remarkable conceptual and empirical advances in the past three decades [2]. Because of this increase in interest, it is important that forensic psychology training programs adequately prepare students to engage in a high-quality forensic practice. More general clinical training programs should also be advised to supplement their basic training needs through forensically-oriented courses and training opportunities. The growth and development of forensic psychology is perhaps best

evidenced by looking at the number and diversity of educational and training opportunities available to students and practitioners. These opportunities range from undergraduate survey courses examining the broad intersection of law and psychology to joint-degree graduate programs offering terminal degrees in both law (JD) and Psychology (PhD or PsyD). Moreover, opportunities for continuing education and postdoctoral specialization in forensic psychology are becoming increasingly more available.

As the popularity of forensic psychology has increased in recent years, the availability of forensic psychology training programs has increased almost commensurately. Forensic psychology training programs or more general programs that offer a forensic psychology track or concentration, have proliferated rapidly in the past two decades. As will be discussed, a variety of educational and training opportunities in forensic psychology now exist at the undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral levels, and they offer a wide variety of educational and training opportunities in both clinical and nonclinical (i.e. research-based) forensic psychology. Even beyond the doctoral degrees, there are opportunities for advanced credentialing (i.e. board certification) for forensic practitioners who wish to distinguish themselves as experts in forensic psychology.

There are a variety of different training models for doctoral programs in forensic psychology (Huss, in press). Melton, Huss,

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and Tomkins identified three specific training models that each has their own advantages and disadvantages. First, joint-degree programs offer the opportunity for students to obtain degrees in both psychology and the law. These programs normally result in a student obtaining both a JD in law and a PhD or PsyD in psychology. However, it is not necessary or even preferred to obtain a degree in both the law and psychology to become a forensic psychologist.

### Another path to becoming a forensic psychologist

As forensic psychology practitioner it involves attending a specialty program in forensic psychology. These programs typically offer a degree in clinical or counseling psychology, and offer additional opportunities for training specifically in forensic psychology. Students in these specialty programs take classes in forensic-related topics, participate in clinical practices or internships at prisons or forensic hospitals, conduct forensic research, and even take some law classes. The third type of program offers a minor in forensic psychology. Students in these programs get their primary training in clinical or counseling psychology, but may take a specialized class in forensic psychology, conduct their dissertation on a forensic related topic, or even get some training in a forensic setting.

Meanwhile, students do not have to attend a specialized program that offers any forensic training. Most forensic psychologists obtained a doctoral degree in clinical or counseling psychology, and then acquired additional training for their postdoctoral internship or sought out workshops or other equal training or education that would allow them to become more knowledgeable about forensic psychology. It shall be clear that there is not just one path to becoming a forensic psychologist [2].

Although forensic psychology training programs have increased in number, scope, and sophistication in recent years, important questions remain regarding the structure, focus, and goals of these programs [3].

Consequently, according to Franklin, K, at the present time, there is no single acceptable training model for forensic psychologists. The dominant model continues to be one in which a student obtains a doctoral degree in clinical psychology, and subsequently pursues a postdoctoral specialization in forensics. However, more and more graduate schools are beginning to adopt forensic tracks [4].

In the Philippines, training programs and opportunities for forensic psychology practitioners are not yet fully established. Clinical psychologists were actually the first professionals who were engaged in forensic practices in the country, even without direct training to become forensic practitioners. They served as an expert witness, and they stand in litigation particularly on marriage nullification and child custody, during the present time. Even though there were no clear documents to be shown to identify who, where, or when they started practicing forensic psychology matters.

Therefore, in an unpublished research, it was gleaned upon that forensic practitioners are confronted with many challenges which may be solved by providing them training opportunities to improve their competencies. In light of the current situation, the study strived to contribute additional knowledge to the shortage of research investigation regarding the training opportunities needed by forensic psychology practitioners. It further aimed to encourage the establishment of specialty guidelines and formal special interest groups for forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines.

### Statement of the problems

The study was conducted to explore training opportunities for forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions:

- What are the demographic characteristics of forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines?
- What are the job descriptions of forensic psychology practitioners? In terms of the following cases handled: Nullity; Child custody; Violence against women and others, please specify.
- What are the competencies of forensic psychology practitioners?
- Do forensic psychology practitioners have substantial training that is properly aligned with their field?
- What are common concerns and issues faced by forensic psychology practitioners?
- Do forensic psychology practitioners need to have specialty guidelines and specialized groups to substantiate and formalize the training needed by forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines?

