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Archivio istituzionale della ricerca

School psychology in Italy: A mixed-method study of actual and desired roles and functions

This is the final peer-reviewed author's accepted manuscript (postprint) of the following publication:

Published Version:

Matteucci, M.C., Soncini, A., Floris, F., Truscott, S.D. (2025). School psychology in Italy: A mixed-method study of actual and desired roles and functions. *SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY INTERNATIONAL*, 46(1), 21-50 [10.1177/01430343241283116].

Availability:

This version is available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/11585/994628> since: 2025-02-18

Published:

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1177/01430343241283116>

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**School Psychology in Italy: A Mixed-method Study of Actual and Desired Roles
and Functions.**

Abstract

Investigating international school psychology practices may promote and influence the globalization of the profession. Although some extant studies assessed the presence and functions of school psychologists internationally, to date little research has focused on Italy. This nationwide study provides up-to-date information about how psychological services are provided in Italian schools, what services are rendered, what populations and issues are addressed, and analyzes discrepancies between existing and desired situations. Data from the concurrent triangulation (simultaneous) mixed-method research consisted of results from an online survey on 565 Italian psychological service-providers who work in schools and 33 key informants' interviews (i.e., school psychologists, regional /national board representatives, vested partners' key representatives, policymakers). Results indicated that individual counseling to students is predominant and that school-based psychological helpdesk is the most common form of provision of psychological services in Italy. However, desired service delivery models differ substantially from reality. Implications for the development of school psychology in Italy in terms of promoting policy design and providing more structured psychological services in schools are described.

Keywords: school psychology; school psychologists; schools; mixed method; Italian schools; psychological services.

School Psychology in Italy: A Mixed-method Study of Actual and Desired Roles and Functions.

1. Introduction

Investigating school psychology services may promote and influence the globalization of the profession (Oakland & Jimerson, 2007), and several important publications have advanced our knowledge of the presence and functions of school psychologists internationally (e.g., Faulkner & Jimerson, 2017). In Europe, a survey of 25 European countries conducted by the Network of European Psychologists in the Educational System (NEPES, 2010) revealed a remarkable variety of working conditions that makes it difficult to compare school psychological service systems across Europe. Moreover, to date, little research has focused on the condition of school psychology in Italy (Matteucci, 2017). In Italy, beginning in the late 1990s, legislation and official reports focused on the need for school-based psychological services but did not establish clear standards for how such services should be organized or which individuals or organizations should provide them. Consequently, data gathered by the International School Psychology Survey (Coyne & Trombetta, 2007) and a more recent geographically limited study by Matteucci and Farrell (2019) revealed that most schools in Italy had some form of psychological services, but these services were rendered to schools via a complex, multifaceted array of private, organizational, and public contractors.

Given rapidly changing and complex service delivery structures and diverse roles and functions of psychologists who work in Italian schools, as well as the lack of clear national standards for psychological services, there is a critical need for up-to-date information about how psychological services are provided in Italian schools. Such data could inform policy, drive needs assessments, impact governmental and organizational attention, and direct

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university plans and resources to provide professional school psychology training. Moreover, this is a critical time for psychological services in the Italian school system as the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has had a severe impact on young people's mental health (Bozzola et al., 2022; World Health Organization, 2022) and raised awareness about the need of psychologists' services in school. In the current study, we aimed to delve into the existing and desired roles and functions of school psychologists, as well as service delivery characteristics in Italy. The findings will inform efforts to consolidate Italian school psychology services and encourage development of the school psychologist profession at the national and international levels.

1.1. School psychology services in Italy

In this manuscript, the term *school psychology services* refers to psychological activities carried out within schools mainly by master's-level psychologists (2 years post bachelor's degree) who work part-time in schools as experts engaged mainly in counseling and consultation¹ (Alessandri, 2013; Matteucci, 2018; Matteucci & Farrell, 2019). In Italy, there are no specific national indications or requirements concerning school psychologists' training. However, several master's degrees in school, educational, and developmental psychology are offered, as well as tertiary specializations in school or educational psychology. To practice as a school psychologist in Italy, psychologists need to be licensed by means of a national state examination, which qualifies candidates for practice as a general psychologist, independent of the area of specialization. The decision to work as a school

¹ *Counseling* refers to the provision of a specific direct psychological service, in which a school psychologist works with one or more individuals (i.e., students) in need of services, to talk about issues and problems that they are facing in their lives.

Consultation refers to using indirect methods to deliver psychological services to students via teachers, principals, other educational personnel, and parents. It is focused on enhancing the ability of adults (i.e., teachers, administrators, and parents) to promote students' development/learning and providing assistance in planning and realizing interventions.

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psychologist is carried out mainly on the basis of professional experience and specific training received.

Unlike some other nations (e.g., United States, United Kingdom, & France; Farmer et al., 2021; Jimerson et al., 2007), existing information suggests that assessment and diagnosis of children with disabilities and/or special education needs is not a primary function of psychologists working in Italian schools. Instead, they provide a variety of services. Most often, psychologists provide school-based counseling, working via helpdesks² and, to a lesser extent, offer other direct or indirect services to the school. Because nationwide information is not available, in this paper we adopt a broad definition of *school psychology services* as services that psychologists provide and perform within school contexts. These psychological activities include direct services such as counseling students and indirect services such as parent and teacher training or consultation to teachers or parents (Bombi et al., 2014; for a critical analysis of direct vs. indirect services, see Conoley et al., 2020). Also included are other psychological services and activities that Italian school psychologists may provide in schools. Such activities include preventive and responsive services, such as interventions (defined as all psychological activities which involve school members, aimed at improving some aspects of school life), prevention programming (e.g., bullying prevention), screening, and research. We include services and activities carried out by psychologists who may not be regularly present within the school, but who provide these services based on a specific project.

Although some previous preliminary findings indicated that a psychological helpdesk or other form of psychological activities and services are present in about 80% of the schools

² Helpdesk is the most frequent delivery model of psychology services in Italian schools. Helpdesks are characterized by the regular presence of a psychologist who provides ongoing school-based mental health services. Helpdesk psychologists typically provide counseling to students and consultation to teachers and parents.

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(Matteucci & Farrell, 2019; Alessandri, 2013), these services varied widely. In some schools, there may be no consistent school psychology services. Moreover, the actual activities of the psychologists who currently serve Italian schools remain unregulated and underreported, as services are not being tracked by any national or regional governmental body (Matteucci & Farrell, 2019). Likewise, their expected and desired roles and functions have never been investigated at the national level, nor have the ways in which school psychology services are provided in schools or which service delivery models are considered to be the most appropriate and desirable.

