

PSYCHOLOGY

Peace Corps Test Hit

Peace Corps officials are being questioned about the use of psychological tests for selection purposes which pry into personal matters of sex and religion—By Edith Lederer

► PEACE CORPS officials in Washington, D.C., defended a controversial psychological test dropped by the State Department because it pried into personal matters of sex and religion.

The Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) is "the only objective personality inventory which helps identify persons who may have or develop serious personality disorders," Dr. Al Carp, director of the selection division of the Peace Corps told a Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights.

The test, which is given to all Peace Corps volunteers, is only part of the entire selection process, he emphasized. Taken as a single measure it can never eliminate a Peace Corps applicant, the selection director added.

However, Dr. Carp did point out that "if the Peace Corps did not use the MMPI, more volunteers sent overseas would fail to complete their Peace Corps service for psychiatric reasons."

Although many items in the test deal with attitudes toward sex, the body, religion, parents and other sexual matters, Mr. Carp defended their use by noting that "personality disorders often express themselves in relation to these matters."

In his opinion, "a good alternative to use of the MMPI does not now exist."

Peace Corps Director Sargent Shriver told the subcommittee that the selection process seems to work. "Only eight percent of all volunteers have failed to complete their service for reasons related to 'personal adjustment.' Fewer than seven-tenths of one percent have returned because of psychiatric difficulties," he told the standing-room-only crowd.

Although the Peace Corps is planning to cut the number of MMPI test questions asked from 566 to 350, it does not plan to eliminate all the controversial ones on sex, religion, parents and a person's body.

Dr. Carp said that the 216 questions are being eliminated because the Peace Corps does not use the answers. They are test questions added by the MMPI officials which might be valuable in developing future inventories, he said.

In later testimony before the subcommittee, however, the use of psychological tests came under strong attack.

Prof. Monroe H. Freedman, associate professor of law at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., told the Senators that supporters of psychological examinations have not proved that "such questions have any significant relationship to fitness for government, or any other, employment."

He pointed out that "the tests and those who give them have proliferated despite a

shocking absence of true scientific support through control studies or test validation."

Prof. Freedman urged the subcommittee to draft legislation prohibiting use of questions relating to religion, politics, personal thoughts or habits, private family matters and sexual matters.

It is unlawful to be a "Professional Peeping Tom," he said, and it is time that these people are "eliminated from positions of such high authority and such great power in our Government."

In earlier testimony to the subcommittee Dr. Arthur H. Brayfield, executive officer of the American Psychological Association, defended the use of psychological tests.

"I know of no other professional tool which has matched the effectiveness of psychological tests in assisting individuals to realize their civil and human rights," he said.

Dr. Brayfield said that psychologists are concerned that "the right tests be used for the right purposes in the right way."

However, he told the subcommittee that psychologists are not "competent" to decide whether a specific personnel procedure is constitutional or legal, although they are concerned about careless and unjust use of the tests "against the privacy to which a human being is morally and legally entitled."

• Science News Letter, 87:404 June 26, 1965

VD Exam Invades Privacy

► A PHYSICAL EXAMINATION for venereal disease may be a greater invasion of personal privacy than answers given to a controversial psychological test.

If a prospective Peace Corpsman was rejected because he had venereal disease, Dr. George K. Bennett, president of the Psychological Corporation, New York, said, the examining physician could damage him by putting this disqualifying fact in his personnel record. "Presumably, this would not happen because it would be unethical for a doctor to do so."

Only the "conclusion of disqualification" should be recorded in the personnel record, he noted.

Similarly, the psychologist pointed out, "the MMPI tends—I only say tends—to indicate satisfactory emotional health."

However, the answers to specific MMPI questions are "not relevant and their retention would serve no purpose," he said.

"There is therefore far more reason to be concerned about the physical examination for VD as a possible invasion of privacy or confidential relationship than answers given to the MMPI."

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