### Research objectives

The researcher aimed to:

- Describe the job description of forensic psychology practitioners in terms of the following cases handled:
  - Nullity
  - Child custody
  - Violence against women
  - Others, please specify
- Determine the competencies of forensic psychology practitioners.
- Determine whether forensic psychology practitioners have substantial training properly aligned with their field.
- Determine common concerns and issues faced by forensic psychology practitioners.
- Attempts to suggest a conception of specialty guidelines and specialized groups to substantiate and formalize training needed by forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines.

## Significance of the study

The study is found beneficial to the following individual/group:

**To forensic practitioners:** This study shall be useful for them by making the result as an avenue to engage and participate through different training programs, workshops and certificate courses, to continuously keep them abreast with the current practices in delivering professional forensic services.

**To the psychological association of the philippines:** This study shall be valuable for them by making the result as a basis for continuously crafting, designing, and establishing substantial training opportunities for forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines. Moreover, it is hoped that a special interest group be formed specifically for forensic psychology practitioners, for them to be more confident and to be equipped with knowledge and proper training in their field of expertise.

**To the FEU psychology department:** Being the pioneer university offering Forensic Psychology Program in the Philippines, it is the intention of the research that the knowledge acquired by this study shall be helpful in creating and catering training programs for students and practitioners, for them to be more competitive in dealing with forensic cases.

**To students and future researchers:** They may use this study to serve as a foundation to conduct further research that is of value and relevant to the field of psychology in general.

## METHODOLOGY

This chapter includes the discussion of research design, participants, ethical consideration, data gathering procedure, and research impediments.

### Measures

This research study utilized qualitative research design to depict the experiences of forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines. Through the use of guide questions and in-depth interview, the research elicited factual investigation regarding their current practices in testifying in the court.

### Participants

The participants of this study were five (5) forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines. The research used purposive sampling technique, hence parameters in choosing the participants were set, that is: must be a forensic psychology practitioner who is currently practicing and testifying in the court, a licensed holder, and must be 25 years old and up.

### Instrumentation

In gathering the data, the researcher developed an interview guide questions that includes forensic psychology practitioners' description of possible case/s handled, competencies, training experiences and recommendation regarding the creation of

special interest groups. These were collected through the use of personal data sheets, phone calls and in-depth interviews.

### Research impediments (limitations and delimitations)

The researcher experienced some difficulties in the conduct of this study. The most challenging concern was the limited numbers of forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines. Another was the participants' availability. Scheduling took weeks to be able to finalize and proceed with the interview.

### Ethical consideration

Ethical considerations were established in the conduct of the research by providing cover letters and informed consent. The cover letter stated the nature of research, the objective of the study, and the utilization of the data to be obtained. Informed consent, on the other hand, was also provided to the participants and allowed them to decide whether or not to voluntarily participate in the study. It was also categorically stated that all or any substantive information obtained from the survey will be treated with utmost confidentiality and the data gathered shall be used only for the said purpose it was gathered for.

### Data gathering procedure

The researcher was able to connect with and identify the practicing Forensic Psychologists in the country from the referral of colleagues. Initially, the researcher sought permission from the participants through the use of social media. It was followed by a phone call and an in-depth interview--all scheduled accordingly, considering the participants' time and convenience. The participants were chosen through a purposive sampling procedure. Additionally, the target participants were licensed psychologists who were currently practicing forensic cases.

### Data analysis

All data were collected, transcribed, and translated using thematic analysis. For demographic data the researcher used frequencies and percentages, computation of mean, and standard deviation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### What are the demographic characteristics of forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines?

Using both phone-call and in-depth interview, the researcher was able to gather 5 forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines. Table 1 shows the basic demographic characteristics of the participants.

**Table 1:** Demographic characteristics of the participants of this study.

Age	n=5	F	%
	36-40	2	40
	41-45	2	40
	46-50	1	20
Mean=41.4		Sd=5.12	
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	1		20
Female	4		80
<b>Civil status</b>			
Single	2		40
Married	3		60
<b>Highest education attainment</b>			
Masteral	2		40
Phd	3		60
<b>Field of specialization</b>			
Clinical	4		80
Social	1		20
<b>Years of practice</b>			
4-5	2		40
6-10	3		60

The mean age of participants is 41, youngest at 36, and oldest at 47. The standard deviation suggests a rather wide distribution of age of the participants. The data also presents that a forensic practitioner is most likely a female, married, with a PhD in Clinical Psychology and is a practitioner for more than 7-10 years. Markedly however is the presence of 2 practitioners who only have masteral degrees and 1 participant who has a graduate degree in social psychology.

