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The International School Psychology Survey

*Data from Georgia, Switzerland and the
United Arab Emirates*

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ABSTRACT Using the International School Psychology Survey (ISPS), this study aims to advance our knowledge of the characteristics, training, roles and responsibilities, challenges and research interests of school psychologists around the world by comparing recent international data. The current study contributes valuable information regarding the profession of school psychology by building upon previous surveys of school psychologists using ISPS data gathered in Albania, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece, Northern England, Australia, China, Germany, Italy and Russia. The discussion provides unique insights regarding similarities, differences and diversity among school psychologists in Georgia, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates.

KEY WORDS: challenges; characteristics; international survey; research interests; responsibilities; roles; school psychologists; training

School psychology around the world

The profession of school psychology continues to develop in many countries around the world; thus, it is particularly valuable to understand the characteristics, training, roles, responsibilities, challenges and research interests of school psychologists internationally. During the 1900s there were few publications reporting the results of projects

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that systematically gathered information regarding school psychology practices around the globe (Catterall, 1977–1979; Oakland and Cunningham, 1992; UNESCO, 1948; Wall, 1956). A review of previous research examining school psychology around the globe is provided by Jimerson and colleagues (2004). During the first decade of the 2000s there have been several scholarly publications that have further advanced understanding and insights regarding school psychology internationally (e.g. Jimerson et al., 2004, 2006, 2007). These recent publications include data collected in 11 countries through the International School Psychology Survey (ISPS) project (described below), as well as an overview of the profession of school psychology in 43 countries (Jimerson et al., 2007). The chapters in *The Handbook of International School Psychology* (Jimerson et al., 2007) provide valuable information regarding: the context of school psychology; the origin, history and current status of school psychology; the infrastructure of school psychology; the preparation of school psychologists; the roles, functions and responsibilities of school psychologists; current issues impacting school psychology and important references. These recent publications promote further understanding of school psychology internationally.

The International School Psychology Survey

In an effort to develop a mechanism to advance knowledge of school psychology around the world, the International School Psychology Survey (ISPS) (Jimerson and the ISPA Research Committee, 2002) was developed through the collaborative efforts of international colleagues involved in the International School Psychology Association (ISPA) Research Committee (Jimerson et al., 2004). Through international collaborative efforts and strong leadership provided by colleagues within several countries, the ISPS was distributed to systematically gather information from school psychologists during 2002 in Albania, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece and Northern England (Jimerson et al., 2004) and during 2003 in Australia, China, Germany, Italy and Russia (Jimerson et al., 2006). Similarities and differences were noted regarding the profession of school psychology in these diverse countries. Findings were described in the five domains included in the ISPS: (a) characteristics of school psychologists; (b) training and regulation of the profession; (c) roles and responsibilities; (d) challenges and (e) research. See Jimerson and colleagues to review the previous findings (2004, 2006) and a synthesis of previous findings from the ISPS (2007).

Current study

The current study provides information regarding the characteristics, training and regulations, roles and responsibilities, challenges and research interests of school psychologists in Georgia, Switzerland and United Arab Emirates.

Methods

Measures

International School Psychology Survey (ISPS). The ISPS was developed by Dr Jimerson and the ISPA Research Committee through a careful process of modification of the draft of the survey previously used by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, USA) and then numerous iterations of revisions and redistribution to international colleagues serving on the ISPA Research Committee (a complete description of the process is described in Jimerson et al., 2004). The International School Psychology Survey (ISPS) (Jimerson and the ISPA Research Committee, 2002) contains 46 items that address five domains: (a) characteristics of school psychologists; (b) training and regulation of the profession; (c) roles and responsibilities; (d) challenges and (e) research. Additionally, the ISPS solicits feedback regarding the potential role of ISPA in each country. The first 20 items contain general questions asked of all participants, with the remaining items on the ISPS to be completed only by professionals employed in a school setting. ISPS items were predominantly multiple-choice questions, with several open-ended questions included as well. *Characteristics* of the sample were measured by 20 items, asking participants for information ranging from gender and age to favourite and least favourite aspects of the profession. Information was collected about *professional training and regulations* through six items addressing educational preparation, requirements for practice and sources of salary funds. The *roles and responsibilities* of school psychologists were measured by 15 items requesting the average number of hours respondents spent in various settings and engaging in specified tasks, as well as for opinions regarding the ideal roles of a school psychologist. *Challenges to the profession* were assessed by two items asking for internal and external factors that jeopardize the delivery of school psychological services in each country. The topic of *research* was addressed by three items that asked for the perceived relevance of research to professional practice, the availability of research journals and the most important research topics. ISPS results are published in previous studies (Jimerson et al., 2004; Jimerson et al., 2006).

Procedures

During 2004–2005, the ISPS was translated, distributed and collected in three additional countries; Georgia, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates. Country representatives were responsible for complete translation of the English version of the survey into the language appropriate for their country, distribution of the ISPS and collection of the completed surveys. The research team at the University of California in Santa Barbara, under the direction of Dr Jimerson, was responsible for co-ordinating correspondence among the country representatives, processing the surveys and completing data analyses. Each country coordinator distributed the ISPS to school psychologists in their country. The distribution and data collection processes for each country are described below.