2. The present study

Literature on school psychology in Italy is dated (Jimerson, et al, 2007; Trombetta et al., 2008), restricted to a small geographical area (Matteucci & Soncini, 2020), focused on limited samples (Meroni et al., 2021), or based on data collected from school respondents (i.e., principals, teachers) who were not school psychologists themselves (Matteucci & Farrell, 2019). Moreover, although existing research indicates that psychologists are present in many schools (Alessandri, 2013; Matteucci & Farrell, 2019), more detailed information is not available, as structures and organizations to monitor, track, or report such activities have yet to be defined. Thus, the actual activities and conditions of psychologists who work in schools remain under-reported.

As previously noted, school psychologists perform many different functions (e.g., Watkins et al., 2001). School psychologists' roles and functions are clearly intertwined, as functions are encompassed within specific professional roles (e.g., a consultant provides consultation; e.g., Jordan et al, 2009; Wang et al., 2015; Weiner, et al., 2021). Moreover, the lack of standards or a clear national model of service delivery renders it necessary to explore optimal conditions for service provision as described by vested partners (i.e., key informants

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with different roles in schools: representatives of national school principals', parents', teachers', and students' associations). Therefore, the study aims to investigate the ideal roles and functions of school psychologists as well as features of school psychological service delivery in Italy. Thus, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the actual roles and services provided by Italian school psychologists (i.e., their main roles and functions played, such as assessment, intervention, consultation)?

What do actual models of service delivery look like?

2. What roles and functions are desired by Italian school psychologists? What service delivery models are desired?

3. Method

3.1. Research design

We conducted a nationwide concurrent triangulation (simultaneous) mixed-method study (Creswell et al., 2003) with a sample of Italian psychological service-providers (i.e., school psychologists) who work in schools as well as key informants (e.g., vested partners, policymakers). Consistent with a concurrent triangulation approach (Creswell, 2009), quantitative and qualitative data were collected separately and concurrently and then compared, connected, and integrated to determine convergences and/or differences salient to the research questions. This allowed the validation of the findings generated by each method through evidence produced by the other (Kroll & Neri, 2009). Concurrent triangulation designs use both qualitative and quantitative data to explore variables of interest more accurately, as mixed-method data can provide a better understanding of research issues than either quantitative or qualitative approaches alone (Palinkas et al., 2011). Moreover, by utilizing separate quantitative and qualitative methods, we leveraged the strengths of both approaches (Creswell et al., 2003; Migiro & Magangi, 2011). Figure 1 displays the concurrent qualitative and quantitative data collections. The two strands were first analyzed

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independently, then integrated and analyzed together. At the end of the data analysis, we compared qualitative and quantitative results in the integrative merging analysis phase.

Finally, we interpreted results together to provide a more detailed overview of the topic.

Figure 1 here

3.2. Sampling Procedure and Sample

3.2.1 Quantitative sampling and sample

Before starting the data collection, we obtained approval for the study by the first author's University Ethical Board (protocol 61299, date March 15, 2021).

Because Italian psychologists must be registered with a regional board, we sent invitation via e-mails that presented the research project to each of the 21 Italian Regional Psychologist Boards and asked each board to deliver the questionnaire link to all the psychologists on their official mailing lists or websites. The inclusion criteria were to have a degree in psychology and to work as a psychologist in an Italian school. Potential participants had to consent before progressing to the online questionnaire. The questionnaire was opened by 1242 respondents, of which 184 were filtered out due to not meeting the main inclusion criterion (i.e., non-psychologists or psychologists who do not currently work in schools). Data from an additional 493 respondents were not included due to their completing less than 72% of the survey. The 72% cutoff was chosen to ensure the inclusion of all survey sections pertinent to the research questions presented in this paper. Therefore, the final sample consisted of 565 psychologists ($M_{age} = 42.2$, $SD = 9.1$, 85.9% female; see Table 1 for demographic information) who completed most of the sections of the questionnaire, including demographics, professional activities and helpdesk activities sections (for more details see paragraph 3.3.1). Most of our survey respondents (92%, $n = 515$) worked part-time in schools and spent the remainder of their professional life in other services such as private practice and psychotherapy for children and adults. On average,

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they spend 10 hours per week in schools (out of 27 total average work hours per week), but respondents' reported time in schools varied widely ($SD = 7$ hours per week). The average ratio of psychologists to students is 1:586 (range: 25-1600).

3.2.2. Qualitative sampling and sample

Key informant interviews have been used often in policy-related research as an efficient and cost-effective method for gathering information on issues or questions under study (Gilchrist & Williams, 1999). Key informants provide high-level perspectives and qualified insights on a specific topic. Participants are identified and selected because they hold special or expert knowledge on the topic and may provide background information that would otherwise be inaccessible, implicit, or inefficient to identify through document reviews or quantitative research methods (Pahwa et al., 2023). In our study, qualitative data consisted of national and regional key informant interviews. National interviewees were selected to provide a stratified sample of diverse experiences and roles (i.e., National Psychologists Board representatives; National Associations of School Principals, teachers, parents and students, school psychologists and policy makers). Potential regional key informants were identified through a purposeful sampling strategy based on referral (Palinkas et al., 2015: i.e., “snowball” sampling) and selected according to stratification criteria. Specifically, Regional Board representatives were asked “Who knows a lot about these issues or has great experience in school psychology?” and subsequently provided the names of potential information-rich key informants. We then chose possible key informants to represent various roles and geographic areas and contacted them with an invitation e-mail. Potential participants were informed about the contents and aims of the study.

As the objective of this study was to explore the psychological services offered in Italian schools—services that involve people with different roles and needs, such as students, teachers, parents—we decided to adopt a quota sampling strategy and defined different

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categories of theoretical interest for purposive sampling (Pahwa et al., 2023). As suggested by Pahwa and colleagues (2023):

In qualitative research, quota sampling is not used for representativeness nor to achieve a specific quantity of participants, but rather to ensure that theoretically relevant perspectives are included in the data. A key informant quota sampling strategy would emphasize breadth, purpose, and variety in key informant participants. This could be done by identifying multiple factors of interest related to, for example, role, organization, experience, geography, domain, or sector of work and then seeking key informants who fit in each of these domains. (p. 1254)

Accordingly, we contacted potential participants to fill categories and to be able to provide different point of views on how psychological services are and should be provided in Italy. Of the 51 people contacted, we interviewed 33 key informants including Regional Board representatives ($n = 12$), policy makers (i.e., employees of different Regional School Offices, an employee of the Ministry of Education, a member of Parliament, and a project coordinator from a humanitarian organization; $n = 8$), vested partners (i.e., representatives of national school principals' associations, the President of a national parents' association, the President of a national teachers' association, and the national coordinator of a students' association; $n = 5$), and expert school psychologists ($n = 8$). The mean age of the interviewees was 54.0 (range = 23-69; $SD = 12.30$), and 21 (63.6%) were women. The specific features of the sample are reported in Table 1.

