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Introduction to the text “Recommendations for the practice of psychologists working with Visually Impaired People”

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Before we present our work regarding « Recommendations for the practice of psychologists working with Visually Impaired Persons », we would like to say a few words about our association.

For over forty years, the Association of French Speaking Psychologists Specialized for Visually Impaired People (« ALFPHV » in French: Association de Langue Française des Psychologues spécialisés pour Personnes Handicapées Visuelles) brings up together psychologists working with blind or partially sighted persons, with their relatives and with other professionals.

These psychologists work in different domains of psychology: clinical psychology, psychodynamic, psychometrics, physiological psychology, developmental psychology, cognitive psychology, experimental psychology.

All of them are attentive to the clinical dimension and share the same ethical commitment.

This association also welcomes other professionals in this field.

Throughout all these forty years, many members have produced and published research works which are recognized in France in the domains of visual impairment.

Each year the association organizes study days about different topics and published proceedings, for example:

Visual impairment, ethics and practices: 40 years and tomorrow... (Nancy, France, 2009)

Teenage and visual deficiency (Besançon, France, 2010)

Neuropsychology and visual deficiency (Mons, Belgium, 2011)

Rethinking compensation. Growing up with our disabilities (Reims 2013)

Parenthood (Paris 2014)

INTRODUCTION

Members of our Association, “Association of French Speaking Psychologists Specialized for Visually Impaired People” wrote a text called “Recommendations for the practice of psychologists working with Visually Impaired People”. This text intends to become a tool of reference for psychologists practicing with Visually Impaired People in France. It is based on the « Code de Déontologie des Psychologues Français », the profession’s deontological code in force in France.

The « Code de Déontologie des Psychologues Français » has the meaning of all the duties that psychologists have to respect in their practice. So, our text is not a guide of good conducts, not recipes, just a framework to be able to create an own practice.

In French, we make the difference between three concepts : “morale”, “éthique” and “déontologie”.

“Déontologie” (deontology) as we have already said, refers to all the duties that the professionals have to respect in their work;

“Moral” (moral): “Code of conduct” (of good conducts, of good practices) refers in French to all the rules of conduct that are considered to be absolutely good. It relates to moral;

“Ethique” (Ethics) is a philosophical concept which depends on the reference of human community: actually, the psychologist is alone to face up to his/her responsibilities.

This text does not intend to be a guide of good conducts, but wishes to provide a framework for each psychologist so as to enable him/her to invent their own ways of working, according to the uniqueness of the encounter with each Visually Impaired Person.

The « Recommendations » fall into three categories:

- Psychologist’s status and role
- Psychologist’s responsibilities
- Psychologist’s methods of work

I PSYCHOLOGIST’S STATUS AND ROLE

Psychologists in France have the status of technical executives. They must have the following required characteristics:

- A specified level of qualification
- A specified level of responsibility
- A degree of autonomy in making professional decisions (the level of responsibility is permanent concerning choices of techniques. Their work requires a capacity for initiatives that can be considered delegations of authority for decisions that have to be taken in their specific professional practices).

II PSYCHOLOGIST'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Psychologist's work focuses on the psychical dimension of the subject.

According to the French psychologist's deontological code, the specific nature of the psychologist's function and practice is "to have the [visually impaired] person recognized and respected in his psychical dimension". That leads to several levels of responsibility and institutional positioning:

A – Concerning Visually Impaired Persons

- There can be no injunction to see a psychologist: therefore the principle of free will must be respected.
- Psychologists respect, and expect the respect by others of privacy and intimacy for Visually Impaired Persons. Defending and preserving the autonomy of thought and decision of Visually Impaired Persons is important.

B – About families

- Psychologists start working with a visually impaired child only with the consent of parents; psychologists keep them informed of the progress with their child. Respecting the rules of absolute professional confidentiality, they do not reveal, neither what the child nor the psychologist said, nor what has been worked through.
- Psychologists are aware that each family's singularity must be respected in the team's work.

C – About team of professionals

- The psychologist participates in welcoming sessions and multidisciplinary meetings;
- The psychologist clearly states the necessary rules of the shared professional confidentiality.