Georgia. Anna Kanjaradze, a member of the Georgian Professional Psychologists Association, provided leadership in translating and gathering the ISPS in Georgia. The questionnaire was translated into Georgian, as the majority of members could not complete the questionnaire in English. The Association is comprised of 150 members. There is a division of education, which includes school psychologists and constitutes a majority of the Association members ($n = 85$). The questionnaire was sent to 65 members of the division, 35 of them were completed and returned (representing a 53 percent response rate). It is not easy to determine how many school psychologists are in the country, as there are no such data in the Ministry of Education and Science itself. There is a school psychologist staff unit at schools, but in the majority of schools this position is not occupied. There are also private schools, where psychologists work, but as with public schools, the Ministry does not collect data regarding their numbers. Psychologists who work in schools primarily practice in big cities (Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Rustavi). In Tbilisi and Rustavi they are of 'Masters' level, while in Kutaisi this function is conducted by teachers of different subjects with education of the 'Bachelors' level (there are no professional psychologists there, although there is a great demand for them). It is estimated that there are approximately 130 school psychologists in Georgia.

Switzerland. Jürg Forster asked SKJP, the Swiss Association for Child and Youth Psychology, to distribute the ISPS among its members. Paul Schmid at the SKJP Head Office sent the questionnaires to the 565 members of the association. About 250 members are practicing school psychologists, most of them in the German speaking part of Switzerland. The ISPS was also translated into French. A total of 102 surveys were returned (representing a 41 percent response rate among SKJP members who are school psychologists, with 90 completed surveys used in this study). The number of school psychologists in

Switzerland is estimated to be between 500 and 800. They work mostly with children and adolescents in kindergarten and public schools at the primary and secondary level, with teachers and parents. As each canton (i.e. regional state or province) has its own school system, school psychologists in Switzerland work in very diverse conditions. They usually are employed by a school board, municipality, district or canton.

United Arab Emirates. The distribution of the ISPS in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was organized by Dr Adnan Alghorani, Professor of Educational Psychology, Thinking Skills, The Psychology of Gifted and Talented, and Applied Research at UAE University in the United Arab Emirates. The sample was drawn from the list of school psychologists developed by Dr Alghorani. It is estimated that there are approximately 64 school psychologists in the United Arab Emirates. The survey was sent to 50 school psychologists. A total of 41 completed surveys resulted in an 82 percent response rate. The results reported below represent the 41 surveys. It is estimated that approximately 64 school psychologists are currently working in the UAE.

Results

Descriptive analyses examining the frequency of responses were completed and summarized (see Tables 1–10). The data presented below provide information regarding characteristics, training and regulations, roles and responsibilities, challenges and research interests for each of the three countries. Answers on open-response items were recorded and synthesized by content for summary purposes. Considering the diverse contexts of school psychology services in various countries, caution and careful consideration is warranted in the interpretation of the results.

Characteristics

Characteristics of the school psychologists who completed the survey are listed in Table 1. The *gender ratio* among respondents revealed that the majority of participants in Georgia and the United Arab Emirates were female, with the largest percentage of female school psychologists being 100 percent (Georgia), and the smallest being 56 percent (United Arab Emirates). In contrast, data from Switzerland reveal a larger percentage of males (61 percent) than females practicing in that country. In Switzerland the *average age* of the sample was 47, matching trends of older practitioners reported from previous studies in Australia, Cyprus, Germany and Northern England (Jimerson et al., 2004, 2005). However, the mean ages of school psychologists in Georgia and the United Arab Emirates were much younger (34 and 33, respectively), and were consistent with results from Albania, China, Estonia, Italy

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of school psychologists*

| Characteristics | Country | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| | Georgia | Switzerland | United Arab Emirates |
| Participants | <i>n</i> = 35 | <i>n</i> = 90 | <i>n</i> = 41 |
| Gender (%) | F = 100% M = 0% | F = 39% M = 61% | F = 56% M = 44% |
| Age range | 23–60 | 28–62 | 20–55 |
| Mean age | 34 | 47 | 33 |
| Average years of experience | | | |
| School psychology | 7 | 14 | 3.6 |
| Range | 0–14 | 0–33 | 0–20+ |
| Teaching | 4 | 6 | 1.4 |
| Range | 0–23 | 0–24 | 0–16 |
| Highest degree held (%) | | | |
| PhD | — | 12% | 7.5% |
| MA | 42% | 86% | 12.5% |
| BA | 58% | 2% | 80% |
| Fluent languages | Russian | German | Arabic |
| Languages spoken fluently | Georgian English | English French | English Hindi Farsi (Persian) |
| % Speaking two or more languages | 91% | 80% | 73% |
| Languages of professional literature | Georgian Russian English | German English French | Arabic English Amharic |
| % Reading in two or more languages | 74% | 76% | 34% |

* Includes results from Q. 11 (Years of experience working as a school psychologist); Q. 10 (Years of classroom teaching experience); Q. 15 (Highest degree earned); Q. 17 (Membership in Professional Organizations); Q. 4 (What languages do you speak fluently/communicate in?) and Q. 5 (What languages do you read professional literature in?).