[Table 1 here]

3.3. Measures and Data Analysis

3.3.1 The survey and quantitative data analysis

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The questionnaire, administered in Italian, contained 92 items that were divided into four main areas.

The first section was about socio-demographic information and included 34 items to obtain information on respondents' gender, age, training, and work experience in general (e.g., total of hours worked per week) and as psychologists in schools (e.g., type of employment, supervision). The second section included 38 items that collected details on the respondents' specific work activities. Respondents were asked what their school-based role entails (e.g., total monthly hours, presence of a network with local healthcare services, number of annual accesses and main reasons for said accesses), whether they worked in a psychological helpdesk, and to provide information about the schools they served (i.e., school level, geographic area, students' socio-economic background, ratio of psychologists to students). Respondents were also asked to provide information on their professional school-based activities such as behavioral and mental health wellness activities, school-wide interventions (e.g., improving school climate, solving relational issues, etc.), screening for the early discovery of disorders or difficulties (e.g., specific learning disorders), and research activities. Said details included information on the targets of the services offered, along with the number of activities and interventions implemented with each category of people served (i.e., students, parents, school staff, and the school as a whole).

In the third section, respondents were then asked to identify their ideal activities, or those activities in which school psychologists should invest most of their time. Specifically, they ranked the importance of various roles presented in the survey. In the fourth section, respondents were asked to indicate whether they assessed each school's needs before they started working and evaluated the results of their work and what methods they used to do so. For analyzing quantitative data, we used SPSS version 26. We ran descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, ranges) and frequencies to describe the sample and characterize the roles,

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functions, and service delivery characteristics of Italian school psychologists. A list of activities carried out by school psychologists, the percentage of time spent on each activity and their ideal rank order were asked to participants.

3.3.2 The interview protocol and qualitative data analysis

Each key informant participated in a virtual semi-structured interview (through a video calling platform chosen by the interviewee, e.g., Zoom) with one member of the research team. The interview protocol consisted of questions about the actual and desired roles and functions and service delivery characteristics. (For the interview outline/questions, see Table S1, Supplementary Online Materials). The virtual interviews were audio recorded and lasted approximately 44 min (on average; range: 23-78 minutes) and were subsequently transcribed verbatim. All interviews were conducted in Italian.

There are four authors for the current study. They all are researchers in school psychology and are also members of national and/or international school psychology associations. The first three authors conducted the data collection and analysis, and all of them contributed to interpreting findings and the implications of the study. It is likely, however, that our backgrounds in terms of our interest and commitment to the dissemination and valorization of school psychology influenced our interpretations of the data. To avoid speaking for the data, the authors made efforts to bracket existing positive bias toward school psychology and the presence of psychologists in schools during data collection and analysis. In pursuit of this purpose, people with different backgrounds, roles and needs (e.g., policy makers, representatives of parents and students' associations) have been included in the sample. Additionally, three researchers coded the data and discussed the consistency/inconsistency between their interpretation, accounting for alternative explanations also not in favor of the presence of school psychologists in schools.

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The three (Italian) researchers read the full dataset to become familiar with it and understand the content of each interview in relation to the entire dataset. A preliminary set of codes was developed based on the initial research questions. In phase 2, the interviews were assigned to the researchers and analyzed separately to generate codes, considered as “the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 63). Using a combination of deductive and inductive approaches (Newman, 2000), the researchers identified as many potential codes as possible (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In phase 3, the researchers gathered similar codes together and created initial themes, namely “patterns in the data that are important or interesting to address the research or say something about an issue” (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017, p. 3353). Any discrepancies in the codes were discussed by the researchers based on the research questions and literature until consensus was achieved (Syed & Nelson, 2015).

In phase 4, the researchers collaborated to further develop the themes selected based on the identification of important patterns related to the research questions. Themes were therefore based on a qualitative approach (i.e., whether the theme expressed a specific topic related to the research questions) rather than a quantitative approach (i.e., the number of instances of the theme across the data set). In phase 5, the researchers developed the scope and focus of each theme, determining the ‘story’ of each. An informative name for each theme was agreed upon. The basic principle was to organize and describe the results in a comprehensive and rich way and to provide a detailed and nuanced account of thematic areas related to each research question. Although these phases were sequential, analysis is typically a recursive process (Braun & Clarke, 2006); thus we moved back and forth between the different phases.

After the analyses, the researchers connected the qualitative and quantitative results to better understand the phenomenon and answer the research questions. As shown in Figure 1,

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the point of interface (Morse & Niehaus, 2009) in our mixed-method approach occurred when the researchers merged both sets of results. The qualitative themes were linked to the frequency and descriptives of the quantitative responses to find discrepancies and conjunctions. In other words, we checked if a theme elaborated through the thematic analysis was mirrored in the responses school psychologists gave to the survey. In this way, it was possible to gain a comprehensive overview of information from the two different samples (i.e., qualitative key informant interviews and quantitative school psychologist survey) on the same phenomenon and to expand, elaborate, and/or identify consistencies or discrepancies between qualitative and quantitative findings (Fetters et al., 2013). In line with this, the researchers described the qualitative and quantitative findings by integrating them and adopting a weaving approach, which involves writing both qualitative and quantitative results together on a theme-by-theme basis answering the research questions. As a final stage, for the purpose of publishing the results, the interview excerpts were translated by the three researcher involved in the analysis who are proficient in English and who, knowing the overall interview corpus, were able to ensure that the meaning of the excerpts was maintained even during translation.

4. Results

Results will be presented by research question. The themes and codes that emerged from the qualitative analysis are summarized and presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Research Question 1: What are the *actual* roles and services provided by Italian school psychologists? What do *actual* models of service delivery look like?

Roles and Functions

To directly address this research question, we asked survey respondents to indicate the *percentage of their school-based professional time* involved the activities listed in Table 2.

Counseling was the predominant professional activity. Although there was considerable

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variation (see standard deviations), on average, our respondents reported spending most of their professional time counseling students (i.e., 37% of their time with individuals and 19% of their time with groups). The central role of counseling was evident in this quote from the interview of the president of a teachers' association: "I must say that we had the queue of students asking for psychological support (Central Italy, male)." The prevalent role of the helpdesk to counsel students also emerged clearly in this quote from a school psychologist: "The helpdesk ... is often a place of initial counseling that can then -if needed- activate other services" (Northern Italy, male)."

Table 2 here

As evident in Table 2, consultation was the next most prevalent professional activity by time with respondents reporting they spent an average of 18% of their time consulting with teachers/staff and 18% with parents/families. Consultation was also the most prevalent activity by percentage of the sample, with 79% and 77% of our sample reporting that they provided consultation services to teacher/staff and parents/families, respectively. The central role of consultation to teachers was reported by the interviewees. For example, a school psychologist said: "Once you are inside the school, another activity to do, in addition then to the helpdesk, is to devote yourself to training teachers and helping them in classroom management (Southern Italy, female)".