With professional team members:

- Psychologists accompany and respect their colleagues and their work. They reaffirm, if necessary, the particularities of visual impairment and of psychical functioning and also the respect of free and informed consent.
- Psychologists encourage the professional team members to think about their practice and to talk about it all together.

D – Concerning the institution

- In terms of the institutional project, psychologists must remind other members of the respect of the individual's psychical well-being and privacy. They remind them of the visual impairment too;
- Psychologists ensure that the institutional project provides time for professional teamwork.

E – Concerning the psychologists towards themselves and towards the institution in which they work

- Psychologists train to be able to discern their personal involvement in their work.

III THE VARIOUS METHODS OF WORK

The psychologist's work with Visually Impaired People can be stated in different terms:

A – Clinical work

Each psychologist has to offer spaces of clinical work:

- a confidential space to listen to the Visually Impaired Persons and their families
- spaces to listen to the other professionals of the team and work with them

Psychologists have to provide assessments to administrative, guidance and managing instances. Whoever is the requesting person, psychologists will only provide the elements corresponding to the question. In all cases, they make sure the person concerned is fully informed and has given his/her consent. As such, one cannot draw conclusions, either summarized or conclusive.

Psychological work must be different according to different criteria such as life events, circumstances of occurrence, origin and evolution of the visual impairment, or possible existence of associated disorders,

It may be:

- The establishment of primordial relationships
- The stages of early development, including the structuring of personality, self-construction in interaction with the environment
- The possible psychical trauma related to visual impairment and the specific individual evolution
- The compensation strategies
- The development or restoration of self-image

- The announcement of the disability

Psychologists work with the usual tools of psychology and specific tools for blind and partially-sighted people and with their family.

So it may be:

- Sessions of listening and support
- Clinical and behavioural observations
- Different psychotherapeutic approaches for individuals or for groups
- Other group techniques
- Psychometric and assessment tools, and projective techniques, possibly adapted for visual disabilities or specifically designed.

B – Working about relationships

A psychologist working in an institution participates in:

- work with his colleagues (meetings, discussion groups , etc.)
- institutional work
- work with families
- work with external partners.

Psychologists organize the continuity of their action according to the professional code of deontology in force in the country of practice.

Psychologists write the requested reports in a language accessible to the various recipients. They keep the person concerned informed. Each report is addressed only to the intended person(s) and can't be reused for any other purposes.

C - *Education and Research*

The specialized training of psychologists working in the field of visual impairment is not limited only to the initial training. It must remain open to specializations related to their field of practice.

Psychologists promote the circulation of information to team members concerning developments in humanities and in the field of visual disability.

They encourage, advise and participate in work related to visual disabilities, especially in the production of new knowledge (for example, with universities, other research institutions, etc...).

Welcoming trainees may also be a vector of educational development.

They participate as much as possible in group study and elaboration concerning their own practice (supervision).

They participate in training sessions to raise awareness towards Visually Impaired Persons among professionals.

D –Supervision of students

Psychologists also have the responsibility for welcoming and training psychology students. Therefore they should be given enough time for this task.

They participate as much as possible in the training of students from other disciplines by providing a specific approach as a specialized psychologist.

TO SUMMARIZE

In a world that emphasizes adaptation and rehabilitation, particularly for Visually Impaired Persons, our Association would like to insist on the importance of the clinical dimension of our work. This clinical dimension has to respect the uniqueness of each person and their ability to find their own solutions and facilities.

Psychologists could not do it alone; they have to work with their colleagues from other professions.

As we are drawing to a close, we are pleased to announce our next study days: they will take place in Bordeaux, in June 2015. The topic is “Behind the frame from the edge” That is to say: “when professionals have to work away from the usual frame”.

And now we would like to question the place of the psychologist in this field of Visual Impairment. We would also like to discuss different practices in this common domain, as well as different codes in force in Europe (Codes of Conduct, Deontological Codes, Codes of Ethics...).

Thank you for your attention.

And now, let's start the discussion!