

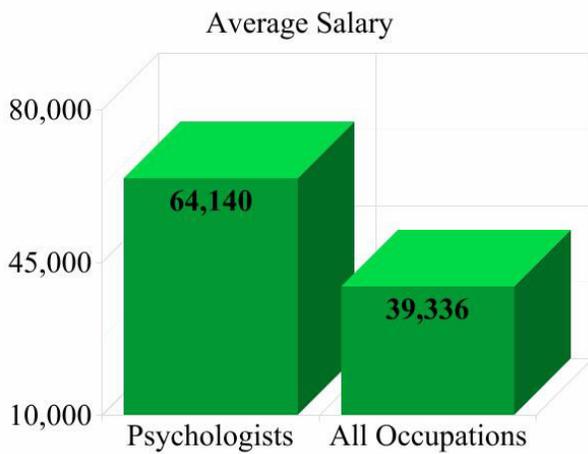
Psychologists

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WHAT THEY DO

Psychologists study mental processes and human behavior by observing, interpreting, and recording how people and other animals relate to one another and the environment. To do this, psychologists often look for patterns that will help them understand and predict behavior using scientific methods, principles, or procedures to test their ideas. Through such research studies, psychologists have learned much that can help increase understanding between individuals, groups, organizations, institutions, nations, and cultures.

Like other social scientists, psychologists formulate theories, or hypotheses, which are possible explanations for what they observe. But unlike other social science disciplines, psychologists often concentrate on individual behavior and, specifically, in the beliefs and feelings that influence a person's actions.



Research methods vary with the topic which they study, but by and large, the chief techniques used are observation, assessment, and experimentation. Psychologists sometimes gather information and evaluate behavior through controlled laboratory experiments, hypnosis, biofeedback, psychoanalysis, or psychotherapy, or by administering personality, performance, aptitude, or intelligence tests. Other methods include interviews, questionnaires, clinical studies, surveys, and observation—looking for cause-and-effect relationships between events and for broad patterns of behavior.

Research in psychology seeks to understand and explain thought, emotion, feelings, or behavior. The research findings of psychologists have greatly increased our understanding of why people and animals behave as they do.

Psychologists may perform a variety of duties in a vast number of industries. For example, those working in health service fields may provide mental healthcare in hospitals, clinics, schools, or private settings. Psychologists employed in applied settings, such as business, industry, government, or nonprofit organizations, may provide training, conduct research, design organizational systems, and act as advocates for psychology.

Psychologists apply their knowledge to a wide range of endeavors, including health and human services, management, education, law, and sports. They usually specialize in one of many different areas.

EDUCATION REQUIRED

A doctoral degree usually is required for independent practice as a psychologist. Psychologists with a Ph.D. or Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) qualify for a wide range of teaching, research, clinical, and counseling positions in universities, healthcare services, elementary and secondary schools, private industry, and government. Psychologists with a doctoral degree often work in clinical positions or in private practices, but they also sometimes teach, conduct research, or carry out administrative responsibilities.

A doctoral degree generally requires about 5 years of full-time graduate study, culminating in a dissertation based on original research. Courses in quantitative experimental methods and research design, which include the use of computer-based analysis, are an integral part of graduate study and are necessary to complete the dissertation. The Psy.D. degree may be based on practical work and examinations rather than a dissertation. In clinical, counseling, and school psychology, the requirements for the doctoral degree usually include an additional year of post-doctoral supervised experience.

A specialist degree or its equivalent is required in most States for an individual to work as a school psychologist, although some States credential school psychologists with master's degrees. A specialist (Ed.S.) degree in school psychology requires a minimum of 2 years of full-time graduate study (at least 60 graduate semester hours) and a 1-year full-time internship during the third year. Because their professional practice addresses educational and mental health components of students' development, school psychologists' training includes coursework in both education and psychology.

People with a master's degree in psychology may work as industrial-organizational psychologists. They also may work as psychological assistants conducting research under the direct supervision of doctoral-level psychologists. A master's degree in psychology requires at least 2 years of full-time graduate study. Requirements usually include practical experience in an applied setting and a master's thesis based on an original research project.