and Russia (Jimerson et al., 2004, 2005). *Years of school psychology experience* was found to be reflective of age, with school psychologists in Switzerland having more years of experience than their colleagues in Georgia and the United Arab Emirates. *Years of teaching experience* varied across the sampled countries (the average ranged from about 1 year in the United Arab Emirates to 6 years in Switzerland). None of the three countries included in this study require experience in teaching prior to entry into school psychology. Data for the *highest degree held* was reflective of varied national standards regarding professional preparation. The majority of respondents from Switzerland held

Masters level degrees, while data from the United Arab Emirates suggest that the majority of school psychologists in that country hold Bachelors level degrees. Georgia respondents had similar levels of Masters (42 percent) and Bachelors (58 percent) level degrees. In Georgia, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, the majority of respondents were *fluent in two or more languages*. In all cases, fluency in the national language was implicit due to the fact that the surveys were distributed and completed in that language. A similar pattern was found for *languages in which school psychologists read professional literature*, with the exception being the United Arab Emirates, of which only 34 percent of respondents reported reading professional literature in more than one language, while 73 percent of respondents reported fluency in two or more languages. English was the most common second language for reading professional literature across Georgia, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates.

Professional characteristics

Professional characteristics of participating school psychologists are reported in Table 2. The reported *ratio of school psychologists to school aged children* varied greatly across respondents from all countries. The averages by country suggest that Georgia may have a relatively small ratio (1:615), while Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, reported substantially higher ratios (1:3,122 and 1:1,860). It is important to note that those countries reporting small ratios have fewer school psychologists; thus, these numbers reflect only the number of students with whom school psychologists work. Therefore, many students in these countries do not have access to school psychology services. The percentage of respondents who *receive supervision as school psychologists* also varies greatly between countries. Professionals in Georgia reported the lowest amount of supervision (3 percent), compared to 57 percent and 63 percent of professionals in Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, respectively. The *hours per week worked in a full time position* was relatively consistent across countries and ranged between 33 and 42 hours for the majority of participants. With regard to *professional membership*, 7 percent of respondents in Switzerland reported membership in ISPA, compared with 3 percent in Georgia and 2 percent in the United Arab Emirates. In Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, membership in national Psychology Associations was greater than membership in national School Psychology Associations. There is currently no national School Psychology Association in Georgia.

Open responses to questions about *what participants like most and least about the field of school psychology* demonstrated similarities between school psychologists worldwide and are listed in Table 3.

Table 2 *Professional characteristics of school psychologists**

| <i>Characteristics</i> | <i>Country</i> | | |
|---|----------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| | <i>Georgia</i> | <i>Switzerland</i> | <i>United Arab Emirates</i> |
| Ratio of school psychologists to school children | 1: 615 | 1: 3,122 | 1: 1,860 |
| Range of ratios | 130–1,800 | 800–26,000 | 50–10,000 |
| National requirement of prior teaching experience | no | no | no |
| % Receiving supervision as a school psychologist | 3% | 57% | 63% |
| Number of hours in a full time position | 33 | 42 | 35 |
| Range | 30–45 | 40–50 | 30–48 |
| Organization membership | | | |
| ISPA (%) | 3% | 7% | 2.4% |
| National School Psychology Association (%) | 0% | 59% | 24% |
| National Psychology Association (%) | 11% | 97% | 68% |

* Includes results from Q. 23 (Ratio of School Psychologists to school age children in your district/local authority); Q. 9. (Are you required to be a qualified teacher with teaching experience before becoming a school psychologist in your country); Q. 32 (Do you receive supervision as a school psychologist); Q. 18 (Please indicate how many hours a week constitutes a full time position in your country) and Q. 17 (Membership in professional organizations).

Respondents from all three countries reported working with students and families as one of their favourite aspects of the profession. Other common responses across countries were related to having a variety of work tasks, professional autonomy or flexibility and producing positive changes. When asked about the least liked aspects of school psychology, common responses across countries included administrative responsibilities, lack of support and resources (e.g. time, funding), overwhelming workload and conflicts (e.g. between parents and school).

Roles and responsibilities

Results regarding the *percentage of time spent in different school psychology tasks* are reported in Table 4. It should be noted that the numbers included in this table represent the average endorsement for each item across participants and, therefore, do not necessarily add up to 100 percent. The exact percentage of respondents endorsing each activity (at any percentage) is represented in the bottom bracket for

Table 3 Most and least liked aspects of school psychology*

| <i>Most liked aspects of school psychology</i> | | |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Georgia</i> | <i>Switzerland</i> | <i>United Arab Emirates</i> |
| Working with children, teachers and families | Working directly with children, parents and teachers | Helping students and parents |
| Ability to help others | Autonomy and flexibility of role/diversity and variety of work | Counseling and primary prevention programs |
| Consultation | Counseling/helping to make a difference | Variety of work |
| <i>Least liked aspects of school psychology</i> | | |
| <i>Georgia</i> | <i>Switzerland</i> | <i>United Arab Emirates</i> |
| Low wages | Lack of resources (time and funding) | Lack of job value and appreciation |
| Lack of private space/frequency of disruptions | High pressure and stress | Administrative responsibilities |
| Lack of support/acceptance/understanding of role by other professionals | Politics/conflicts of interest (e.g. between parents and school) | Instability |
| | Administrative work | |

