

Letter from . . .

Rome

A billion pounds on psychotherapy

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Perhaps the first national survey of psychotherapy anywhere has recently been published in Rome by the Institute for Political, Economic, and Social Studies (ISPES). Given that the provision of psychotherapy in national health service facilities is scanty, the study largely concentrates on the 524 private 'centres' for psychotherapy, identified country-wide in a previous inquiry by the Ministry of Scientific Research. In fact, 40% of these centres do have links of some kind with public services, and a few actually are academic medical clinics, included because they are so few as to be virtually apart and private. In addition, the survey calculates the work-load of some 1,200 'classical' analysts listed in the three major Italian psychoanalytic societies. It also takes note of the existence of 61 scientific and other associations in the country that are concerned with psychotherapy, psychiatry, and psychology.

A "centre" is defined as a private foundation where a course of psychotherapy can be obtained, and where also a training in psychotherapy may be available. About one centre in six offers such training, and one in 15 has been doing so since the 1970s or before; to be eligible for training, 70% of the centres require a degree in medicine or psychology, 5% require both, and 17% require other degrees. As their main theoretical tradition, 43% of the centres refer to psychoanalysis, 20% to humanist psychology, 17% to systems theory, and 8% to cognitive-behavioural schools. Half the centres regularly produce a publication of some kind.

To describe what the centres provide, the report distinguishes five broad categories of psychotherapies. The largest number of centres, 193 (37% of the total) come into the activity-based category – 103 specialising in one of a dozen subvarieties of individual therapy, and 90 specialising in ten subvarieties of family and group therapy. Next in number are 149 (29%) offering individual therapies of various analytic schools; 52 (10%) offering psychosomatic and alternative medicine; 51 (10%) offering behavioural and cognitive therapies; and 18 (3%) offering psychodiagnostic projective testing. There were 61 centres (12%) that could not be categorised.

Il lettino sotto inchiesta



"The couch investigated" (Tullio Pericoli, Milan).

As would be expected, 85% of the centres are in the north and centre of Italy, 125 in Rome and 102 in Milan, but a third are located in small cities with 400,000 people or less. The report considers that, in general, courses undergone in psychotherapy last for a year or more, with sessions averaging twice a week and costing between £20 and £50.

The report arrives at some thought-provoking figures. It estimates that there are nearly 32,000 psychotherapists with a diploma of some sort in Italy, or 55 per 100,000 people (doctors in the national health service are three times as many, teachers in state schools 30 times). While it leaves out of account psychiatrists and psychologists who may conduct psychotherapy in single-handed practice, it still reveals that Italians out of their own pockets spend a billion pounds per annum on psychotherapy – or not so very much less than they spend on sport and entertainments.