Psychologists - Continued

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OTHER USEFUL SKILLS

Aspiring psychologists who are interested in direct patient care must be emotionally stable, mature, and able to deal effectively with people. Sensitivity, compassion, good communication skills, and the ability to lead and inspire others are particularly important qualities for people wishing to do clinical work and counseling. Research psychologists should be capable of detailed work both independently and as part of a team. Patience and perseverance are vital qualities, because achieving results in the psychological treatment of patients or in research may take a long time.

HOW TO ADVANCE

The American Board of Professional Psychology (ABPP) recognizes professional achievement by awarding specialty certification in 13 different areas, such as psychoanalysis, rehabilitation, forensic, group, school, clinical health, and couple and family. To obtain board certification in a specialty, candidates must meet general criteria which consist of having a doctorate in psychology, as well as State licensure. Each candidate must then meet additional criteria of the specialty field, which is usually a combination of postdoctoral training in their specialty, several years of experience, and professional endorsements, as determined by the ABPP. Applicants are then required to pass the specialty board examination.

Psychologists can improve their advancement opportunities by earning an advanced degree and by participation in continuing education. Many psychologists opt to start their own private practice after gaining experience working in the field.

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Psychologists' work environments vary by subfield and place of employment. For example, clinical, school, and counseling psychologists in private practice frequently have their own offices and set their own hours. However, they usually offer evening and weekend hours to accommodate their clients. Those employed in hospitals, nursing homes, and other healthcare facilities may work shifts that include evenings and weekends, and those who work in schools and clinics generally work regular daytime hours. Most psychologists in government and industry have structured schedules.

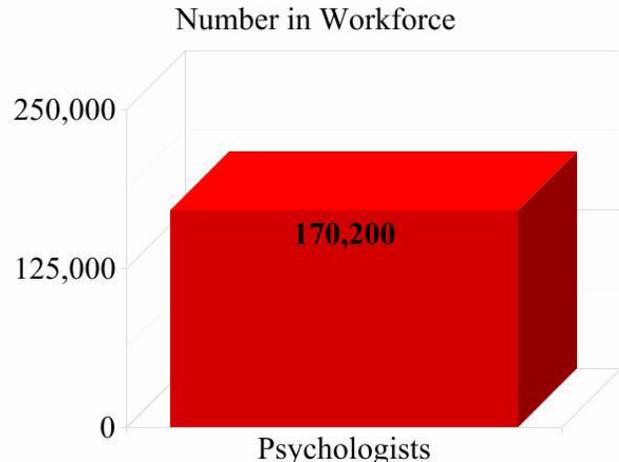
Psychologists employed as faculty by colleges and universities divide their time between teaching and research and also may have administrative responsibilities; many have part-time consulting practices.

Increasingly, a good number of psychologists work as part of a team, consulting with other psychologists and medical professionals. Many experience pressures because of deadlines, tight schedules, and overtime.

JOB GROWTH

Employment of psychologists is expected to grow 12 percent from 2008 to 2018, about as fast as the average for all occupations. Employment will grow because of increased demand for psychological services in schools, hospitals, social service agencies, mental health centers, substance abuse treatment clinics, consulting firms, and private companies.

Demand for school psychologists will be driven by a growing awareness of how students' mental health and behavioral problems, such as bullying, affect learning. School psychologists will also be needed for general student counseling on a variety of other issues, including working with students with disabilities or with special needs, tackling drug abuse, and consulting and managing personal crisis.



Spurring demand for clinical psychologists will continue to be the rising healthcare costs associated with unhealthy lifestyles, such as smoking, alcoholism, and obesity, which have made prevention and treatment more critical. An increase in the number of employee assistance programs, which help workers deal with personal problems, also should lead to employment growth for clinical and counseling specialties. More clinical and counseling psychologists will be needed to help people deal with depression and other mental disorders, marriage and family problems, job stress, and addiction. The growing number of elderly will increase the demand for psychologists trained in geropsychology to help people deal with the mental and physical changes that occur as individuals grow older. There also will be increased need for psychologists to work with returning veterans.

Industrial-organizational psychologists also will be in demand to help to boost worker productivity and retention rates in a wide range of businesses. Industrial-organizational psychologists will help companies deal with issues such as workplace diversity and antidiscrimination policies.