



INDUSTRY OVERVIEW: PSYCHOLOGY

What is Psychology?

Psychology is the study of the human behavior and mental processes. Those studying psychology learn about theories and facts about individuals and groups, using experimental, observational, and case study methods. The principles of psychology are applied to many areas outside of the clinical setting, including business (human resources, market research, and sales, for example), nonprofit and social service organizations, and education. Many careers in psychology require a graduate level degree, though there are also several possibilities for those with just a bachelor's, including assisting professionals in community mental health centers, vocational rehabilitation offices, correctional programs, and research settings. Those with a BA also frequently work in related fields, such as market research, sales, service, or business management. In order to have a private practice and use the title "psychologist", however, graduate work is required.

Career Tracks

Clinical psychologists: help mentally and emotionally distressed clients adjust to life, and may assist medical patients in dealing with illnesses or injuries. Most work in counseling centers, individual or group private practices, hospitals, or clinics. They may provide individual, family, or group psychotherapy, conduct interviews and testing, and may design and implement behavior modification programs. Some clinical psychologists collaborate with physicians to develop treatment and intervention programs. Others may work in university settings training students, while others may choose to administer community mental health programs. Clinical psychologists generally are not permitted to prescribe medication to treat patients—therefore they must consult with psychiatrists and other medical doctors if medication is to be considered. Training to be a clinical psychologist requires several years of graduate work to earn a Ph.D. These programs emphasize research, and involve coursework in statistics and experimental design, in addition to training students in how to conduct psychotherapy.

Counseling psychologists: use various techniques, including interviewing and testing, to advise people on how to deal with problems of everyday living, including career, work, developmental, or transitional difficulties faced in different stages of life. They work in settings such as university counseling centers, hospitals, and individual or group private practices. Many work in programs for special populations, such as prison settings, substance abuse centers, and residential homes for the mental handicapped. Graduate work for counseling psychology often has a slightly reduced focus on research than clinical programs, with a higher emphasis on applying the principles of psychology to actually conducting therapy on patients. However, the differences between clinical and counseling psychology programs are beginning to dissipate.

School psychologists: work with students in early childhood and elementary and secondary schools. They collaborate with teachers, parents, and school administrators to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments for all students. School psychologists address students' learning and behavioral problems, suggest improvements to classroom management strategies or parenting techniques, and evaluate students with disabilities. The distinction between school psychologists and guidance counselors (or school counselors) is generally around the focus of testing—graduate programs in school psychology apply a heavier focus on psychological testing methodologies. School psychology programs are often longer (3 years plus 1 year of practicum) than guidance (generally 2 years).

Industrial-Organizational (IO) psychologists: apply psychological principles and research methods to the workplace to help increase productivity and improve organizational structures. They often conduct research on management, marketing, and human resources problems. They may screen, train, and counsel applicants for jobs, as well as perform organizational development and analysis. Industrial psychologists frequently act as consultants, brought in by management to solve a particular problem. They might conduct workshops on topics such as team building, stress, and managerial skills, and may be involved in mediation or dispute resolution between coworkers. A master's degree in IO Psych is the most common route to enter this career.

Developmental psychologists: study the biological, mental, and social development that takes place throughout life. Some specialize in behavior during infancy, childhood, and adolescence, or changes that occur during maturity or old age. Developmental psychologists also may study developmental disabilities and their effects. Increasingly, research is developing ways to help elderly people remain independent as long as possible.

Social psychologists: examine people's interactions with others and with the social environment. They work in organizational consultation, marketing research, systems design, or other applied psychology fields. Prominent areas of study include group behavior, leadership, attitudes, and perception.

Experimental or research psychologists: work in university and private research centers and in business, nonprofit, and governmental organizations. They study the behavior of both human beings and animals, such as rats, monkeys, and pigeons. Prominent areas of study in experimental research include motivation, thought, attention, learning and memory, sensory and perceptual processes, effects of substance abuse, and genetic and neurological factors affecting behavior. This type of work requires training in scientific methods including research design, statistics, and increasingly, technology.