**What are the job descriptions of forensic psychology practitioners?**

**Job description:** Nullity -“Assessment, diagnosis and no intervention need...in my case when I composed my psychological report usually I ended up having a 30-page report... not the typical report that we usually do, in court it’s a different practice.”~ R1-LG36

“Child custody – Assessment, diagnosis and capacity of the people...example justification of parent if they are capable of handling the needs of the child/children.”~ R1-LG36

“Both annulment and child custody...so both requires an in-depth inquiry and there’s a need to have collateral interview so that the information needed would be relevant.”~R2-SC43

“Violence against women and criminal cases...Assessment for capacity to stand trial for criminal cases for VAWC assessment for trauma and or other pathology such as depression and intellectual disability. I don’t handle annulment cases because I think it’s more of a civil cases not forensic”~R3-HS36

“I do assessment of both or either party/parties involved in the case/s. Processing is also conducted when necessary and required. Counseling is given to survivors of domestic violence when sought. Being expert witnesses also when required though

in adoption, usually the needed service is assessment.”~R4-YG47

“I handle nullity, child custody and Violence against women and others, – Perform psychological assessment, Preparation of Psychological report and Testifying in court.”~R5-MTOBA45

Notably, a forensic psychology practitioner in the Philippines handles cases such as annulment, child custody, and violence against women and children. It was observed that the common job responsibilities were conducting psychological assessment, preparing psychological evaluation, doing collateral interviews if needed and testifying in court. For psychological assessment and evaluation, participants stated that in forensic practices doing such things is far different from the typical assessment psychologists are preparing, because they used to have a 30-page report that is composed of all the relevant information and evidence of their clients. More so, collateral interview was one of the best ways to clarify things and to elicit pertinent data. In addition, testifying in court is another job responsibility of forensic psychology practitioners.

It was identified that forensic psychologists perform psychodiagnostic examinations ordered by the courts to provide a variety of forensic assessments, including determining competency to stand trial or criminal responsibility (legal insanity. Work is performed through the application of a body of knowledge related to professional psychologist methods, practices, procedures, policies, and regulations; and materials and equipment of the psychologist service (Michigan Civil Service Commission Job Specification Forensic Psychologist, n.d.).

### What are the competencies of forensic psychology practitioners?

**Assessment:** “In terms of psychological assessment, you have to say what [you] have to say. I have been a practitioner since 2001, and even work at Philpsycor. Thus, I am very much familiar with the content and entity of assessment be it in industrial or clinical settings. My exposure to this field for many years really equipped me to easily conduct assessment to clients/patients.”~R1-LG36

“Of course assessment of client/s, then doing psychological evaluation and then if there’s a need to testify in the court.”~R2-SC43

“Assessment... I am used to it because in the clinic there were bulks of cases every day or in a week, so in assessment you need to have intake and clinical interview and also you need to prepare an appropriate tests materials depending on the case on the client/s”~R3-HS36

“I do an intake interview in assessment and collateral interview if needed, in order to elicit enough information. Because in assessment you should be very attentive in what writing your psychological evaluation.”~R4-YG47

“Interview is a challenge as questions must be addressed to client and at time some questions are thought of as impressions are arrived at; collateral interview is a must especially when the

other party does not cooperate as regards nullity where antecedent is an element historical background is very extensive.”~R5-MTOBA45

### Being an expert witness

“As an expert witness need to build your own reputation”... because intimidation arises when you stand as an expert witness...and in courtroom you need to prove your psychological report...like what is written there should be presented well.”~R1-LG36

“Of course assessment of client/s, then doing psychological evaluation and then if there’s a need to testify in the court.”~R2-SC43

“Being an expert witness you need to be yourself...be confident while presenting the case.”~R3-HS36

“Being an expert witness you should be very firm and confident in presenting yourself inside the courtroom, as if you know everything you should be telling/presenting.”~R4-YG47

“Being an expert witness-extensive knowledge of psychology is very important there is need to be abreast with the latest trends in the practice and knowledge of the law is an advantage.”~R5-MTOBA45

Most of the participants confidently affirmed that doing assessment is not that challenging for them because they are exposed to it repeatedly. The participants managed to give advice like to be extra cautious in writing psychological evaluation and suggest that it is a must utilizing appropriate test materials. Consequently, collateral interviews must be done predominantly when the client does not cooperatively participate during the assessment proper.

