

Introduction

In contrast to assessments in which psychological tests are used to make decisions regarding a test taker (e.g. job offer, diagnosis and treatment of psychological conditions, educational needs), the use of psychological tests in research tends to focus primarily on the collection of data for the development and evaluation of new tests, theories and models. That is, the information gathered from psychological tests used in research tends not to be used as a basis for decisions affecting those test takers participating in research. However, for ethical and scientific reasons, it is still in the interest of researchers to follow principles drawn from the standards developed by the British Psychological Society (BPS) for the competent use of psychological tests.

Purpose

The principles set out below seek to encourage best practice by outlining those factors that should be considered in the use of psychological tests in research, and by inviting those engaged in the use of tests in research to reflect on the impact that their research may have on their participants, on perception of the research enterprise, on perceptions of the profession and on psychological testing more generally.

Definition of the term ‘psychological test’

While the term ‘psychological test’ tends to be most closely associated with questions contained in a booklet that are scored and interpreted through numerical scoring systems, many forms of assessment may be considered as constituting a psychological test, ranging from normative questionnaires (including paper and pencil, online and PC formats) and performance tasks, to observational methods of assessment.

The definition that will be used here follows Cronbach (1990) in taking the broader view that ‘psychological tests may comprise standardised or reproducible tasks (e.g. questions, stimuli or indeed tasks), standardised or reproducible methods of observation, and standardised or reproducible methods of scoring these tasks and/or observations, which are deemed psychological in providing measures or examinations of a person’s abilities, skills, interests, preferences, disposition, attitudes, emotions or well-being’.

Principles

The following are offered as broad principles for the use of psychological tests in research:

- 1** The conduct of the research should be in accordance with a written statement of ethical standards as produced by the sponsoring organisation (e.g. university, professional association, research laboratory) and/or by the British Psychological Society.
- 2** Clear statements should be provided in the research proposal as to why tests are to be used and why the particular tests chosen for use are appropriate for the research aims. Evidence of the psychometric properties of the tests chosen to be used should be documented and assessed for appropriateness. Such appropriateness should include consideration of the sensitivity and precision of measurement where test scores are used to evaluate score changes arising from interventions.
- 3** Tests should only be used in the format provided by the test publisher (e.g. test publishers may provide a research copy of the test or refer the researcher to an online version). Confidentiality, copyright and security of test materials need to be considered at all times (e.g. tests should not be photocopied or downloaded from a website without authorisation, and materials should be stored securely).
- 4** Written procedures should be provided in advance of testing to cover the following:
 - 4.1** Knowledge and skills required to administer the tests (i.e. who is competent to administer the tests)
 - 4.2** The administration requirements for the tests (e.g. rooms, equipment)
 - 4.3** Knowledge and skills required for scoring and interpretation of the tests (i.e. who is competent to score and interpret the tests).
 - 4.4** Storage and access to test materials and test records (e.g. files or computer records)
 - 4.5** The time over which test materials and records are to be stored (i.e. for how long and why)
 - 4.6** Supervision and monitoring of test administration, scoring, interpretation and storage of and access to records (i.e. who has supervisory responsibility for which aspects of the research and the use of the tests)
- 5** The administration of tests for the purposes of research should abide by the principle of informed consent. That is, participants in research should be told in advance broadly what will be required of them, what will happen to the information collected through the tests and who will have access to this information. In the case of minors and vulnerable adults this information should be provided to parents, guardians, or those with responsibility for safeguarding.

It is strongly recommended that written consent to participate in the research study and for use of the scores in subsequent analyses should be obtained either from the participant directly or, in the case of minors, from parents or guardians.

6. Of particular concern to the BPS's Committee on Test Standards (CTS) is the issue of feedback. It is the recommendation of the CTS that, in the case of assessments leading to a decision regarding a test taker, it is normal practice that written or oral feedback is provided. However, it may be the case that owing to the numbers of participants involved, the developmental nature of the tests being used, or for confidentiality issues inherent in the research design, the provision of feedback may create practical difficulties (e.g. staffing and costs) or conflict with research objectives (e.g. criterion contamination). In such cases, participants taking tests should be told in advance that feedback will not be provided. When feedback is to be provided, then this should be in accordance with the BPS's standards for competence in test use.

Further information

Related guidelines and information which may be found at Psychological Testing Centre's website www.psychtesting.org.uk include:

- Code of Conduct for Psychological Testing
- Psychological Testing: A User's Guide
- Psychological Testing: A Test Taker's Guide
- Information about the BPS Qualifications in Test Use for test users working in Educational, Occupational and Forensic Contexts

References

Cronbach L.J. (1990). *Essentials of Psychological Testing* (5th ed.). New York: Harper Collins.

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