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PERFORMANCE OF GRADUATES IN THE INTERNSHIP IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY ENTRANCE EXAMS

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EXTENDED SUMMARY

Introduction

In Spain, university degree in Psychology is one of the most popular among prospective university students. As a result, Spanish public and private universities have increased the amount of places and the number of university graduates in Psychology. The access to the National Health System (NHS) is one professional possibility for these graduates. Applicants must pass an exam to become an Internship in Clinical Psychology at the NHS. This paper analyses the graduate's exam performance during the period 2013-2016, and also possible differences depending on size or ownership of their universities of origin.

Method

A non-experimental quantitative approach was used to address the research question by a descriptive approach of secondary data provided from the Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality. Data are referred to the number of students who have passed the punctuation of screening in order to occupy places as an Internal Psychologist Resident (PIR) in 2013-2014, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, as well as the total number of candidates submitted for the exam.

Population and sample

The study population consists of 10107 students who have been submitted to PIR selective test during the period under study. These students come from 49 universities which offer the degree in Psychology in Spain. During the preliminary analysis, 9 universities (8 privately owned and 1 public owned) were removed because, during the period considered, no student of these institutions had been presented to the selection tests for access to NHS. Thereby, the final subset of the target population available for study was comprised for 40 public and private universities, with two teaching modalities: traditional classroom or distance teaching.

Variables

Main variable is the score on the screening test, estimated from response of candidates to a multiple-choice test consisting of 225 items (plus 10 reserve questions) and limited to 5 hours of duration, characteristics common to the three calls analyzed (Decree SSI/1695/2013, 12 September; Decree SSI/1674/2014, 10 September; Decree SSI/1892/2015, 10 September).

The multiple choice test is considered surpassed for those candidates who obtain a particular value greater

than or equal to 35 % of arithmetic mean of ten best individual scores of the exercise, considering exclusively integers result of this operation (Decree SSI/1695/2013, 12 September; Decree SSI/1674/2014, 10 September; Decree SSI/1892/2015, 10 September).

The variables used to characterize the universities have been: Ownership (public/ private), size (big or small) and modality of teaching (traditional/ distance).

Results

Evolution of the number of graduates in Psychology presented and that they overcome the selective tests for access to NHS

During the period under review, there have been testing a total of 10107 undergraduates, 8563 of which have exceeded cut-off point. Given that applicants come from 40 Spanish universities, the average of graduates who faced and overcome these tests would be 253 and 214 people, respectively.

In any case, it is remarkable the huge variability in number of applicants who come from one or another institution of higher education. In this sense, we see how the number of subjects that each university has been submitted to the different calls is between 1 (2013-2014 and 2015-2016 calls) and 478 (call 2013-2015). In case of candidates who pass the tests, the observed maximum and minimum values are 0 (call 2013-2014) and 408 (2014-2015 and 2015-2016 calls).

In evolution analysis of subjects presented to the three calls, it can be observed how the possible differences in the number of graduates presented are not statistically significant (Chi-square Friedman = 3.279, g.l. = 2, $p = .194$). On the contrary, there are significant differences in number of subjects who pass the tests of access to NHS in these calls (Chi-square Friedman = 16.504, g.l. = 2, $p = .000$). Thus, number of can-

didates who exceeded the average grade of cut is lower in the call 2013-14 than in 2014-2015 calls (Wilcoxon $Z = -3.710$, $p = .000$.) and 2015-2016 (Wilcoxon $Z = -3.427$, $p = .289$), no appreciable difference in the results of these last two calls (Wilcoxon $Z = -1.060$, $p = .289$).

Percentage of individuals who pass the test access to NHS and analysis of differences depending on the size and ownership of universities

Overall, the percentage of psychology graduates who passed the access test is more than 75 % in the three calls. However, as was noted in previous section, variability of results obtained by graduates from different universities is important.

In all cases, the percentages distribution of approval obtained by public institutions is above the percentage distribution of private universities. In turn, in case of public universities the variability in the results obtained it is lower.

The analysis of the significance of observed differences, carried out through the Mann-Whitney U test, confirms the best results of students from public universities in 2013-2014 calls (Mann-Whitney $U = 70.5$, $p = .016$) and 2014-2015 (Mann-Whitney $U = 76.0$, $p = .035$), as well as throughout the observation period (Mann-Whitney $U = 82.0$, $p = .006$). Meanwhile, in the call 2015-2016, the percentage of approved subjects from both types of institutions does not differ significantly (Mann-Whitney $U = 119.0$, $p = .106$).

The representation of the distribution of pass rates for different subgroups, reports a greater variability of the results obtained by small universities. In any case, the analysis of the differences in the percentages of subjects who pass the tests of access to NHS depending on the size of institutions, shows how the three calls considered: 2013-2015 (Mann-Whitney $U = 149.5$, $p = .838$), 2014-2015 (Mann-Whitney $U = 103.0$, $p = .177$) and 2015-2016 (Mann-Whitney $U = 172.0$, $p = .594$), these differences are not statistically significant. The superiority in the re-

sults of a type of university over another is not apparent when considering the entire observation period (Mann-Whitney $U = 183.0, p = .817$).

Performance and contribution of universities to NHS

Focusing the analysis on the achievement obtained by these universities in the PIR selective test, we can appreciate how, of all the total subjects that have exceeded the cut-off mark in the various calls, a 78.34 % come from face-to-face public universities, a 13.71 % of the distance public university, 7.26 % of all private universities face-to-face and finally, a 0.69 % of the distance private university that is part of this study.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to analyze the performance of graduates in Psychology in selective testing access to specialized health training NHS, evaluating the educational and employment impact of universities of origin, which has allowed incorporating the approach to accountability a social dimension.

In recent years Psychology studies continue to be one of most demanded, the training offered (especially in private universities) has increased, and consequently, the number of graduates with such academic / professional profile.

An important way of professional development of these graduates is their specialization as a Clinical Psychologists; this specialization required overcome a test, set by the Management Act of the health professions (Law 44/2003 of 21 November). In light of the data from the last three calls (2013-2014, 2014-2015 and 2015-2016), we see how this is a highly demanded specialization, as the number of applicants in each of the calls was higher 3000.

This paper provides empirical evidence about the great variability of the results obtained by graduates from different universities. In this regard the ownership

of the institutions should be considered one of the variables that allow us to explain this differences. Thus, in the three calls analyzed, the percentage of students from public universities that pass the test was higher than the percentage of students from private schools. Such differences have proved to be statistically significant for 2013/2014 and 2014/2015 calls, as well as in the whole period. As for the size of the center, the differences have not been statistically significant, but is important to note the increased variability in the case of the results obtained by the smaller universities.

The study carried out, has allowed us identified the 12 universities that provide a higher number of students, superior to the mean and with better achievement on PIR test. These universities could be identified as a high social impact, because the quality of education that students receive, seems to translate into improved performance in test mentioned.

In relation to the analysis on the number of graduates who obtain a place in the training program PIR, the percentage of students from public universities that finally get place is greater than 90 % in the three calls under study, reaching a 92.05 % in the entire period. In light of the results, we can highlight the remarkable social contribution of university public centers to NHS.

In spite of the informative value of this study, is important to take into account some of the main limitations derived from available data. On the one hand, it would have been interesting to analyze the percentage of students that take the PIR test, in relation with the total number of graduates in those universities. By the other hand, it is not taken into consideration the post graduate training preparation of those candidates in order to prepare the exam and their possible influence in the results obtained.