Career counselors: help individuals with career decisions. They may work in a school or college setting, in private practice, or for nonprofit organizations. Some corporations also employ career counselors to do outplacement counseling, where they assist employees who have been terminated in their new job search efforts. Career counselors explore and evaluate the client's education, training, work history, interests, skills, values, and personality traits. They also work with individuals to develop their job search skills and assist clients in locating and applying for jobs. In addition, career counselors provide support to people experiencing job loss, job stress, or other career transition issues.

Rehabilitation counselors: help people deal with the personal, social, and vocational effects of disabilities. They counsel people with disabilities resulting from birth defects, illness or disease, accidents, or other causes. They evaluate the strengths and limitations of individuals, provide personal and vocational counseling, and arrange for medical care, vocational training, and job placement. Rehabilitation counselors interview both individuals with disabilities and their families, evaluate school and medical reports, and confer with physicians, psychologists, occupational therapists, and employers to determine the capabilities and skills of the individual.

Mental health counselors: work with individuals, families, and groups to address and treat mental and emotional disorders and to promote mental health. They are trained in a variety of therapeutic techniques used to address issues, including depression, addiction and substance abuse, suicidal impulses, stress, problems with self-esteem, and grief. They may also help with job and career concerns, educational decisions, issues related to mental and emotional health, and family, parenting, marital, or other relationship problems. Mental health counselors can choose to specialize in particular areas such as substance abuse.

Marriage and family therapists: apply family systems theory, principals and techniques to individuals, families, and couples to resolve emotional conflicts. In doing so, they modify people's perceptions and behaviors, enhance communication and understanding among family members, and help to prevent family and individual crises.

Additional Related Occupations

Genetic counselor
Human resources manager
Labor relations specialist
Policy analyst

Psychiatry
Social worker (see CDC industry overview handout on social work)
Training specialist
Youth counselor

Probation officer

Requirements / Skills

In general, many positions in the field of psychology require graduate degrees. A master's degree can often be sufficient to work in various counseling and community settings, as well as corporations and universities. A Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) is generally required to begin or join a private practice as a psychologist. A Ph.D. may also be required to become a university professor, or to manage a counseling center or research program. The Ph.D. generally takes 5-7 years to complete and includes a dissertation, which is an extensive paper describing an original research project. There are also Psy.D. (Doctor of Psychology) programs which tend to focus less on research and may allow for an applied internship in place of the dissertation. Most graduate programs in counseling or psychology incorporate a practicum component after coursework is completed, with hands-on training under close supervision. Psychologists in private practice or those who offer any type of patient care—including clinical, counseling, and school psychologists—must meet certification or licensing requirements. Licensing laws vary by State and by type of position, but all generally incorporate an internship, 1-2 years of experience, and passing of a licensure exam.

Individuals considering a career in any of the psychological tracks must have strong abilities in critical analysis, communication, and interpretation of data, and must also have a sense of compassion, empathy, and patience. It is also highly important to be emotionally stable and deal well with crises.

Salary

Salaries vary widely depending on setting, specialty and education level. These salaries are based on the New York, NY area.

- Clinical, counseling, and school psychologists: \$60,000 - \$74,000
- Educational, vocational, and school counselors: \$49,450 - \$70,000
- Industrial-organizational psychologists: \$108,849 - \$177,330
- Mental health counselors: \$36,000 - \$55,000
- Marriage and family therapists: \$45,720 - \$76,000
- Rehabilitation counselors: \$44,988 - \$52,288

Some psychologists in private practice can make much higher salaries than the medians posted above, particularly those working in high-income areas where they can charge clients high fees for their services. Entry-level positions without graduate degrees will generally be lower than those figures, but they will also vary greatly. For example, an individual with an undergraduate degree in psychology could obtain a first job in market research for a corporation and make in the high 40s or 50s.

*Source: Occupational Outlook Handbook, www.bls.gov/oco

Associations

- New York Psychological Association: www.apa.org
- American Counseling Association: www.counseling.org
- National Career Development Association: www.ncda.org
- National Association of School Psychologists: www.nasponline.org

Websites

www.apa.org/careers/index.aspx

www.clinicaltrials.gov

www.idealists.org

www.topresearchjobs.com

www.socialservice.com