Interventions for problematic situations were important both as represented by the average percentage of time spent (18%) as well as the percentage of respondents who reported such interventions as professional activities (65%). Although responding to presenting problems via counseling, consultation, and other interventions were the predominant activities, prevention activities were also common. For example, primary prevention

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programs (21% of time), in-service staff training (18% of time), and school-wide projects (17% of time) were all frequently reported. Thus, our respondents reported serving the school in multiple ways by addressing multiple targets. This result emerged in the interviews as well. When asked directly about the actual functions of school psychologists, interviewees identified clearly that their function was interconnected with the targets they address. The theme “Target of their activities” (see Table 3) was comprised of three codes: consultation provided to teachers, the school, and parents. This concept was explicitly described by a representative of a Regional Board (Southern Italy, female) who said: “You work at multiple levels as you work with the principal, you work with the teachers, and you work with the families and the pupils. So, you work with all members of the school.” A psychologist interviewee emphasized the importance of working with the school community by saying: “The idea is just to change the everyday experience that the kids live and to change the everyday [life], which means creating an organizational and culture change of the school (Northern Italy, female).”

The importance of school-wide interventions was also emphasized by a representative of school principals who said: We arrived at a certain point where we saw that it was necessary to set in motion a psychological type of action towards the school community. [We made a contract to a school psychologist who] intervened primarily with respect to teachers, administrative staff, management and [therefore] indirectly with respect to the students. ... to intervene toward the well-being of the school community could then have a spillover to the general well-being of students and families as well (Northern Italy, female).

In conclusion, our respondents reported serving the school by addressing multiple targets, responding to problems (especially through counseling to students and consultation with teachers/staff and parents) and also via prevention activities. In the qualitative data (see Table 4) school psychologists were described as providing disparate functions: some

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respondents described school psychologists who are “called for problems and critical situations, [and are] not involved in other educational processes” (Representative of regional board, Central Italy, female), while others mentioned how psychologists are “called upon to do much more systemic intervention, much more relationship building, good relationship building, rather than clinical intervention” (Representative of regional board, Northern Italy, male). A fundamental partnership between the school and local social and health agencies emerged as a recurrent theme across service delivery models.

Table 3 here

Models of Service Delivery

With regard to the characteristics of the psychological services in Italian schools, most of our survey respondents (70.4%, n = 398) operate via a helpdesk in one or more of their schools. In most situations (84.9%, n = 338), these psychological helpdesks are administratively and financially managed by the school; in other cases they are managed by outside authorities such as local healthcare providers. The widespread presence of psychological helpdesks was confirmed by qualitative data (Table 4) as, for example, a female school psychologist from Northern Italy stated: “The helpdesk is the most widely present (service)”. Helpdesks are the predominant access points for common services such as counseling, consultation, and interventions (Table 2). However, they are not the only service delivery system. A male regional board representative from Southern Italy reported, “There is no official mandate; however there are many psychologists who—within different roles—work in schools, ... They were doing school helpdesk, others were doing other projects [focused on] for instance bullying, inclusion, training.” A psychologist representative of a regional board (Northern Italy, female) said, “Then, there is a whole satellite world of realities that have very differentiated configurations ... ranging from an associative nature ... directed

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... toward issues around the developmental age ... that enter schools with projects that are funded by the regions, by the schools.”

Table 4 here

Although helpdesks are primarily tasked with providing direct services to students, our participants reiterated their central importance in the coordination of complementary actions. That is, psychologists working through helpdesks “work not only in a network but also in synergy with these other figures [teachers, families and the educational community], which is the most difficult thing to do” (Representative of regional board, Central Italy, female). Another said, “The helpdesk is not only a listening desk, but many kinds of activities precisely to be organized with both teachers and parents” (Representative of regional board, Southern Italy, female). However, participants also noted a helpdesk weakness concerning the lack of teacher access. Finally, an important complication relates to deontological issues as, according to the Italian ethical code for psychologists, informed parental consent must be collected for all psychological services, which can complicate daily practice.

Despite the prevalence of helpdesks, data from key informant interviews provided four themes about potential concerns with school psychology service delivery. As displayed in Table 4, a theme centered on the *lack of uniformity* leading to discontinuous service (i.e., fragmentation of services, absence of continuity, differences in quality of services, differences among regions/areas). A male regional board representative from Southern Italy explained: “We have a country [Italy] that has very different realities. There are those who are ahead, those who still don't even have an idea of what we are talking about.” A regional board representative from Southern Italy explained that “Each region moves differently ... we don't have a model, and, in my opinion, it is needed ... because all professionals move differently.” Additional concerns about the continuity of services emerged because many schools contract

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for services at the beginning of each school year, with the risk of contracting with a different professional each year: “There is no continuity anyway, and perhaps that is ... destabilizing for schools” (Policymaker, female).

The absence of a shared model for school psychology services emerged as a general concern and was evident from both school psychology providers and policymakers. For example, one female school psychologist from Central Italy said: “[A shared model] still does not exist and should instead exist”, and a female regional board representative from Northern Italy reported “...there is not [a shared model] and maybe everyone is moving differently. We notice it precisely because being a referent, emails come in and everyone doesn't know how to move.” Only two interviewees, both from Northern Italy, described the advantages of an evidence-based model applied in their region when the interviews took place (i.e., The European Network of Health Promoting Schools).

Overall, counseling and consultation emerged as the predominant actual roles and functions, and our participants noted that the psychological helpdesk was by far the most common service delivery system, which was sometimes supplemented by specific services (such as school-wide interventions). Despite the broad commonalities, participants noted substantial concerns about the lack of a clear national model leading to disjointed and variable service delivery and disjointed psychological assistance for children, parents, and teachers.

4.2 Research Question 2: What roles and functions are desired by Italian school psychologists? What service delivery models are desired?

Roles and Functions

The last column of Table 2 presents the survey data addressing ideal roles and functions. Respondents ranked the amount of time that they believed should be devoted to potential school psychology functions. Data are presented as the calculated ranking and the mean for each item. As is evident by the means, there was some variation in respondents’

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rankings, which is to be expected in a survey of 565 psychologists. Generally, our Italian school psychologist respondents reported aspiring to activities that resemble their actual roles reported earlier (i.e. counseling and prevention).