* Includes results from Q. 45 (Please describe what you most like about being a school psychologist) and Q. 44 (Please describe what you least like about being a school psychologist).

each activity. Responses from the United Arab Emirates should be viewed with particular caution, given the relatively lower percentage of respondents participating on items from this section of the survey. Similar to responses regarding likes and dislikes, the reported average percent of time spent per activity was relatively consistent across many countries. In all countries, either *psychoeducational evaluations* or *counselling students* were reported as comprising the greatest percentage of practitioners' time. The greatest percentage of time for one activity was 25 percent in Georgia (*counselling students*), 29 percent in Switzerland (*psychoeducational evaluations*) and 26 percent in the United Arab Emirates (*counselling students*).

Table 5 presents the average number of *specific school psychology tasks* performed monthly by respondents. School psychologists in Georgia reported conducting the highest number of *psychoeducational*

Table 4 Average percent of work time spent in common school psychology activities*

| <i>Work activity</i> | <i>Country</i> | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| | <i>Georgia Mean (Median) {**}</i> | <i>Switzerland Mean (Median) {**}</i> | <i>United Arab Emirates Mean (Median) {**}</i> |
| Psychoeducational evaluations | 23 (20) {80} | 29 (25) {74} | 16 (15) {59} |
| Counselling students | 25 (20) {87} | 16 (10) {69} | 26 (25) {61} |
| Providing direct interventions | 11 (5) {63} | 8 (5) {51} | 8 (8) {12} |
| Providing primary prevention programs | 13 (6) {77} | 4 (5) {44} | 11 (10) {24} |
| Consultation with teachers/staff | 19 (19) {80} | 11 (10) {71} | 12 (10) {24} |
| Consultation with parents/families | 17 (10) {77} | 15 (10) {70} | 9 (7) {12} |
| Conducting staff training and in-service programs | 8 (7) {51} | 5 (5) {26} | 7 (5) {12} |
| Administrative responsibilities | 7 (5) {31} | 16 (15) {67} | 6 (5) {12} |

* Includes Q. 31 (% of your total work time) (**numbers in the brackets indicate the % of respondents indicating that they spend a portion of their time engaged in the particular activity).

assessments monthly, with an average of 27 assessments completed. Interestingly, Georgian school psychologists did not report the largest percentage of their time engaged in this activity. An intuitive pattern was seen in Georgia and the United Arab Emirates, whose respondents reported the highest number of *students counselled individually* and *counselling groups*, and also reported spending the greatest percentage of their time engaged in this activity. Responses for the number of *consultation cases* per month were relatively consistent across countries (ranging from 6 to 9). Similarly, responses for the number of

Table 5 *Monthly tasks of school psychologists**

| | Country | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| | Georgia Mean (Median) [Range] | Switzerland Mean (Median) [Range] | United Arab Emirates Mean (Median) [Range] |
| Number of times tasks were completed per month | | | |
| Psychoeducational assessments completed (# of students) | 27 (19) [3–300] | 14 (11) [2–60] | 7 (7) [0–30] |
| Students counselled individually | 22 (15) [4–80] | 11 (10) [1–40] | 15 (8) [0–69] |
| Counselling groups | 8 (7) [2–24] | 4 (2) [0–33] | 6 (5) [0–20] |
| Consultation cases | 6 (3) [1–20] | 7 (4) [2–40] | 9 (8) [0–60] |
| Inservice programs/presentations | 3 (3) [1–11] | 1 (1) [0–4] | 3 (2) [0–16] |
| Primary prevention programs | 5 (3) [1–24] | 1 (1) [0–8] | 3 (2) [0–17] |

* Includes results from Q. 24 (Average number of students per month counselled individually); Q. 25 (Average number of student counselling groups conducted per month); Q. 27. (Average number of students per month you have completed psychoeducational assessments with); Q. 28 (Average number of consultation cases per month in which you provided consultation to other educational professionals, e.g. consultations for interventions); Q. 29 (Average number of inservice programs/presentations you conducted for teachers, parents and/or other personnel per month, e.g. special topic presentations, professional development presentations) and Q. 30 (Average number of primary prevention programs, e.g. working with the whole class to prevent future problems, per month).

counselling groups, in-service programs/presentations and primary prevention programs conducted were relatively consistent across countries (ranging from 1 to 5 per month).

