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PRESTIGE OF PSYCHOLOGISTS IN Britain, the USA & Israel

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The professional standing of British psychologists has rarely been mentioned (e.g. Baddeley, 1979), yet it may be of importance for future educational and job-market planning. The present study is designed to compare the relative perceived prestige (social regard), status (social power) and income of psychologists in Britain with those of the U.S.A. and Israel. Criticisms of the British system (Baddeley, 1979), taken together with our feeling that psychologists were of lower prestige in Britain than in the other two countries, were "triggers" to our study.

METHOD

Forty eight volunteers aged between 20 and 40, who had academic training (University students, staff and alumni) in a variety of fields, took part in the study. Twelve subjects were asked to complete the experimental questionnaire in each of these locations: Manchester (Britain), Rhode Island (U.S.A.), New Jersey (U.S.A.) and Tel-Aviv (Israel). Two subjects in each of these three first places failed to properly complete the entire questionnaire and were therefore excluded from the study. The questionnaire consisted of two tasks: (a) ranking 18 professions according to their perceived prestige, status and income, and (b) ranking 15 activities from "most characteristic" to "least characteristic" of the psychologists work. These activities had been rated by five judges (staff and postgraduate students) according to their "complexity", that is, the degree of "skill, talent and effort" they required. The complexity rankings of the five judges were reliable (Kendall's coefficient of concordance: $W=0,611; p < 0,001$).

RESULTS

Independent Mann-Whitney tests on the ranking scores showed that psychologists in Britain were rated as having lower prestige than psychologists in the U.S.A. and Israel ($z=2,495; p < 0,014$). In the U.S.A. and Israel, psychology was among the 5 top rated professions, whereas in Britain it was among the 5 bottom rated ones. Under a unidirectional hypothesis also, status could be significantly lower in Britain than in the U.S.A. and Israel ($z=1,698; p < 0,046$). The corresponding difference in income did not reach marginal significance ($z = 1,403; p < 0,162$). There were no significant differences between Israel and the two U.S.A. locations, nor between each of the two U.S.A. locations, on any of the three dependent variables. Similarly, the sexes did not differ in their rankings significantly.

In order to find out whether these cultural differences in prestige and status could be a result of (or at least

concomittant with) differences in perceived job complexity, a complexity score was derived from the sum of the mean complexity ratings given by the judges, for each of the three most characteristic activities in each subject's ranking order. The results showed that the mean job complexity for psychologists was slightly lower in Britain (19,37) than in Israel, Rhode Island and New Jersey (21,09, 20,18, 20,20, respectively) but not significantly so (Mann-Whitney $z = 1,388$). The non-significant correlations between the judges complexity ranking and the subject's characteristic activities rankings failed to support the possibility that the perceived job complexity in Britain is lower than that of the U.S.A. and Israel.

DISCUSSION

The results support the hypothesis that psychologists in Britain have lower perceived prestige (and status) than their colleagues in the U.S.A. and Israel.

The results do not give an answer as to the causes of these differences. The possibility that psychologists in Britain are perceived to be engaged in less "complex" activities (e.g. assisting the psychiatrists) than American and Israeli psychologists (e.g. studying unusual phenomena such as sleepwalking) was not confirmed, but this marginally significant result cannot entirely be ruled out.

The possibility that there are differences in local needs for psychological work has also to be considered. For example, it is well known that the profession of psychology has developed in western countries and not in eastern ones. Further, both the U.S.A. and Israel are immigrant societies in contrast to Britain, a more conservative non-immigrant society. Bearing in mind that adjustment problems are more frequent in immigrants than in non-immigrants, it seems possible that immigration results in a greater need for psychological services, which in turn raise the psychologist's prestige and status.

A third possibility of explaining

the differences observed is that of level of education. In America, most psychologists have doctoral training, while in Britain they have master's level training. However, the data from Israel are discordant with the idea that level of education per se accounts for the differences in prestige. This is because Israeli psychologists have a level of training similar to that of their British colleagues, and yet their prestige and status is similar to that of their American colleagues. So, it seems that further research is needed in order to understand the causes for the low prestige and status of British Psychologists we observed.

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