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What kind of work do psychologists do

A psychologist studies how we think, feel and behave from a scientific viewpoint and applies this knowledge to help people understand, explain and change their behaviour. What Do Psychologists Do? Psychologists engage in research, practice and teaching across a wide range of topics having to do with how people think, feel and behave. In general, the majority of psychologists work in five broad categories of employment: research, teaching, service provision, administration, and consulting. Many combine two or more of these categories. For example, a university professor usually teaches and conducts research; they may also be an administrator and a clinical psychologist providing help to clients. A master's level counselling psychologist may be a service provider and teach at a local college. Their work can involve individuals, groups, families and as well as larger organizations in government and industry. Some psychologists focus their research on animals rather than people. Here are some of the kinds of topics towards which psychologists focus their research and practice: mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, phobias, etc.; neurological, genetic, psychological and social determinants of behaviour; brain injury, degenerative brain diseases; the perception and management of pain; psychological factors and problems associated with physical conditions and disease (e.g. diabetes, heart disease, stroke); psychological factors and management of terminal illnesses such as cancer; cognitive functions such as learning, memory, problem solving, intellectual ability and performance; developmental and behavioural abilities and problems across the lifespan; criminal behaviour, crime prevention, services for victims and perpetrators of criminal activity; addictions and substance use and abuse (e.g. smoking, alcohol, drugs); stress, anger and other aspects of lifestyle management; court consultations addressing the impact and role of psychological and cognitive factors in accidents and injury, parental capacity, and competence to manage one's personal affairs; the application of psychological factors and issues to work such as motivation, leadership, productivity, marketing, healthy workplaces, ergonomics; marital and family relationships and problems; psychological factors necessary to maintaining wellness and preventing disease; social and cultural behaviour and attitudes, the relationship between the individual and the many groups of which he or she is part (e.g. work, family, society); and the role and impact of psychological factors on performance at work, recreation and sport. Where Do Psychologists Work? Some psychologists work primarily as researchers and faculty at universities and at governmental and non-governmental organizations. Others work primarily as practitioners in hospitals, schools, clinics, correctional facilities, employee assistance programs and private offices. Many psychologists are active in both research and practice. Planning a Career in Psychology Are you planning a career in psychology? If yes, be sure to download Planning a Career in Psychology: A Canadian Perspective for University Bound and Beginning University Students. We interviewed Multi-Scholarship Award winners and put everything we learned into this book. Plus More than 1,400 carefully selected opportunities for Africans Psychology majors can be successful in a variety of careers outside the field of psychology. These majors can work in human resources, marketing, education, business, and healthcare. Working as a psychologist, counselor, or therapist will require an advanced degree. Psychology is one of the most popular undergraduate majors, with more than 100,000 students receiving degrees in the field every year. Despite its popularity, there are many misconceptions about the types of jobs you can get with a major in psychology, and some may wonder whether it's worth it to get a psychology degree at all. Some students may not realize that becoming a licensed psychologist in most states requires a doctoral degree in psychology. Others may assume that a bachelor's alone will not prepare them for careers relevant to their major, or that there are no opportunities outside becoming a psychologist. "There are absolutely career paths for students with a bachelor's degree in psychology outside of becoming a psychologist." —Whitney Baker, Academic Advisor at Iowa State University's Department of Psychology The truth is that a bachelor's degree in psychology could lead to immediate employment in fields like marketing, teaching, or human resources, or it could be coupled with a graduate degree and lead to careers in counseling, social work, or occupational therapy. Regardless of where students are in their educational journeys, it is important for them to know their options so that they can make informed choices about their careers. Is a Psychology Degree Worth It? According to the American Psychological Association (APA), the number of people earning a bachelor's degree in psychology has declined slightly since 2013. However, the overall number of psychology degrees awarded has increased from about 87,000 in 2004 to 124,497 in 2017. In 2015, 3.4 million people in the United States held a bachelor's degree in psychology, with 57% reporting it as their highest degree. Even though psychology is a popular major, some students may wonder whether a bachelor's in psychology alone can lead to a rewarding career that is actually relevant to their degree. In 2015, the APA reported that 64% of American workers who held a bachelor's degree in psychology as their highest degree worked in jobs related to that degree. That number jumped to 87% for those with a master's degree and 96% for those with a doctorate in psychology. Although a 2017 APA survey suggests that 85% of professionals with a bachelor's degree in psychology are satisfied with their jobs, this figure lags slightly behind job satisfaction in other fields. However, reported job satisfaction was higher among those with doctoral degrees in psychology compared to other fields. Professionals with a master's degree reported satisfaction with certain aspects of their jobs, like their level of responsibility, but were less satisfied with their salaries and benefits. Whether a psychology degree is worth it or not may depend on your career needs and expectations. For example, the typical salaries and benefits available for bachelor's and master's degree-holders may be unappealing if you need to borrow money to finish school. At the same time, psychology degree-holders reported higher levels of satisfaction when it came to their career independence and contribution to society. What Jobs Can You Get With a Psychology Degree? Like many undergraduates, psychology majors often begin their studies without understanding how that degree can lead to a career. For example, there's a popular misconception that a bachelor's degree in psychology alone is useless, which paints an inaccurate picture of a psychology undergraduate's job prospects. Whitney Baker, an academic advisor at Iowa State University's Department of Psychology, notes that this misconception often leads psychology majors to believe