Perceptions of the *ideal school psychology role and extent of participation in this ideal role* are listed in Table 6. Although responses varied across nations on most items, respondents unanimously rated *administrative responsibilities* as the least optimal role. The most ideal role for school psychologists was unique for the United Arab Emirates (*counselling students*), while respondents from both Georgia and

Table 6 *Ideal roles /responsibilities /activities and extent of participation in the ideal school psychology role**

| <i>Ideal roles for rank order</i> | <i>Country</i> | | |
|---|----------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| | <i>Georgia</i> | <i>Switzerland</i> | <i>United Arab Emirates</i> |
| Psychoeducational evaluations | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Counselling students | 2 | 4 | 1 |
| Providing direct interventions | 6 | 5 | 7 |
| Providing primary prevention programs | 4 | 6 | 3 |
| Consultation with teachers/staff | 3 | 3 | 5 |
| Consultation with parents/families | 5 | 2 | 4 |
| Conducting staff training and in-service/education programs | 7 | 7 | 6 |
| Administrative responsibilities | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| % Participation in ideal role | | | |
| All the time | 21% | 1% | 11% |
| Great extent | 37% | 27% | 59% |
| Average amount | 24% | 54% | 30% |
| Limited extent | 12% | 18% | — |
| Not at all | 6% | — | — |

* Includes Q. 42 (What would you include as the ideal roles/responsibilities/activities of school psychologists? RANK ORDER, 1 = most ideal, etc.) and Q. 43 (To what extent are you able to work in that ideal roles/responsibilities/activities?).

Switzerland selected *psychoeducational evaluations* as the most ideal role. Regarding the second most ideal role, the United Arab Emirates identified *psychoeducational evaluations*, while respondents from Georgia and Switzerland selected *counselling students* and *consultation with parents/families*, respectively. An analysis of the top three ranked choices by countries shows a relatively consistent pattern across countries, with psychoeducational evaluations selected as either first or second most ideal role by all countries included in this study. *Consultation with teachers/staff* was ranked among the top three most ideal activities by three countries and *counselling students* and *consultation with parents/families* were each ranked in the top three by two countries. Overall, the lack of consistency in ranking the ideal roles and responsibilities of school psychologists reflects differences in the overall definition of the school psychology role between these countries. However, the consistency in selecting the least ideal role suggests that professionals in these countries are agreeing on what is *not* the optimal role of a school psychologist.

Regarding the reported *participation in the ideal role*, the results were somewhat consistent across the countries. Between 1 percent and

Table 7 *External challenges jeopardizing service delivery**

| <i>External challenges (%)</i> | <i>Country</i> | | |
|---|----------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| | <i>Georgia</i> | <i>Switzerland</i> | <i>United Arab Emirates</i> |
| Low status of school psychology | 54 | 13 | 29 |
| Low status of education in my country | 26 | 1 | 10 |
| Conflicts with competing professional groups | 17 | 23 | 20 |
| Other professional groups taking school psychology jobs | 31 | 36 | 22 |
| Lack of money to properly fund services | 69 | 43 | 50 |
| Lack of political stability | 17 | – | 2 |
| Lack of economic stability | 51 | 1 | 2 |
| Lack of public support for education | 23 | 20 | 2 |
| Low salaries for school psychologists | 83 | 1 | 29 |

* Includes Q. 40 (Please indicate which of the following external challenges may jeopardize the delivery of psychological services within schools in your country).

21 percent of respondents participated in their ideal role all of the time. The majority of respondents reported participating in their ideal role to a great extent (27 percent to 59 percent) or for an average amount (24 percent to 54 percent). The percentage of respondents in each country reporting participating in their ideal role to a limited extent was more varied, ranging from 0 percent (United Arab Emirates) to 18 percent (Switzerland). Those reporting that they did not participate in their ideal role at all were more consistent, ranging from 0 percent to 6 percent.

Challenges

External challenges to the delivery of school psychological services are presented in Table 7. Endorsement of potential challenges demonstrated considerable variability across countries; however, the data for a few items showed some international consistency. *Lack of money to properly fund services* was regarded as jeopardizing service delivery by the highest percentage of respondents in Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates with endorsements ranging from 43 percent to 50 percent, and was the second-highest rated external challenge in Georgia (69 percent). *Low salaries for school psychologists* was identified as a threat to the profession by respondents from Georgia (83 percent) and the United Arab Emirates (29 percent) and it was identified by more respondents than any other threat in Georgia (second highest percentage for the United Arab Emirates). In contrast, only 1 percent of

Table 8 *Internal challenges jeopardizing service delivery**

| <i>Internal challenges (%)</i> | <i>Country</i> | | |
|--|----------------|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| | <i>Georgia</i> | <i>Switzerland</i> | <i>United Arab Emirates</i> |
| Lack of leadership within the profession | 11 | 23 | 22 |
| Conflicts of leadership within the profession | 14 | 8 | 12 |
| Professional burnout | – | 22 | 27 |
| Lack of research and evaluation | 34 | 40 | 51 |
| Lowering standards for selecting or preparing professionals | 43 | 7 | 12 |
| Lack of professional standards governing professional services | 34 | 18 | 29 |
| More able professionals leaving the profession | 14 | 18 | 20 |
| Lack of peer support from other school psychologists | 17 | 2 | 10 |
| Lack of adequate supervision | 31 | 8 | 5 |

* Includes Q. 41 (Please indicate which of the following internal challenges may jeopardize the delivery of psychological services within schools in your country).