The key informant interviews revealed a clearer picture of the ideal school psychology roles and functions from psychologists, vested partners and policymakers. Specifically, interviewees pinpointed ideal roles and functions of school psychologists in supporting and counseling different targets (i.e., theme: “Support and counseling”), and in prevention interventions (i.e., theme: “Prevention of adverse situations and promotion of wellbeing”). Specifically, some school psychologists identified work with students, in groups or individually, as their ideal role: “The psychologist who works in schools must be a psychologist who works with groups” (Central Italy, female); and also: “I think our role could be a central role in intercepting the issues and needs of these age groups” (Northern Italy, male). Confirming the survey results, prevention emerged as an ideal key function: “Psychologists are often called in where there is already a problem, right? In my opinion, it would be much more important instead to work at more of a prevention level (School psychologist, Northern Italy, female); and, in a more comprehensive way: “with respect to which [i.e., to the needs that young people express] the intervention should be as much as possible an integrated intervention, in which there are prevention, promotion, and support components” (Representative of a Regional Board, Central Italy, male).

A further specific theme highlighted teacher and parent training, (i.e., “Offer training”). In-service staff training was ranked 8th by school psychologists but cited as an ideal function by vested partners and policymakers. For example, as expressed by two school principals. One said: “The psychologist certainly can intervene in classrooms with students, but he has to intervene giving help and training to the teacher” (Central Italy, female). Another (i.e., a representative of school principals association, Central Italy, male) reported

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that psychologists can be supportive “...but it is necessary to train the teacher [to have] more psychological sensitivity and then equip them with tools to mobilize these learners' energies.”

A female vested partner from Northern Italy identified that indirect teacher-training can have in-class effects “...psychologists ...– since they are part of the community – [can provide] training interventions [which then have] effects inside the classes.”

The importance of psychologists supporting teachers was clarified by a representative of a student association: “I think it would also be necessary to imagine that teachers and even school staff can also have access [to psychologists' services], not only students” (Northern Italy, male); moreover, a policymaker stated: “For the first cycle, ...[it would be important to have] a more preventive function [of the school psychologist] in supporting teachers to identify any behaviors that denote discomfort” (Northern Italy, female).

Consultation with parents/family (ranked 6th in the survey; see Table 2) emerged partially from the interviews, especially concerning the support for the development of parenting skills: “So for me, the school psychologist is not only related to the function of the child's [mental] health, but also in supporting the educational function of teachers and parents” (Representative of Psychologists board, female).

Another indirect service role assigned to the “ideal” school psychologist was that of mediator in facilitating relationships (i.e., Theme “Role of mediator”). This theme applied primarily to school-family collaboration, as clearly described by a school psychologist: “Facilitate the relationship between school and family, which is often a bit complex, ... bring families closer to a greater participation ...in their children's school life.” (Northern Italy, female).

Interviewees were particularly clear that school psychologists should answer varied needs, including interventions for problematic situations (ranked 5th in the survey). One policymaker stated that the function of school psychologist should be: “First and foremost to

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intercept early signs of distress and maladjustment, as well as those arising from situations of violence, abuse, maltreatment. They should play a ‘sentinel role’." (Northern Italy, female).

Although the psychologist survey respondents did not rank psychoeducational evaluations as an ideal activity (rank 7th of 11), the schools’ need for support in planning interventions and projects for students with disabilities was reported by other vested partners. For example, a teacher said: “With students with disabilities ... a person who can highlight the psychological aspects related to learning is useful.” (Central Italy, male).

In sum, our respondents reported ideal roles and functions for school psychologists that resembled their actual ones (i.e., individual and group counseling, and primary prevention interventions). However, many participants said these functions should ideally be integrated or expanded with other functions, such as facilitating school-family relationships. Other ideal roles emerged mostly from vested partners and policymakers, such as training activities and support to teachers, as well as supporting schools in planning interventions and projects.

Models of Service Delivery

With regard to the characteristics of service delivery, data were developed from the key informant interviews, as the survey did not contain relevant items (see Table 4). Some of the themes for this question expanded on themes identified above. For example, integrated school-local agency networks were seen as the ideal service delivery model (i.e., *Support network*):

When you identify difficulties, you work with the [school's] administrators and the family to refer the case to local (community) specialist services so they can take charge [of the case]. This way, [school psychologists] become a link between the school and the community and create a network of services. (Policymaker, Northern Italy, female).

The need for networking within the school is also stressed by a school psychologist who said:

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I think a school-based listening and counseling service needs to create ... networks around, it can't be a box with the psychologist in it. Because in the collective imagination of teachers there is a big misconception: [that is: 'when] a child is functioning badly, I send him to the helpdesk and you [i.e., the school psychologist] return him to me repaired, normalized.' ... There's a culture to be created around the function of psychology in school: they're not the wizard who's going to fix everything for you, [which leads to ...] being seen and being known, being able to go to the classroom, you also meet the teachers, the kids see you, that is a way to create a connective tissue around the counseling point. (Northern Italy, male)

In response to challenges identified previously, our informants cited offering consistent services (i.e., *Importance of continuity*) and hiring a specific professional who offers them as ideal service delivery attributes that would both improve and facilitate psychologists' work in schools.

[A school psychologist may say:] 'I invest in something, and I don't know how it will be in a year, I go to a new school and have to get used to it, the school asks me for ten things or maybe talks to me as if I absorbed through osmosis information that the [psychologist] before me had ...'. This is a big problem. (Representative of Regional Board, Northern Italy, male)

Expanding on the advantages of continuity, a male school psychologist from Southern Italy said: [Parents] tell me: 'Every time you send us an informed consent [module to sign] it's as if we have to set everything up again, but we know you, we know what you do, we know the work you do, so if you think it's necessary, do it'.

A related theme concerned how psychologists are employed (i.e., *SP hiring system*). Currently, most psychologists work in schools through contracts, as independent contractors.

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Thus, they are not regular staff members. Many interviewees stated that psychologists should be part of the school staff rather than contracted from external organizations.

Some of our key informants also thought that service delivery would be enhanced if one or more psychologists were assigned to each school (i.e., *Psychologists in every school*). Specifically, some informants said there should be at least one psychologist per school or group of schools, while others (notably a male representative of teachers, Central Italy, and a female school psychologist from Southern Italy) believed that the number of students and the numerous demands warranted more school psychologists per school.

Other identified elements of the ideal school psychology service delivery model centered on the guidelines governing professional services and the supports needed for practitioners (i.e., *Characteristics of service delivery model*). Specifically, key informants thought there was a need for standards, guidelines and instruments to instruct psychologists' work in schools, which is important given that most practitioners work in multiple contexts. Some of our informants also thought there was a need for supervision, generally, and mentoring of new psychologists by those with more experience. Finally, some interviewees posited that service delivery would be enhanced by including needs analysis before implementing interventions.

Overall, key informants identified that ideal school psychology service delivery rested on the strong integration of school and local agency resources that could be accessed by school psychologists to address student concerns. They believed service delivery would be enhanced by consistent services across schools and regions, especially when provided by long-lasting practitioners hired as school staff members. Some key informants posited that ideally, service delivery should consist of one or more psychologists assigned to each school.

