

**A short interview with Dr. Sir Romesh Jayasinghe FRSPH(UK) FTBCCT(UK) (Director of Studies at the Institute of Mental Health [www.imhik.com] in Colombo-04) about the relevance of Psychology and Counselling in Sri Lanka and educational and training opportunities in this growing field.**

### **1. What is Psychology and why is it important in today's world?**

Psychology is the scientific study of behavior and the mind. The study of human behavior and the mind predates to thousands of years when both western and eastern philosophers and even religious founders and leaders thought and spoke much about human nature and the true nature and the power of the human mind. Psychology is becoming even more important in today's world because of the widespread growth of psychological and mental health disorders in this fast paced, highly competitive and stressful society and the fact that students and the general public are becoming more aware and knowledgeable about the importance of studying psychology and behavioral sciences at foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

### **2. What is the relevance of Child Psychology for a country like Sri Lanka?**

Child Psychology is one of the many branches of psychology that focuses on the mind and behavior of infants and children from prenatal development through adolescence. Child psychology deals not only with how children grow physically, but with their mental, emotional and social development as well. As such, a knowledge of child psychology can be essential for parents and other caregivers, Montessori and primary and secondary school teachers, and also for those who work with abused, traumatized, disabled children and children with other developmental and mental disorders. In Sri Lanka, we can now see more teachers and parents studying child psychology to gain a better understanding about infant and child development and to become more responsible and effective parents, caregivers and teachers as well. Moreover, due to the past civil war situation and natural disasters such as the Tsunami and its impact on children and adolescents and the malnutrition problem of children in rural areas and also the alarming growth of child abuse and child exploitation in the recent past, it has become imperative that Sri Lankans become more informed and educated about the field of child psychology and child development.

### **3. What is Counselling and Psychotherapy in a nutshell? And why is it becoming more relevant now?**

The goal of counselling is to help individuals overcome many of their past, present & future problems and challenges. In recent times, rapid social change coupled with increasing levels of competition and stress caused by industrialization and urbanization has led to varied and perplexing problems. For most people the pace of change and the resultant unhealthy modern high-tech lifestyle is simply too fast and stressful and creates serious problems of adjustment. The professional counselor should be able to address a variety of problems, such as

educational, vocational, marital, parental, emotional and personal. The major objective of counselling is to help individuals become self-confident, self-dependent, self-directed and to adjust themselves efficiently to the demands of a better and meaningful life. Individuals are provided assistance to enhance their personal, social, emotional and intellectual development (and at times even their spiritual development). Counselling is an effective way for people who are having problems that they can't handle, can't control, or just don't know how to deal with, to find help from a trained or professional counsellor. There are many types of counselling. It is dealt mostly with talk therapy. A person goes to a counselor because he/she can't find the answers to a problem. A counselor will actively listen to the problem(s) and ask probing questions to get at a deeper level of what is really going on. The therapist will then either explore with you ways that you can change your thinking and attitudes about the issue(s) and problems faced or teach you skills so that you can cope with this or else correct this concern on your own.

#### **4. What Educational and Training opportunities are available in Sri Lanka in this specialized area of study?**

The academic field of psychology at undergraduate and post-graduate levels of study and research is comparatively new to Sri Lanka when compared to the other developed countries and even with some other Asian countries. For example, up to now there are no complete undergraduate level Bachelor's degree programs in Psychology or Behavioural Sciences at any local university even though there are some postgraduate programs at Masters and Doctorate levels in Counselling, Educational and Clinical Psychology in a few Sri Lankan universities. Most of the undergraduate degree programs in psychology in Sri Lanka are available only through foreign universities (American, British, Australian, Indian) who conduct some of their programs in Sri Lanka in partnership with some private educational institutions locally. Besides, there are some good introductory and comprehensive short term (3 months to one year) Certificate and Diploma level courses in general psychology, child psychology, counselling and psychotherapy conducted by several government and semi-government organisations, NGO's and some other private institutions as well in Sri Lanka suitable for school leavers and other professionals interested in this field of study.

#### **5. What is the nature and role of the Institute of Mental Health (IMH) in Colombo-04, Sri Lanka?**

The Institute of Mental Health (IMH) is an internationally accredited private educational and research institute founded in 2007 and located in Colombo-04 with the primary aim of conducting short term educational and training programs at Certificate and Diploma levels for the benefit of school leavers, parents, teachers and other professionals in Sri Lanka who want to gain a comprehensive introduction and knowledge of subjects such as general psychology, child psychology, educational psychology, and counseling and psychotherapy. We regularly

conduct these courses for small groups of students or participants and also on an individual class basis in the English language medium of instruction only at the present time. If a student successfully completes all three of our basic or core Certificate level courses (in General Psychology, Child Psychology, Counselling & Psychotherapy) then the student is eligible to be awarded with our **IMH Diploma in Psychology & Counselling** as a group level diploma qualification. In the future, we plan to conduct specialized seminars, workshops and training programs in Colombo and outstation on topics of interest and relevance to the field of psychology and mental health for the benefit of the public and the student and professional community in Sri Lanka.

#### **6. What job opportunities and prospects are available for graduates of Psychology in Sri Lanka and Overseas?**

Psychology and counselling diplomates, graduates and postgraduates have good and exciting job prospects both in Sri Lanka and more so overseas in developed nations since they would end up working in the growing mental health sector as licensed or registered clinical psychologists, mental health counsellors, psychosocial workers, drug and alcohol abuse counsellors, psychotherapists and hypnotherapists. Some of them might prefer a career in teaching or lecturing at an academy or university whilst others would prefer working for a government or a private organization or else going into private practice.