Moreover, in the aspect of being an expert witness majority of them stated that it requires being certain on what you are saying. Having the guts to present ones’ self while testifying inside the courtroom is an edge for them. And building their own reputation helps them to become acknowledged in their field. Subsequently, being an expert witness requires extensive knowledge of psychology and maintains current knowledge of laws.

Therefore, in relation to the study of El-Shenawy, 2017 the forensic evaluator should take into account a set of standards for the selection, administration, and interpretation of psychological tests in forensic assessment. Additionally, collateral sources of information, when available, are usually an important element of the forensic assessment. With the consideration of multiple data sources, varying points of view may need to be reconciled [5,6].

### Do forensic psychology practitioners have substantial training that is properly aligned with their field?

**Continuous educational activities:** “Training/convention-no need with CPD...training itself since I started practicing legal cases since 2010...the training that I gain through my education, research and other training help me to be confident in what I

am doing... There were no formal training opportunities back then, so I learned all the strategies and techniques on my own to practice legal matters.”~R1-LG36

“For me, there’s no need for training professional or continuous professional activities because what we need is training itself, like for example in my case I have been practicing forensic psychology for years now. During my time, there was not so much training nor formal education for forensic practices. I have learned and managed things on my own. In the course of my profession, I have only experienced attending one conference in 2005, and a seminar for CPD and renewal of my certificate in 2015.”~R1-LG36

“Certificate course...and I have been handling assessments for industrial, clinical and forensic settings for a pretty long time and I must say, I have the knowledge and capability to provide psychological evaluations based on my experience.”~R1-LG36

“If I may suggest, it would be nice if there will be a seminar provider that could offer unique and new topics that are relevant and essential in forensic psychology.”~R1-LG36

“I used to attend training and workshops to keep me updated on the current trends.”~R2-SC43 “Training/convention and Workshop/s...I attend training/convention and workshop to see if there is an appropriate training for forensic psychology, but unfortunately there’s none and other reason is for CPD points.”~R3-HS36

“For training/convention, since, I used to deliver or conduct my own training and workshop, when I am the facilitator...In my part I love also to attend a lot seminars and workshops regarding forensic practices for the advancement and updating of my skills in doing forensic cases.”~R4-YG47

“None...My work experienced of being a practicing psychologist and my background as law student serves as my training in dealing with forensic cases.”~R5-MTOBA45

In this study, the researcher explored the participants’ continuous educational activities. Most of them stated that through their experience and knowledge of handling forensic psychology cases for long years, they don’t need to have special training/convention, certificate courses or workshops to be taken. Nonetheless, some cited that they attend training/convention for the purpose of keeping them updated on the current trends and practices. And for the reason of gaining CPD points for the renewal of their license. Additionally, they suggested that if there is a chance of conducting a continuous educational program, the organizer must offer topics that are not usual and that are of relevance in their forensic practice.

It was then clearly seen that the participants were competent enough. Despite the fact that they do not actually have formal training to practice forensic cases but through their substantive experience and willingness to become an expert they make use of their potential to study psychology and the law.

Thus, according to Neal, T. 2017, competence can be acquired through various combinations of education, training, supervised experience, consultation, study, and professional experience. Forensic practitioners planning to provide services, teach, or

conduct research involving populations, areas, techniques, or technologies that are new to them are encouraged to undertake relevant education, training, supervised experience, consultation, or study. Forensic practitioners make ongoing efforts to develop and maintain their competencies. To maintain the requisite knowledge and skill, forensic practitioners keep abreast of developments in the fields of psychology and the law [7].

### What are common concerns and issues faced by forensic psychology practitioners?

**Recognition:** “Since forensic psychology is a separate discipline, there is this feeling of intimidation from others. People in the legal system have low regard for psychologists when it comes to defending cases in court, probably because of the existing misconceptions about our practices and what psychologists are capable of doing.”~R1-LG36

“Additionally, since there are no forensic psychologist yet in the country, we are not actually properly recognized inside the courtroom as if the Judges are just seeing us an on call consultants.”~R4-YG47

**Malpractices:** “Another observation would be those psychometricians who practice forensic psychology and testify in court without a psychologist license. There is a possibility that if he/she testifies in the court, it can be repeated since experience is present. However, in handling cases from the higher court, a person’s credibility, regardless of experiences, will be questionable if not a license holder.”~R1-LG36

“Another issue is the utilization of obsolete testing tools such as DSM 3 and issuance of photocopied materials, then charging clients with high payment. Practitioners must utilize updated (psychological) tests to clients.”~R1-LG36