Figure 2 summarizes the results across research questions and provides an overview that will guide the discussion.

Figure 2 here

4. Discussion

This study sought to better understand the actual and desired roles, functions, and service delivery models of school psychologists working in Italian schools using a concurrent triangulation (simultaneous) mixed-method study with nation-wide sample. The sample included 565 Italian school psychologists who work in schools and 33 key informants. Figure 2 summarizes the main results. This study is the first comprehensive examination of Italian school psychological services, including an amount of school psychologists close to previous nationwide research involving this target (Trombetta et al., 2008) and key informants with different roles in schools. It provides strong and convincing data to inform efforts to consolidate Italian school psychology services and encourage development of the profession and it also provides a model for similar studies.

Currently, most Italian school psychologists work part-time in schools (average = 10 hours/week) and integrate their school psychology role with other activities, most often as psychotherapists outside schools. It is important to note that we are reporting general experiences across Italy. There was considerable variation in our data, which is evident in Table 2. Generally, our results confirm the limited data available from other studies of school psychological services in Italy (e.g., Matteucci & Farrell, 2019; Meroni et al., 2021). Individual student counseling is the predominant role and the school-based psychological helpdesk is the most common form of service delivery model. Group counseling with students is also common. Furthermore, our results reveal that Italian school psychologists also provide consultation to teachers and parents and sometimes work with the school as a whole system to address topics such as bullying. Like their colleagues in other nations (e.g., Faulkner & Jimerson, 2017; Watkins et al., 2001), Italian school psychologists provide a range of

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preventive and remedial services through direct and indirect methods (Conoley et al., 2020). Indeed, even as they are predominantly engaged in counseling with pupils, they appear aware of the need to broaden their roles and functions. This is in line with what Conoley and colleagues (Conoley et al., 2020; Conoley & Gutkin, 1995) suggested; namely, to increase students' behavioral, psychological health and academic success, school psychologists should refocus their work to indirect school-wide preventive interventions targeted to the needs of all students, involving adults in creating health-promoting environments for children and adolescents. Interestingly, in contrast to other nations (e.g., United States, United Kingdom, & France; Farmer et al., 2021), Italian practitioners have a limited psychoeducational assessment role, which places Italian school psychology practices closer to the roles long desired in other nations (e.g., Brown et al., 2006; Dickison et al., 2009; Filter et al., 2013; Levinson, 1990; Watkins et al., 2001).

The limited Italian school psychology assessment role fits national history, service organizations, and needs. In the Italian system, the assessment and diagnosis of children with disabilities and/or special education needs is provided by the local health authority. Furthermore, special education eligibility is not so relevant in Italy because there is no special education. Schools are fully inclusive, and children with disabilities attend mainstream schools and classes at all educational levels, with an individualized and personalized education plan and supported by special teachers (support teachers; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education [EASNIE], 2017).

The prevalence of counseling and consultation over assessment can be considered a positive attribute of Italian school psychology, as in other countries school psychologists traditionally spend a great deal of time carrying out intellectual assessments of individual children, even if they would prefer to work more with teachers and parents in carrying out preventative work (Farrell, 2010). Moreover, Italian school psychologists' focus on

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counseling is not surprising in that most psychologists working in Italian schools are trained in psychotherapy and work as psychotherapists outside schools for most of the work week. Individual counseling is also ranked highest as the ideal activity. Although we did not survey job satisfaction, the alignment of the ideal and actual roles is likely a positive professional attribute. Implementing primary intervention programs and consultation with teachers (or school staff) were ranked among the top three most ideal activities. As is often the case (Jimerson et al., 2004, 2006, 2009), the least preferred activities included administration and research-related activities such as data collection. If we compare this finding with the time spent doing each activity (see Table 2), then we can deduce that Italian school psychologists generally carry out their preferred activities. On this point, Italian school psychologists do not differ from most school psychologists in the world; however, there appear to be some discrepancies among countries, which may reflect differences in the overall definition of the professional role and functions of school psychologists (Jimerson et al., 2004, 2006, 2009).

Our research supported previous regional findings showing that school-based psychological helpdesks are the most common form of service delivery, most often integrated with a wide range of other individual and organizational activities, (Matteucci & Farrell, 2019; Trombetta et al., 2008). However, it is important to reiterate that the lack of homogeneity between regions and the quality and nature of services offered was quite pronounced. This and our participants' reports suggest that services are often fragmented, discontinuous, and differentiated.

These observations were supported by key informant interviewees who generally complained about the absence of a uniform service delivery model and expressed the need for such a model. They also reported on the need for shared professional standards, guidelines and supervision to guide and support psychologists' work in schools. Thus, there is a clear need to develop a service delivery model that responds to the needs of psychologists and

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vested partners. Our results can be a starting point for discussion and development of a national model that also considers the existing international literature which, since the 1990s, discusses and questions which organizing framework is best suited for the delivery of a school psychological service (e.g., Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Strein et al., 2003). Specifically, our results may be framed within a biopsychosocial ecological model of student support, in which direct services to students have to be provided together with indirect support services, by collaborating with teachers, families, and other key partners (Conoley et al., 2020; Kranzler et al., 2020). In this respect, throughout the US – where school psychology is well-established – an ecological model of student support, the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) model (Loftus-Rattan et al., 2021) is increasingly prevalent in schools (Jimerson et al., 2016), though not without implementation problems (see Jimerson et al., 2016).

Our participants also reported the need for professional supervision, which is consistent with international research (Newman et al., 2019). The need for a common service delivery model is strictly connected with the need for supervision and a framework to guide supervisory practice. Furthermore, such supervision cannot be generic; rather, it must be organized, implemented, and monitored specifically for school psychology (Guiney & Newman, 2021).

As concerns the service delivery model, the most comprehensive current model is the NASP Practice model (2020), which defines the skills, knowledge, and training of psychologists working in school-education settings. The NASP model could be a useful reference to create national standards grounded in the positive Italian practices reported by our participants, by adapting them to fit the cultural and social context in Italy. First of all, our research suggests that to move towards the NASP model, school psychology in Italy should expand beyond the prevalent clinical approach to be more comprehensive and involve interventions and instructions to develop academic, socio-emotional, and pedagogical skills.

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Such services were clearly identified as “ideal” by our non-school psychologist vested partners.

With some limitations, our participants reported that the helpdesks provided a valuable psychological presence in their schools and were an important way to reach and detect the needs of children and adolescents. In its ideal version, the helpdesk school psychologist should be seen as a consistent and familiar presence in the school, who can be freely contacted without the need for referral to an often distant and unfamiliar outside agency. The psychological helpdesk may therefore support and integrate mental health services as part of an “expanded role service model” (Brown et al., 2006), in which a psychologist is assigned to a single school and provides prevention and intervention services. Similarly, the role and functions of Italian school psychologists could be expanded by adopting a public health perspective (Conoley et al., 2020; Strein et al., 2003) in which the focus is the school system, rather than specific individuals.

