

Current State of Neuropsychology in Germany

Siegfried Gauggel
TU Chemnitz, Department of Psychology

Neuropsychology in Germany has a long tradition dating back to the middle of the last century. A comprehensive review of the history of neuropsychology can be found in Markowitsch (1992). A history of neuropsychological rehabilitation in Germany is given by Poser, Kohler, and Schoenle (1996) and a selective survey of the last decade of neuropsychological research in the German language has been compiled by Markowitsch, Thoene and Rieger (1993).

In Germany neuropsychology has a strong clinical emphasis. At present there are about 120 neurological hospitals which are concerned with the treatment and rehabilitation of brain-damaged patients. Contrary to this, only a few dozen outpatient clinics and practices exist, providing assessment and rehabilitation beyond hospital treatment in the patients' vicinity. More than 1000 neuropsychologists are working in such clinical settings (e.g., rehabilitation clinics, neurology departments). Most of them are rather young and part of a team of several colleagues. They see up to 15 patients weekly. On an average, they received their diploma 10 years earlier and from their nine years of clinical experience six years were spent in neuropsychological rehabilitation. Half of these neuropsychologists completed training in psychotherapy. Neuropsychological assessment and therapy occupy a vast amount of their time. Counseling, supervision and report writing are other important duties of the clinical neuropsychologist (Gauggel & Hättig, 1994).

There are several scientific neuropsychological organisations in Germany. The Society of Neuropsychology (GNP) and the German Society of Neurotraumatology and Clinical Neuropsychology (DGNKN) are the largest of them. The DGNKN was founded in 1985 as an interdisciplinary interest group. Members are physicians as well as neuropsychologists. In 1986 the Society of Neuropsychology (GNP) was founded as a specialty group for psychologists and is today the largest neuropsychological society with more than 1300 members. Because there is no special training in clinical neuropsychology the GNP is also responsible for offering a post-graduate curriculum in clinical neuropsychology. This curriculum enables psychologists to become qualified in clinical neuropsychology and to obtain recognition as a "Clinical Neuropsychologist" (GNP) with coverage by medical insurance companies and pension funds.

Although there are nearly 50 psychology departments in Germany only three of these (Freiburg, Bielefeld, Hamburg) have a special curriculum for the masters degree in neuropsychology. The other departments offer courses and classes in neuropsychology and related fields (e.g., neuroscience) with varying intensities and frequencies.

The lack of consistency is due to the fact that there are only a few professorships in neuropsychology within the psychology and medical departments. Most of the researchers in clinical and experimental neuropsychology hold positions in clinical psychology, biological psychology, cognitive psychology, medical psychology, or neurology.

In addition to the psychology departments there are also several medical departments with teaching and research activities in neuropsychology. In 1995 the Max-Planck-Society began the construction of a new institute for neuropsychology in Leipzig

together with an outpatient rehabilitation unit both of which were devoted to research in clinical and experimental neuropsychology.

Today there are a multitude of research projects in the field of neuropsychology at both German universities and clinics. The main institutions funding for such projects are the National Science Foundation (DFG), the Federal Ministry for Research and Technology (BMFT), and the pension funds (BfA, LVA, VDR). In addition to the scientific organisations, there are several non-profit organisations and patient groups which directly or indirectly promote neuropsychology. These organizations also support patients and their families, promote research and educate the general public about the consequences of brain damage. One example is the influential Kuratorium ZNS (CNS) which was founded by Hannelore Kohl, the wife of former chancellor Helmut Kohl.

As one might conclude neuropsychology is still a developing field in Germany. On the one hand there are a lot of jobs and research opportunities. On the other hand there is the tight financial situation of the health system and the stagnation of funding through the national and private science foundations which will very likely impair the growth rate during the next years.

References

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Siegfried Gauggel, Ph.D.
University of Technology Chemnitz
Department of Psychologie
Wilhelm-Raabe-Str. 43
D-09120 Chemnitz
Phone: +49-(0)371-531-6321
Fax: +49-(0)371-531-6339
eMail: siegfried.gauggel@phil.tu-chemnitz.de