respondents from Switzerland identified *low salaries* as a threat to the profession of school psychologists in their country. The remaining external threats were endorsed at highly variable rates across countries. *Other professional groups taking school psychology jobs* was recognized as a threat to the profession, with percentages ranging from 22 percent (the United Arab Emirates) to 36 percent (Switzerland). *Low status of school psychology* was considered a challenge by a large percentage of school psychologists in Georgia and the United Arab Emirates (54 percent and 29 percent, respectively); however, very few colleagues in Switzerland (13 percent) agreed that this was a problem. A high percentage of school psychologists in Georgia (51 percent) reported *lack of economic stability* as a threat to the delivery of school psychology services in their country; however, respondents from Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates did not identify this threat as relevant in their respective countries. External threats to the delivery of school psychology services may be particularly salient in Georgia (where four of the nine potential challenges were endorsed at 50 percent or higher). In contrast, school psychologists from Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates only endorsed one of nine challenges at 40 percent or higher.

Perceived *internal challenges to the delivery of school psychological services* are listed in Table 8. Lack of leadership within the profession,

conflicts of leadership within the profession, more able professionals leaving the profession, lack of peer support from other school psychologists and lack of adequate supervision were consistently rated low across countries (23 percent or lower for all countries), suggesting that these potential threats are not considered problematic by the majority of participating school psychologists. In contrast, lack of research and evaluation was endorsed as the top threat in Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates (40 percent and 51 percent, respectively), and as the second highest threat in Georgia (34 percent). Professional burnout was endorsed as the second greatest threat in Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates (22 percent and 27 percent, respectively). Lack of professional standards governing professional services was endorsed as the second greatest threat in Georgia and the United Arab Emirates (34 percent and 29 percent, respectively). Lowering standards for selecting or preparing professionals was endorsed as the highest internal threat to the profession of school psychology in Georgia (43 percent); however, respondents from the remaining participating countries did not report this threat to be a significant concern. In general, internal challenges did not appear to be very salient to practitioners in the countries surveyed, as in each country only one of nine internal threats was endorsed at 40 percent or greater.

Research importance and interests

The ISPS asked participants to rate the *importance of research to the profession of school psychology* in their country, as well as to list a few important topics in which research may be needed. Results for these items are shown in Table 9. The majority of respondents across all three countries found that research is somewhat to very important to professional practice. However, in Georgia and the United Arab Emirates the percentages of practitioners finding research to be *very relevant* to practice was extremely consistent (71 percent to 77 percent), while a similar majority (69 percent) was found in Switzerland for *somewhat relevant*. Similarly, the percentage of practitioners perceiving *research as not important to practice* was less than 10 percent in Georgia and the United Arab Emirates with nearly twice that percentage indicating this response in Switzerland. Open response answers of important research topics by country reflect the diversity of the countries. Learning processes, behaviour problems and motivation were some common responses across nations. Additionally, responses from Switzerland referred to research on diagnosis and the efficacy of interventions. Social psychology and systems were some themes in Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates, and neuropsychology and cognitive processes surfaced as important topics in Switzerland and Georgia.

Table 9 *Importance of psychological research**

| <i>Relevance rating (%)</i> | <i>Country</i> | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| | <i>Georgia</i> | <i>Switzerland</i> | <i>United Arab Emirates</i> |
| Very relevant | 77% | 8% | 77% |
| Somewhat relevant | 14% | 69% | 13% |
| Not relevant | 3% | 23% | 10% |
| Commonly cited research topics needed | Motivation | Educational psychology/ learning behaviour | Behavioural problems |
| | Age specification | Diagnosis/ efficacy of interventions | Educational problems |
| | Cognitive processes | Developmental and social psychology/ systems | Motivation |
| | | Neuropsychology | Parents/ Family issues |

* Includes Q. 37 (To what degree is psychological research important to professional practice in your country?) and Q. 38 (In your judgement, what are the major research topics needed for school psychology in your country?).

Discussion

The International School Psychology Survey (ISPS) project reflects an ongoing international effort to better understand school psychology around the world (Jimerson et al., 2004, 2006). Information reported by school psychologists in Georgia, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates enhances our knowledge of the characteristics, training and regulations, roles and responsibilities, challenges and research interests of school psychologists in these three countries. In addition, the participants provided suggestions regarding potential contributions of the International School Psychology Association (ISPA) to the development of the profession of school psychology. Comparisons and interpretations of the results warrant caution, as it is important to consider the various contexts and systems of school psychological services in each country. Additional details regarding the context, preparation and activities of school psychologists are available for Switzerland (Scherer et al., 2007) and the United Arab Emirates (Alghorani, 2007) in *The Handbook of International School Psychology* (Jimerson et al., 2007). Implications and reflections on the data from the three participating countries are presented below.

Characteristics

Global similarities in the demographic characteristics of this sample suggest a relatively consistent profile for school psychologists around the world. The results of this study indicate that the majority of practicing school psychologists in Georgia are female, which is similar to previous research exploring the characteristics of school psychologists in Albania, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece and Northern England (Curtis et al., 1999; Jimerson et al., 2004; Oakland and Cunningham, 1992). In contrast, the majority of respondents in Switzerland were male. This is the first occurrence of this ratio among the 14 countries that have provided ISPS data to date. It coincides with a high status of school psychology in Switzerland and rather good salaries in comparison to other fields of psychology. The percentages of males and females in the United Arab Emirates were roughly equal, similar to previous results from Germany. Previous international research revealed that the range of percentage of female practitioners appeared to be linked to the average age, with those countries with younger practitioners on average having a tendency to have a higher proportion of females (Jimerson et al., 2004).