Indeed, some of our participants identified the need for each school to have its own psychologist who served exactly this expanded role. However, such a realignment would require significantly more resources. Participants indicated an average ratio of psychologists to students of 1:586, but the range was enormous (25-1600). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) standards (2020) recommended level is 1:500 and the national average for the US is 1:1119 (for the 2022-2023 school year) (NASP, 2024). However, it is important to note that the NASP calculations are based on the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) presence of a school psychologist in the school. In other words, the NASP ratio rests on each school psychologist being present for a 5-day work week, or approximately 40 hours. The average psychologist in our sample worked only 10 hours per week in the schools, or approximately .25 FTE. Converting our results to be comparable to the NASP figure results in an average ratio of 1:2344 (Psychologist to student), which is much larger than the NASP

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recommended ratio. Such a ratio, as well as the reduced amount of time working in schools, can negatively impact psychologists' work, making it extremely difficult for them to properly carry out their preferred activities. As pointed out by NASP (n.d.), a shortage in school psychologists can hinder the provision of sufficient quality counseling for students along with prevention services and consultations with families and teachers, which were considered by our sample to be the activities on which a school psychologist should ideally focus most of their time.

4.1 Limitations and Further Research

A general limitation of this study is related to the complex and variable situation of school psychology in Italy. It was challenging to examine every nuance of how school psychology is practiced and conceptualized, from variations in school psychologists' activities to the various ideas interviewees reported while defining school psychology. This challenge mirrors the difficulty in presenting the identity and the practice of school psychologists at the national level. Despite this difficulty and the lack of a unique and distinctive profile of school psychologist's role and functions, it was nevertheless possible to pinpoint several actual and ideal features of school psychology service delivery that represented what a school psychologist should be and do. This representation needs to be further examined and made clearer through further research, aiming also to develop a model that is shared at the national level to support consistent implementation of school psychological services.

Another general limitation is that the study was conducted one year after the COVID-19 outbreak started when the need for out-of-school and in-school psychology was felt strongly by a large part of the population. This factor may have had an impact on our findings, which should only be viewed as a snapshot of the time when school psychology became more important than it had been previously (Consiglio Nazionale dell'Ordine degli

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Psicologi, 2021). For this reason, it would be important to monitor the situation of school psychology in a scenario in which schools are no longer provided with resources to face the pandemic's effects (as in 2020) and extraordinary measures (e.g., distance learning) are revoked.

These two first limitations underscore another one related to the quantitative part of the study, which concerns the generalizability of our results. The varied situations of school psychology in Italy, characterized by different profiles of school psychologists and service delivery models may create problems in extending these results to different study populations. On the one hand, at the national level, it would be difficult to generalize the results to the overall population of Italian school psychologists. On the other hand, at the international level, it might be difficult to carry out cross-cultural comparisons. In addition, the COVID-19 situation made it even more difficult to generalize quantitative results, as explained in the previous point.

Besides this limitation, the quantitative part of the study presented three minor limitations. First, the quantitative strand focused more on the actual *features of the service* delivery characteristics and school psychologists rather than the desired aspects. Indeed, only one quantitative question explored the desired activities school psychologists would like to carry out in school. Second, since an official register of school psychologists is not available in Italy, it was not possible to obtain the real number of those who work in schools. We estimated this number based on previous work and worked to be inclusive of different regions and organizations, but we do not know the actual number of psychologists who work in Italian schools. Future research should aim to provide a more definitive count, which may allow for a more representative sample. Finally, the questionnaire was administered only to school psychologists. Still, there is a need for the comprehensive study of school psychology consumers in Italy, including parents and students. In this way it would also be possible to

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compare results from different populations (e.g., National Psychologists Board representatives; National Associations of School Principals, teachers, parents and students, school psychologists and policy makers).

4.2 Practical Implications

Our findings provide a valuable starting point for stimulating and supporting nationwide efforts to define the profession and create a detailed and specific description of the role, functions and required training of school psychologists. This is a critical time for psychological services in the Italian school system as the coronavirus pandemic has triggered an increase in mental-health support need, in students (de Miranda et al., 2020) and teachers (Soncini et al., 2021; 2023a; 2023b). In such a fertile context, this study may help strengthen extant initiatives (such as the guidelines promoted by the Italian National Board of Psychologists following the COVID-19 pandemic) and promote new actions at the national and regional levels to implement and enhance school psychology practice in Italian schools, as well as to inform professional development activities. In addition, our findings could inform governmental and organizational attention, drive policy design, direct university plans and promote the allocation of resources to provide schools with more structured and permanent school psychology services. A first fundamental outcome could be the approval of a national regulation of the presence of school psychologists in the Italian school system that would cause a tremendous impact on the development of the profession, as well as on the wellbeing of school communities.

5. Conclusions

Data from this study, steeped in the life experiences of school psychologists and vested partners' viewpoints about school psychologists and school psychology service delivery, provide a landscape of the current services delivered and perspectives for improvements of the profession and service provision. The study can be considered a step forward in the

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recognition of school psychologists' contribution in school settings, especially as "schools face increasing demands, both from external pressures arising from changing societal expectations, changes in curriculum and economic demands, as well as from internal pressures that arise from increased behavior, learning and mental health problems presented by students" (Russell, 2019, p. 104).

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Table 1

Demographic and training characteristics of the sample (qualitative and quantitative)

Survey (school psychologists)		Interviews (key informants)	
Age (years) <i>M (SD)</i>	42.24 (9.06)	Age (years) <i>M (SD)</i>	53.97 (12.30)
Sex % (<i>N</i>)		Sex % (<i>N</i>)	
Male	14.1 (79)	Male	36.4 (12)
Female	85.9 (483)	Female	63.6 (21)
Geographical area % (<i>N</i>)		Geographical area % (<i>N</i>)	
North	34.2 (188)	North	39.4 (13)
Center	39.5 (217)	Center	33.3 (11)
South	26.4 (145)	South	27.3 (9)
		(of which)	27.3 (9)
		National representatives	
Degree % (<i>N</i>)		Role/function % (<i>N</i>)	
Master's Degree*	94.0 (528)	School psychologist	24.2 (8)
Bachelor's Degree	0 (0)	Representative of	
Doctorate	1.1 (6)	Regional Board	36.4 (12)
Other Degree**	1.5 (8)	Stakeholder	15.2 (5)
		Policymaker	24.2 (8)
Post-grad (post-master specialization) % (<i>N</i>)		Post-grad (post-master specialization) ³ % (<i>N</i>)	
Yes	75.8 (426)	Yes	95.0 (19)
No	24.2 (136)	No	5.0 (1)

³ Reported by school psychologists and representatives of regional boards.