they need to attend graduate school to be successful. However, while careers in clinical and mental health counseling, social work, and school counseling often require master's degrees — and becoming a licensed psychologist requires a Ph.D. or Psy.D. — options exist for students with only bachelor's degrees, too. [T]here's a popular misconception that a bachelor's degree in psychology alone is useless, which paints an inaccurate picture of a psychology undergraduate's job prospects. "There are absolutely career paths for students with a bachelor's degree in psychology outside of becoming a psychologist," says Baker. "We often see graduates pursuing careers in business, healthcare, education, and nonprofit social work. Specifically, business is a growing field for our psych majors, because they are qualified to work in recruiting, new employee onboarding, human resources, sales and analyst roles." Baker also noted that she sees "... a large number of students interested in the criminal justice industry, working for prison systems, law enforcement, and/or local, state, or federal agencies." The APA offers an extensive list of jobs for psychology bachelor's degree-holders, which includes psychiatric technicians, correctional officers, and preschool teachers. Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors are also among the fastest growing jobs in the field. What to Expect from the Psychology Major If the career prospects sound promising to you, it's important to understand some basics about earning a degree in psychology. First off, you should know that psychology majors learn about human behavior by applying scientific research methods. They may also design studies involving theory, clinical work, and qualitative and quantitative research. It's also important to know the differences between a bachelor of science in psychology and a bachelor of arts in psychology. A BS in psychology focuses on quantitative skills, while a BA is more theory-based and requires a broader selection of classes in the humanities and social sciences. "The skills gained from [research and lab work] — analytical thinking, problem-solving, following deadlines, detail-orientation, and communication — are relevant to a variety of fields." —Whitney Baker, Academic Advisor at Iowa State University's Department of Psychology Some BA programs, like Iowa State's BA in psychology, require students to add a second major or minor in another area. This type of requirement expands a student's area of study and provides more opportunities to pursue careers in fields outside of psychology. Regardless of whether you choose a BA or BS in psychology, the curricula for these programs focus heavily on research. Baker notes that experience gained through conducting research can be applied to many careers: "Students do not need to be interested in graduate work to elect to work in a research lab because the skills gained from these experiences — analytical thinking, problem-solving, following deadlines, detail-orientation, and communication — are relevant to a variety of fields." How Can Graduate School Improve Job Prospects? While most psychology students do not go on to pursue a graduate degree, the APA has found that earning a graduate degree in psychology is likely to increase rates of job satisfaction and your likelihood of finding employment in the field. The APA also reports that about 25% of psychology baccalaureates go to graduate school in psychology, with another 18% continuing their education in another field. Some psychology majors may not even know that many occupations related to psychology require a graduate degree. Dr. Randi Brown, a school psychologist, remembers realizing that many of the career paths she was interested in pursuing a career in psychology, including wages and employment numbers by state, academic paths to a career in psychology, and professional resources for psychology majors. This ranking contains answers to frequently asked questions about obtaining a bachelor's in psychology online, a list of online programs, and financial aid opportunities. Last Updated: April 22, 2020 In considering whether you want to pursue a psychology career, you likely have some questions. You might be asking yourself, "Where do psychologists work?" Perhaps you instinctively conjure images of a stereotypical therapist's office adorned with soft lighting and comfortable furniture. But the truth is, psychologists work in a number of different environments — some of which you may not expect. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines psychology as the study of two critical relationships: one between brain function and behavior, and the other between behavior and the environment. Since this field covers such expansive ground, it's unsurprising that the various specialties and corresponding environments in which psychologists practice are vast. Becoming a psychologist requires years of dedicated study, with most psychologist positions seeking candidates with a doctoral degree in psychology. But even as you contemplate the prospect of a psychology career while deciding what to major in as an undergraduate student, it can be helpful to look ahead and see what may await you in the field. Join us as we examine a handful of common psychology subfields to gain a clearer perspective of where psychologists work. Where do psychologists work, typically? According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly a quarter of psychologists work in a private practice environment. These professionals do their jobs in their own offices and are often able to set their own hours. And many psychologists who run their own businesses will accommodate client schedules by working evening and weekend hours as needed. While some psychologists work alone, others collaborate with a larger health care team. In the latter scenario, psychologists will work in collaboration with physicians, nurses, social workers and others to treat patients. When employed in hospitals, clinics or other health care facilities, psychologists will typically work shift schedules that may also include night and weekend work. The most predictable schedules often go to psychologists employed in academic, business or government settings. These professionals will often work shifts that align with typical business hours. 7 subfields you might work in as a psychologist Some psychologists find their niche and stick to it for the duration of their careers. Others may spend years working in one subfield of psychology before shifting to something else that reignites their passion for the profession. But it's also true that many psychologists will work in more than one setting in a given phase of their psychology careers. Keep this in mind as you review these seven common psychology specialties and consider the corresponding environments. 1. Industrial and organizational psychology Profitability is the main goal for just about any business. But industrial and organizational (I/O) psychologists know profitability is dependent on a variety of factors, including teams that communicate well and are comprised of employees who are motivated and committed to company goals. I/O psychologists study individual, group and organizational dynamics in the workplace. The study of human behavior in the workplace enables these professionals to identify solutions to problems that may typically hinder the well-being and performance of an organization and its employees. Some I/O psychologists do work in academia, but most work in corporate offices focusing on topics like employee productivity, training and human resources. 