With respect to language, school psychologists in Georgia, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates reported predominantly multilingual fluency. Due to the fact that the most common second language in all countries was English (a pattern consistent with results from previous research in Albania, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece and Northern England), international communication and publications in English may be valuable to international colleagues in many countries.

The age range of school psychologists in the participating countries appears to be related to the length of time that the profession has existed in each country, with the oldest average age found in Switzerland. This trend is consistent with results from the previous ISPS distribution in Albania, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece and Northern England (Jimerson et al., 2004). The older average age of practitioners in Switzerland (47) may be a particularly important consideration, depending on the number of professionals being prepared in school psychology and the relative demand. Repeated administration of the ISPS in these countries during the upcoming years will help to facilitate an understanding of longitudinal trends in the profession of school psychology.

Regarding the most and least rewarding aspects of the profession of school psychology, similar responses were reported across countries. School psychologists in each country reported enjoying working with and helping children, families and teachers, and expressed concerns regarding limited resources. Two of the three countries (Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates) also stated that administrative work

was among their least liked aspects of school psychology. These responses were also common in the previous countries responding to the ISPS (Jimerson et al., 2004, 2006), which is notable considering the diverse composition of the multiple countries responding to the survey. School psychologists in one of the three countries (Switzerland) responding to the ISPS reported enjoying the variety and autonomy provided by the profession.

The ratios of school psychologists to school-age children varied widely both within and across countries. It has been suggested that a ratio of approximately one school psychologist to every 1,000 children is ideal. Of these three countries, the reported ratios were either very high or very low. Several explanations for these ratios exist. For example, the relatively small ratios reported by the sample from Georgia could represent the fact that there are relatively few school psychologists and their range of students served is limited to those sites that have a school psychologist (thus, most children in the schools do not have direct and regular access to psychological services). For instance, it is estimated that Georgia has about 686,000 school-age children and approximately 130 school psychologists, for an overall ratio of 1:5,277 school psychologists to students. In United Arab Emirates there are about 384,000 school-age children and approximately 64 school psychologists, for an overall ratio of 1:6,000 school psychologists to students. In Switzerland there are about 1,028,000 school-age children and approximately 800 school psychologists, for an overall ratio of 1:1,285 school psychologists to students. Further investigation is necessary to clarify the range of ratios revealed in this study.

A recent report on the present status and future prospects of the profession of psychologists in Europe includes further information regarding psychologists working within educational systems (Tikkanen, 2006). Two surveys of members of the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA, is an umbrella association of 32 national associations in Europe) reveal a high proportion of the professional psychologists working within the educational system in multiple European countries [e.g. Latvia (66 percent), Iceland, Lithuania and Turkey (40 percent), Croatia (38 percent) and Estonia, France and Luxembourg (30 percent)]. However, in other European countries the use of psychologists in schools appears almost non-existent (e.g. Italy). The proportion of psychologists working within the educational system is also relatively low in European countries where the majority of the professionals work in the health-care sector [e.g. in Germany (3 percent), Austria and the United Kingdom (13 percent) and Norway (14 percent)].

Training and regulations

The variation found in this study with respect to the highest degree earned is consistent with the range of training options available in each country and the existing opportunities to study abroad. In Switzerland, the majority of respondents held a Masters or specialist level degree. Georgia respondents reported holding roughly equal amounts of Masters and Bachelors level degrees. In the United Arab Emirates, where the profession is emerging, the vast majority had Bachelors level training.

Similar results were found in the percentage of school psychologists receiving supervision across Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates. The percentage of professionals receiving supervision in Georgia was notably low (3 percent), perhaps reflecting a lack of infrastructure for the emerging profession. In contrast, the United Arab Emirates was particularly high in the percentage of professionals receiving supervision; this may reflect the infrastructure of emerging professional services. Additional research is necessary to better understand the significance of the variability in professional supervision in various countries.

Membership in professional organizations is likely related to the differences in options available in each country. Similar to the results found previously among 11 countries, very few colleagues in the current countries were members of ISPA. Membership in national school psychology associations varied across the three countries. For instance, Georgia only has a national psychology association, no association that is only for school psychologists. In the United Arab Emirates only a quarter of the respondents indicated membership in the national school psychology association. Additional information regarding the size and scope of these organizations and the benefits of membership would also assist in understanding these differential membership rates.

Whereas the 1956 UNESCO report (Wall, 1956) recommended teaching experience as a requirement for school psychology practice, Oakland and Cunningham (1992) reported a trend of decreasing importance placed upon prior teaching experience. Similar to previous ISPS results (Jimerson et al., 2004, 2006), results from the current study were consistent with this trend, with all three countries not requiring teaching experience for entry into the field.

