



What is a Psychologist?

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.

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. Others work as consultants to corporations and various organizations. Many psychologists are active in both research and practice.

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. 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;
- psychological determinants of health and psychological factors that contribute to health and disease management;
- role of psychological factors in preventing disease and maintaining physical health;
- rehabilitation and adjustment to disability and chronic illness;
- brain injury, degenerative brain diseases;
- perception and management of pain;
- relationship between psychological factors and physical conditions and illness (e.g. diabetes, heart disease, stroke);
- management of psychological aspects of terminal illnesses and end-of-life care;
- cognitive functions (e.g., learning, memory, problem solving, intellectual ability);
- developmental and behavioural abilities and problems across the lifespan;
- criminal behaviour, crime prevention, and services for victims and perpetrators of criminal activity;
- addictions, substance use and abuse (e.g. smoking, alcohol, prescription and recreational drugs);
- stress, anger and other aspects of lifestyle management;
- court consultations on the role of psychological factors in legal matters (e.g., accidents and injury, parental capacity, competence to manage one's personal affairs);
- psychology in the workplace (e.g. motivation, leadership, productivity, marketing, healthy workplaces, ergonomics);

- marital and family relationships and problems;
- social and cultural behaviours and attitudes
- relationship between the individual and the many groups of which he or she is part (e.g. work, family, society)
- psychological factors related to performance at/in work, school, recreation and sport.

What is the Difference between a Psychologist and a Psychiatrist?

In Canada, the professionals who most commonly treat people with mental health problems are psychologists and psychiatrists. A psychologist holds a master's and/or doctoral degree in psychology that involves from 6 to 10 years of university study of how people think, feel and behave. Psychologists who hold doctoral degrees, can use the title 'Dr.'. Psychologists who practice (and hence those who are licensed) typically will have completed their graduate university training in clinical psychology, counseling psychology, clinical neuropsychology or educational/school psychology.

A psychologist working with children should have been trained in the area of child psychology and so on. Typically, the psychologist will have received this training while in graduate school where he or she will have chosen the courses and training experiences to prepare for working within a particular specialty area. Sometimes, psychologists pursue specialized training after graduation by completing a post-doctoral fellowship for example.

A practicing psychologist is trained to assess and diagnose problems in thinking, feeling and behaviour as well to help people overcome or manage these problems. A psychologist is uniquely trained to use psychological tests to help with assessment and diagnosis. Psychologists help people to overcome or manage their problems using a variety of treatments or psychotherapies.

Psychiatrists are medical doctors who go on to specialize in mental health and mental disorders. Psychiatrists often use medication to help their clients manage their mental disorders and there are some disorders for which medications are very necessary (schizophrenia and some depressions for examples). Some psychiatrists also do psychotherapy much like psychologists do. For more information on the study and practice of psychiatry, please visit the website of the Canadian Psychiatric Association at <http://www.cpa-apc.org>.

Sometimes a client might consult his or her family physician about medication while seeing a psychologist for psychotherapy. Some family physicians have an interest and training in treating psychological problems.

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