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Psychotherapy license ⁴ % (N)		Psychotherapy license ² % (N)	
Yes	84.3 (359)	Yes	94.7 (18)
No	15.7 (67)	No	5.3 (1)
Work experience as psychologist <i>M (SD)</i>	13.12 (7.56)	Work experience as psychologist <i>M (SD)</i>	20.10 (8.32)

Notes.

*Half of the sample (50.0%, $n = 281$) have a “Laurea Magistrale” (Master’s Degree, 2 years after 3 years for a Bachelor’s), while 44.0% ($n = 247$) have a “Laurea quinquennale” (Bachelor’s and Master’s combined, five years in total).

**E.g., in philosophy or literature.

⁴ Percentages calculated on the respondents who reported a post-master’s specialization.

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Table 2

List of activities carried out by psychologists in school (Mean and median percentage of time spent on each activity; percentage of participants who indicated they are involved in each activity) and their ideal rank order according to school psychologists

<i>Activity</i>	<i>% Time M (SD)</i>	<i>Median</i>	<i>% Respondents</i>	<i>Ideal rank</i>
Individual counseling to students*	37.2 (20.7)	30	74.2	1
Primary prevention programs	21.0 (21.7)	10	43.7	2
Consultation with teachers/staff	17.7 (13.6)	15	78.7	3
Group counseling to students*	18.7 (15.6)	14	43.0	4
Interventions for problematic situations	17.8 (15.7)	10	65.2	5
Consultation with parents/family	18.3 (14.6)	11.5	76.8	6
Psychoeducational evaluations	19.3 (19.0)	10	27.7	7
In-service staff training	18.3 (21.4)	10	32.0	8

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Projects/interventions aimed to the school as a whole**	16.7 (19.7)	10	33.9	9
Data collection and research**	9.9 (9.7)	5	16.9	10
Administrative responsibilities	9.8 (10.0)	5	35.4	11

Notes. Item adapted from item 31 of the Italian version of the ISPS (International School Psychology Survey): “In your activities as a psychologist in school, what % of your time do you dedicate to each of these activities? The total must amount to 100.”

#Percentage of school psychologists engaged in each listed activity.

* “Counseling to students” (from the ISPS) was divided into “Individual counseling” and “Group counseling”.

**Activities absent from the original item (ISPS), added to better represent the Italian context.

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Table 3

Summary of qualitative results about role and functions of school psychologists

Qualitative results		
ROLE AND FUNCTIONS	Themes	Codes
ACTUAL	Different targets	Parents (3)
		Teachers (9)
		School community (4)
IDEAL	Support and counselling	Support to teachers (25)
		Consultation/counselling to teachers (8)
		Consultation to the school principal (9)
		Support to students (8)
		Consultation and support to the school system (25)
	Offer training	Support for the development of parenting skills (3)
		No psychotherapy (4)
		Support to the class (5)
		Training for teachers (16)
		Training for parents (3)
Role of mediator		Training (no specific target) (1)
		Facilitates relationship: within the school (26) with territorial services (2)

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Carry out activities aimed at prevention of	Prevention (12)
adverse situations and promotion of	Promoting wellbeing (13)
wellbeing	Promoting a cooperative setting (7)
	Relational needs (6)
	Learning difficulties/disorders (7)
	Students' need for career counselling (5)
Answer different needs	Schools' need for support in planning interventions and projects (4)
	Students' motivation (2)
	Needs for psychological interventions/acclaimed issues (8)
	Parenting and Disadvantaged students (2)

Notes. Numbers in parentheses are frequency of quotes.

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Table 4

Summary of qualitative results about service delivery model

Qualitative results		
SERVICE DELIVERY MODEL	Themes	Codes
		Fragmentation of services (4)
	Lack of uniformity (territorial and of services)	Absence of continuity (9)
		Differences in the quality of services (3)
		Differences among regions/areas (27)
		Presence of a shared evidence-based model (7)
	Presence/absence of a model	Absence of a model (12)
ACTUAL	Features of school psychologists' service	Typical interventions (11)
		Prevention (5)
		Clinical approach (7)
		Helpdesk (9)
		Restorative interventions (5)
		Improving relationships (3)
		Classroom interventions (4)
		Network with territorial services (8)
		Need for collateral actions (7)
		Need for network (6)
Features of the school-based psychological helpdesk	Not used by teachers (3)	
	Helpdesk as first aid (5)	
	Deontological risks (2)	

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		SP as a known figure (2)
IDEAL	Support network	Network with local services (9) Network with other schools (1)
	Psychologists in every school	One psychologist per school/group of schools (9) More psychologists per school (2)
	SP hiring system	Part of the school staff (20) Hired when the need arises (2) Hired by local healthcare services (3)
	Importance of continuity	Continuity of services and professionals (18)
	Characteristics of service delivery model	Need for guidelines (15) Needs analysis before implementing interventions (10) Need for supervision (5)

Notes. Numbers in parentheses are frequency of quotes.

Figure 1

Flowchart of the mixed-method procedure including the qualitative and quantitative phases' details

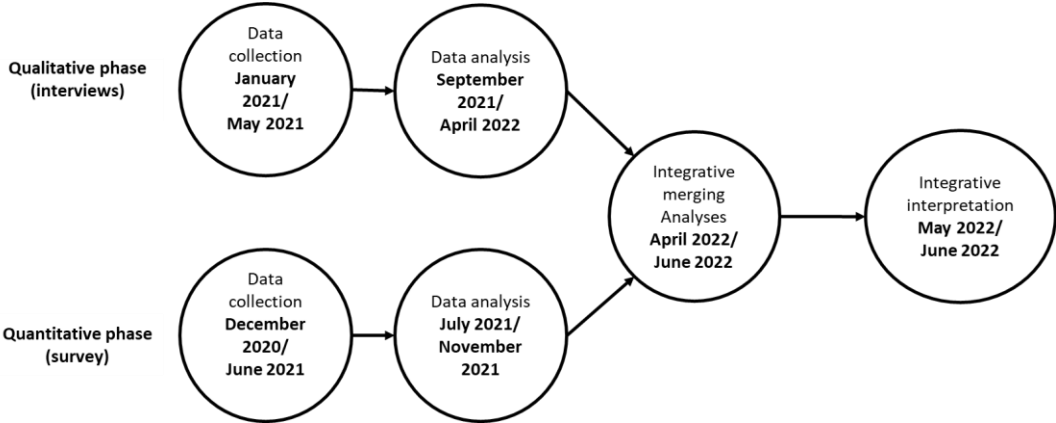


Figure 2

Main results about actual and desired role and functions and service delivery characteristics