Roles and responsibilities

Consistent with previous results from the ISPS, the percentages of time reported for *psychoeducational evaluations* or *counselling* were among the highest reported in each of the countries in the current study. A third important activity was *consultation*, which was reported

among the top three most ideal roles by practitioners in Georgia and Switzerland. Switzerland results indicated that *administrative activities* were the second most on average percent of work time, however, were ranked as the least ideal activity overall.

The percentages of reported participation in the ideal activities revealed that very few respondents engaged in their ideal activities all of the time. Most reported participating in ideal activities either 'a great extent' or 'average' amount. School psychologists in Georgia and the United Arab Emirates reported a greater proportion in the more favourable direction, with the other countries clearly undecided on how close their daily tasks match what they feel to be the ideal school psychology tasks. It is possible that the emerging status of the profession in these countries affords greater satisfaction among those who are currently involved with the profession. The present data are also consistent with a trend found in the previous ISPS study, with older practitioners reporting lower levels of participation in the ideal role (Jimerson et al., 2004). Further research is needed to explore the international differences between ideal and actual roles of school psychologists.

Challenges

Overall, the three countries varied on whether they reported more external or internal challenges to the delivery of psychological services. Commonly cited external challenges were *lack of money to properly fund services* and *low salaries for school psychologists*, with the exception of only 1 percent in the Switzerland sample reporting low salaries as a challenge. The relative consistency with which these challenges were endorsed suggests that these challenges exist in countries regardless of GNP. Additionally, in the Switzerland sample, four of the nine external challenges were endorsed at a rate of 1 percent or less. In the Georgia sample, four of the nine external challenges were endorsed at a rate of 50 percent or higher. These trends in the data reveal respondents' general sense of low versus high external challenges jeopardizing service delivery in these countries.

Some commonly cited internal challenges included *professional burnout* and *lack of research and evaluation*. However, it was notable that while the other two countries' respondents endorsed *professional burnout* fairly frequently, 0 percent of respondents from Georgia endorsed this internal challenge. The large amount of variability in perceived challenges to service delivery within the countries in the study may likely be a reflection of differences within the countries regarding issues such as how long the profession has existed.

Research

Similar to the previous ISPS information from Albania, Cyprus, Estonia, Greece and Northern England, respondents from the current study were fairly consistent in their endorsement of the importance of psychological research. The majority of respondents from Georgia and the United Arab Emirates endorsed the importance of psychological research as *very relevant*, while the majority of respondents in Switzerland endorsed *somewhat relevant*. Commonly cited research topics (i.e. learning processes, behaviour problems and motivation) were fairly consistent with previously reported themes. The richness of the variety of research topics cited across countries in this study reflects the array of research contributions that school psychologists are making in these various countries and the perceived need for further research on these topics.

Potential ISPA contributions

Suggestions for potential ISPA contributions are listed in Table 10. Common responses across countries included that ISPA could be helpful in sharing new research findings, promoting international exchanges of ideas and developing new methodologies and standards. Respondents from Georgia and the United Arab Emirates suggested trainings and workshops, and Switzerland responders suggested that ISPA could also help promote school psychology in the media. Related to this suggestion, since 1998 (under the auspices of the ISPA Research Committee), Jimerson has offered a Research Column in the ISPA *World Go Round*. The research column summarizes recent research in the fields of child development, education and psychology that may be valuable to school psychologists around the world. The annual ISPA colloquium also includes many presentations that highlight important research.

Conclusions

This article shares the results of the International School Psychology Survey (ISPS) in Georgia, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates. These results evidence both similarities and differences in the characteristics, training, roles and responsibilities, challenges and research interests of school psychologists in these three countries. As delineated in the results of this article and discussed above, these efforts and previous ISPS data provide a foundation for subsequent research efforts to build upon. Through repeated administration of the ISPS in these countries (e.g. in 3–5 years) it will be possible to examine changes related to the preparation and practice of school psychologists. As additional countries complete the ISPS, this will provide further

Table 10 *Potential ISPA contributions**

| <i>Most liked aspects of school psychology</i> | | |
|---|--|--|
| <i>Georgia</i> | <i>Switzerland</i> | <i>United Arab Emirates</i> |
| Provide training/ workshops | Share research information/ intercultural exchange of ideas | Specialized training workshops and seminars |
| Promote international exchange of information/resources | Develop standards and models | Disseminate research information |
| Setting new methodologies | Promote the visibility of school psychology | Meetings, professional exchanges |

* Includes Q. 46 (Please provide information about how you believe ISPA may contribute to the profession of school psychology around the world and in your country, and also indicate what you would most like ISPA to address).

information regarding the diversity and similarities of school psychologists and the evolution of school psychology across countries. Additional information such as that collected from the ISPS should help new and established school psychological services to plan future developments. Recognizing the common ground and variations in the field of school psychology in countries around the world provides a perspective on peculiarities and possibilities in the preparation and practices of school psychologists.

Notes

The International School Psychology Survey project emerged from the efforts of the International School Psychology Association (ISPA) Research Committee with Dr Jimerson as the Chair and Principal Investigator.

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