2. Experimental psychology Generally speaking, experimental psychologists are interested in exploring theoretical questions by creating a hypothesis and then proving or disproving it through experimentation. Within these efforts, they study the behavior of humans and animals, including everything from sensation, perception and attention to memory, cognition and emotion. In essence, all psychologists can be considered experimental psychologists. The distinguishing factor of experimental psychology, however, is its sole focus on research. In fact, some experimental psychologists will spend the duration of their careers attempting to answer a single, complex research question. Others will devote their careers to working across a range of psychology subfields, including school psychology, I/O psychology, rehabilitation psychology and more. Experimental psychologists most commonly work in universities, research centers and government agencies. Some may also work for private businesses. 3. Engineering psychology Also referred to as "human factors" psychologists, engineering psychologists focus their work on studying how people interact with machines and technology. Their expertise helps inform the design of many products, systems and devices people use every day, focusing on both performance and safety. But the work included in engineering psychology reaches further than improving user experience for daily devices. These professionals also apply the science of psychology when analyzing "life-critical products," such as airline computer systems and medical equipment. Many engineering psychologists will be employed by businesses and government agencies. In these environments, they have the opportunity to work with a range of product designs. They can have a hand in everything from can openers to the equipment that allows pilots to land planes safely. 4. Health psychology While we have physicians to help us maintain our physical wellness, it's not always easy to consciously make the healthy choices recommended by health care providers. Health psychologists can help. They focus on the complexities that exist in each person's path to wellness. Simply put, these professionals explore how biological, social and psychological factors may influence the choices people make about their health. When working with clients, health psychologists consider factors in a person's life that contribute to certain patterns of behavior and help them reframe those patterns to make better choices to positively impact their health. They may also help patients come to terms with a difficult diagnosis or stick to a treatment regimen. Health psychologists will often work with patients in a hospital or clinical setting. But it's also true that some professionals in this realm focus their work on conducting research or influencing health care policy. 5. School psychology The focus of psychologists working in education is to study how people learn and retain knowledge. In today's complex educational system, no single learning approach will work for every student. With that in mind, school psychologists focus on identifying and studying learning methods to better understand how different pupils absorb new information. They apply psychological science to improve the learning process and promote educational success across the board — from gifted students to students with disabilities. As with child psychologist positions, the school psychologist career path requires a strong background in child development and child psychology. A school psychologist's training, however, will include an added emphasis on education and special education. More than 80 percent of school psychologists work in public schools, according to the National Association of School Psychologists. Most school districts employ school psychologists full time, although the practitioners will often work in multiple schools within a given district. They may also find employment in community health centers or clinics. 6. Climate and environmental psychology While climate and environmental psychologists focus some of their work on environmental protection and conservation, the bulk of their research centers on how human behavior impacts our world. They also study the influence different environments — both indoors and out — have on people. The APA highlights the following as examples of the various questions climate and environmental psychologists will explore in their work: Why does your mood change when the sun is shining? Can the colors used to decorate an office impact employee productivity? Why are some people committed to things like recycling while others toss everything in the trash — or even litter — unthinkingly? Demand for these psychology professionals is growing as the population grows more environmentally conscious. Climate and environmental psychologists may work with private businesses, nonprofit organizations and government agencies. 7. Community psychology Some psychology subfields have a hyper-specific focus. Community psychology, on the other hand, encompasses a handful of different psychology specialties, including clinical psychology, counseling psychology, social psychology and forensic psychology. The overarching goal of community psychologists is to help enable communities, organizations and broader social systems to meet people's needs. They achieve this by combining scientific research and practice, partnering with diverse citizens to implement community-wide changes and advance social justice. More specifically, community psychologists conduct and apply research to help people adopt healthy behaviors, prevent illness and improve the health care and criminal justice systems. Clinical and counseling psychologists can work in a number of different environments, from hospitals to private practices. Social psychologists will typically work in educational environments that allow them to conduct research, teach classes and run psychology laboratories. They may also work for government offices or nonprofit organizations. Since the aim of forensic psychologists is to conduct evaluations that inform and guide legal proceedings, they'll typically find work with the government, the military, academia, the prison system and in psychiatric facilities. Do you belong in one of these psychology work environments? You now know that answering the question, "Where do psychologists work?" is a bit more nuanced than many would expect. Even in a specific subfield of psychology, practicing as a psychologist can include a variety of work environments. If you can envision yourself working as a psychologist in one of the many professional environments outlined above, you may be on the right track in considering an undergraduate degree in psychology. To learn more about what you can expect when earning a psychology degree, visit Brandman University's Bachelor of Arts in Psychology program page.

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