

# What is a Psychologist?

## What is psychology?

Psychology is the study of behaviour, including the biological, cognitive, emotional, social and cultural determinants of behaviour, that is, how we think, feel and behave in our social and physical environments.

It is impossible to consider productivity, innovation and societal development without placing human behaviour in all its complexity at the centre of the discussion.

Psychology is both a science and the application of that science. The discipline began in the university laboratories of Europe and North America in the late 1800s with the examination of cognitive processes.

The science of psychology spans the three Research Councils of Canada. It includes the biological determinants of behaviour, such as the study of basic brain processes, memory, thought, perception (NSERC), the contribution of human behaviour across the continuum of health and health care (CIHR), and factors related to the workplace and society at large (SSHRC). Psychology is one of the few disciplines with such a broad scope of scientific interests, which allows it to act as a meeting ground and synthesizing agent for research from all three councils and from many other disciplines.

Modern psychology approaches the analysis of behaviour in several ways. One approach focuses upon the fundamental processes of perception, cognition, movement, learning, motivation, and emotion, as well as the application of this knowledge to many challenges facing individuals and society. A second approach emphasizes the study of abnormalities of behaviour, such as neurological and mental disorders, and disease and their treatments. A third approach focuses upon the social nature of human behaviour and the study of factors affecting it.

## The role of psychologists

Trained as scientists and practitioners, psychologists have made important and unique contributions to the understanding of mental health and mental illness, as well to the treatments and systems best suited to help people live well in health and with illness.

## 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?

Psychologists work in clinics, correction facilities, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, schools and universities. They diagnose and provide therapy for psychological and emotional disorders, help clients manage physical illnesses and disorders, consult with other health care professionals, plan and implement research, and apply theory relating to behavior and mental process. 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. Psychological research & practice can include:

- Mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and phobias
- Addictions and substance use and abuse (e.g., smoking, alcohol, drugs)
- Marital and family relationships
- Neurological, genetic, psychological and social determinants of behaviour
- Brain injury and degenerative 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
- Stress, anger and 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 to work such as motivation, leadership, productivity, marketing, healthy workplaces, ergonomics
- 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)
- The role and impact of psychological factors on performance at work, recreation and sport
- Evaluation of treatment effectiveness
- Facilitating adherence to health interventions

