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POSITION PAPER

Constraints on disclosure and sharing of raw data from psychometric and structured professional judgements

The last 12 to 18 months have seen an increase in formal requests for disclosure of 'raw' psychometric testing data and information such as score sheets, rating grids and other materials used by test users in their assessment and reporting activities. This has been particularly notable in the forensic domain, but also in others. As such the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Committee on Test Standards (CTS) sought to review their position on the issue presenting and agreed to provide a position statement based on existing standards, European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA) guidelines and International Test Commission (ITC) published standards and policy. This short guideline contains the position that has been agreed by CTS formally in respect of this area. Test users who hold entry on the BPS Register of Qualifications in Test Use (RQTU) and psychologist test users are therefore encouraged to share this position statement as relevant and note the approach agreed to this, at times, challenging aspect of our practice and roles.

1. Issue

- 1.1 In the process of preparing testing outcome reports for formal administrative and other bodies, the use of psychometric testing and structured professional judgements (SPJ) (which the BPS Psychological Testing Centre treat as psychometric tests in the forensic context testing standards for example) is common and often directed by an instructing authority.
- 1.2 This process, by necessity, involves the collation and gathering of information and data from the test taker, which informs the expert opinion regarding the outcome of the assessment. The outcome of testing forms an integral part of the overall report provided and the recommendations made.
- 1.3 In instances where access to the data gathered during testing is requested by the authority certain constraints apply which mean that only in very limited circumstances can this data be shared on request.

2. Position

- 2.1 The International Test Commission (ITC) Test Users' Guide and the ITC handbook provide the basis for response to requests for such data following testing. Both ITC publications draw together international standards for test use and guidelines for practice that reflect international best practice. They incorporate the BPS Testing Standards, EFPA Testing Standards, Canadian Psychological Testing Standards, Australian Testing Standards and American Psychological Association Testing Standards, amongst others. As all the tests we commonly use are of UK, wider European, American, Australian or Canadian origin we can assert the ITC as the relevant reference point.
- 2.2 The ITC Handbook states at Chapter 29 (9.04): '(a) The term test data refers to raw and scaled scores, client/patient responses to test questions or stimuli, and psychologists' notes and recordings concerning client/patient statements and behaviour during an examination. Those portions of test materials that include client/patient responses are included in the definition of *test data*. Pursuant to a client/patient release, psychologists provide test data to the client/patient or other persons identified in the release. Psychologists may refrain from releasing test data in order to protect a client/patient or others from substantial harm, misuse or misrepresentation of the data or test, recognising that laws may regulate the release of confidential information under these circumstances. (b) In the absence of a client/patient release, psychologists provide data only as required by law or court order.'

- 2.3 The ITC Test User Guidelines similarly, but in greater detail describe testing as: 'Any attempt to provide a precise definition of a "test" or of "testing" as a process, is likely to fail as it will tend to exclude some procedures that should be included and include others that should be excluded. For the purpose of these guidelines, the terms "test" and "testing" should be interpreted broadly. Whether an assessment procedure is labelled a "test" or not is immaterial. These guidelines will be relevant for many assessment procedures that are not called "tests" or that seek to avoid the designation "test". Rather than provide a single definition, the following statements attempt to map out the domain covered by the guidelines.

Testing includes a wide range of procedures for use in psychological, occupational and educational assessment. Testing may include procedures for the measurement of both normal and abnormal or dysfunctional behaviours.

Testing procedures are normally designed to be administered under carefully controlled or standardised conditions that embody systematic scoring protocols. These procedures provide measures of performance and involve the drawing of inferences from samples of behaviour.

They also include procedures that may result in the qualitative classification or ordering of people (e.g. in terms of type).

Any procedure used for "testing", in the above sense, should be regarded as a "test", regardless of its mode of administration; regardless of whether it was developed by a professional test developer; and regardless of whether it involves sets of questions, or requires the performance of tasks or operations (e.g. work samples, psycho-motor tracking tests).

Tests should be supported by evidence of reliability and validity for their intended purpose. Evidence should be provided to support the inferences that may be drawn from the scores on the test. This evidence should be accessible to the test user and available for independent scrutiny and evaluation. Where important evidence is contained in technical reports that are difficult to access, fully referenced synopses should be provided by the test distributor.

The test use guidelines presented here should be considered as applying to all such procedures, whether or not they are labelled as "psychological tests" or "educational tests", and whether or not they are adequately supported by accessible technical evidence.

Many of these guidelines will apply also to other assessment procedures that lie outside the domain of 'tests'. They may be relevant for any assessment procedure that is used in situations where the assessment of people has a serious and meaningful intent and which, if misused, may result

in personal loss or psychological distress (for example, job selection interviews, job performance appraisals, diagnostic assessment of learning support needs).

The guidelines do not apply to the use of materials that may have a superficial resemblance to tests, but which all participants recognise are intended to be used only for purposes of amusement or entertainment (e.g. life-style inventories in magazines or newspapers).¹

2.4 The ITC Test User Guidelines further describe the requirements for communication and management of test results²:

‘2.8. Communicate the results clearly and accurately to relevant others.

Competent test users will:

- 2.8.1. Identify appropriate parties who may legitimately receive test results.
- 2.8.2. With the informed consent of the test takers, or their legal representatives, produce written or oral reports for relevant interested parties.
- 2.8.3. Ensure that the technical and linguistic levels of any reports are appropriate for the level of understanding of the recipients.
- 2.8.4. Make clear that the test data represent just one source of information and should always be considered in conjunction with other information.
- 2.8.5. Explain how the importance of the test results should be weighted in relation to other information about the people being assessed.
- 2.8.6. Use a form and structure for a report that is appropriate to the context of the assessment.
- 2.8.7. When appropriate, provide decision-makers with information on how results may be used to inform their decisions.
- 2.8.8. Explain and support the use of test results used to classify people into categories (e.g. for diagnostic purposes or for job selection).
- 2.8.9. Include within written reports a clear summary, and when relevant, specific recommendations.
- 2.8.10. Present oral feedback to test takers in a constructive and supportive manner.’

2.5 As such, psychologists and those in training, under supervision, and test users should not release raw test data (as defined above), other than to another appropriately competent professional/test user directly, and with the consent of the test taker.

2.6 Test user professional reports are provided to inform and summarise the outcome(s) of assessments and offer recommendations based on expert opinion arising from the use of tests. Where the information gathered during testing and assessment will include collateral, reasoned descriptors for ratings (often in a grid format) may be recorded to inform the assessment outcome. As described at 2.2–2.4, above this constitutes raw data and should not be disclosed other than at 2.5 above, or by a relevant court order.

2.7 In the case of other frequently used tests such as the WAIS 4, ADOS, PAI, MMPI, MCMI and BDI for example which are all ‘pencil and paper’ tests we should treat the raw and scaled scores similarly in terms of disclosure and reporting as per 2.2 above.




¹ https://www.intestcom.org/files/guideline_test_use.pdf p.13

² https://www.intestcom.org/files/guideline_test_use.pdf p.22



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