“And sad to say that some psychologists used templated psychological reports.”~R1-LG36

“The issues resulting from malpractices conducted by some psychologists (or parapsychologists) especially those who have been practicing prior to the Law. Some professionals also in the judiciary seem to have lack of knowledge on our practice that they would usually insist on their procedure.”~R4-YG47

**Training:** “Limited updated trainings.”~ R2-SC43

“Since, I am affiliated with NCMH, there were bulk of patients...” And in assessment...I think the institution needs to have updated testing materials. Because it will reflect on our training as professional.”~R3-HS36

“Also that in the Philippines, there are no forensic psychologists yet. We are actually clinical/counseling/assessment psychologist working in forensic setting.”~R4-YG47

“None so far maybe the lack of standardized professional fee.”~ R5-MTOBA45

Remarkably, the common concerns or issues faced and are facing by forensic psychology practitioners are with regards to recognition, malpractice, and training. In relation to recognition, it was revealed that they encounter intimidation

and not being recognized as an expert, particularly when they are testifying inside the courtroom. Apparently, few of them cited some sentiments like as if the judges do not have a high regard and just see them only as a consultant.

Another highlighted issue was in line with malpractices made by some practitioners. Mainly, in the utilization of test materials other forensic psychology practitioners give obsolete and photocopied test materials to their clients. Added to this, they tend to charge a high rate of payment despite the fact of their action.

Furthermore, in the Philippines there is no forensic psychologist so far, the first to practice forensic psychology cases were actually clinical, counseling and social psychologists working in forensic settings. Thus, when it comes to training there were only few or very limited offerings provided to them.

By which, as forensic psychologists often act as an expert witness, they must set for him/herself the highest possible ethical standards. According to Kalmbach, K. and Lyons, P. "Professionals who choose to participate in the legal forum must ensure that their performance meets not only the standards of general practice for their profession, but also those pertaining to the forensic specialty". Given the dynamism of the legal field, the expert should also be well up-to-date with the current standards and the changes in it. This means that he must keep reading, both in the legal and psychological fields [5,8,9].

### Do forensic psychology practitioners need to have specialty guidelines and specialized group to substantiate and formalize the training needed by forensic psychology practitioners in the Philippines?

**Formalization and establishment of sig:** "Since forensic psychology is a separate field, there is a need for SIG [Special Interest Group] to ensure the validity of ethical considerations, procedures, fees in place. A need for formal organization shall be considered, too."~R1-LG36

"Yes... Part of professional growth."~ R2-SC43

"Yes, however headed by credible trainers preferably foreign experts to integrate new and best practices."~R3-HS36

"Yes. Many years back (sometime 2007 if my memory serves me right), a meeting focusing on forensic psychology was conducted during the PAP convention with the goal of looking at the issues of forensic practice in our eld. That somehow started the plans of coming up with a professional group within the Association. From what I know, some people are beginning to form it now. No update though since I've stopped connecting with them for some time."~R4-YG47 "Yes, so there will be structure in the practice and we be protected against those who are not practicing in accordance to ethical standards."~R5-MTOBA45.

The results indicated that there is a consensus response from the participants. They agreed to have special interest group to set ground rules for the profession, to regulate practices, and to

promote standardize ethical consideration. Also, they wanted to have it for professional growth and for the protection against J Foren Psy, Vol.8 Iss.4 No:10002869 possible misconduct. More so, the main suggestion of one participant is to established special interest group. However, it should be headed by reliable professionals' specifically foreign experts in the field of forensic psychology practice.

As per the results, in International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology (IACCP), they encourage the creation of Special Interest Groups (SIGs) and provide a set of rules and procedures for their creation, maintenance and dissolution; specifies their responsibilities; affords resources for their activities; and regulates their relationship to the Association. Special Interest Groups (SIGs) accommodate diversity with IACCP by allowing groups of individuals to conduct activities related to their shared interests, providing a higher level of involvement in the activities of the Association, and supporting scholarly activity in a broad domain of psychology and culture studies. [8,9].

## CONCLUSION

Based on the result of the study it can be very well concluded that forensic psychology practice in the Philippines is a relatively new field and that training opportunities and other continuing programs are very limited for the practitioners. Furthermore, it was ascertained that those who currently render service in forensic psychology have expertise and credibility in their practice. Interestingly, it was found out that they have collective opinions in the establishment of special interest groups that will help them to formalize their field where members cooperate or construct solutions within their field and may organize continuing education or programs that will help them as professionals.

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