A Career as a Counseling Psychologist

Major Career Points:

- Employment of psychologists is expected to grow faster than average, 15% from 2006-2016
- 34% of psychologists are self-employed, compared with only 8% of the workers
- Admission to graduate school programs in counseling will be fierce (competition)
- Psychologists held approximately 166,000 jobs in 2006
- 29% were employed in educational institutions, in positions other than teaching such as counseling
- Employment should be best for people who hold a doctoral degree in an applied specialty, such as counseling or health

Counseling Psychologists assess and evaluate individuals’ problems by using techniques such as case history and interviewing. They also provide individual or group counseling to assist individuals in achieving a more effective personal, social, educational, and vocational development and adjustment. They counsel people on how to deal with problems such as with their career. Counseling psychologists also work in various settings such as university counseling centers.

Typical tasks that people in this profession perform include selecting, administering, or interpreting psychological tests to assess intelligence, aptitude, ability or interests, counseling clients to assist them in understanding personal or interactive problems, defining goals, and developing realistic action plan. They also develop therapeutic and treatment plans based on individual interests, abilities, or needs of clients, analyze data, such as interview notes, tests results, and reference and manuals and texts to identify symptoms and diagnose the nature of client’s problems, and advise clients on the potential benefits of counseling or make referrals to specialists or other institutions for non-counseling problems.

People looking to pursue this field should have various skills, including critical thinking, active learning and listening, speaking, writing, and reading comprehension. In addition, people should have knowledge in areas such as psychology, therapy and counseling, education and training, communications and media.

In terms of education, a bachelor’s degree is the minimum that is required. Some occupations, within this field, may require graduate school such as a master’s degree, and some may require a doctoral degree.
For counseling psychologists, the median annual wage and salary earnings in May 2006 was $59,440. The middle 50 percent earned between $45,300 and $77,750. The lowest 10 percent earned less than $35,280, and the highest 10 percent earned more than $102,730. Counseling psychologists who worked in elementary and secondary schools earned $61,290. People who worked in family and individual services earned $50,780.

People interested in this field generally have social interests which involve working with, communication with, and teaching people. Occupations in the social arena usually involve helping others.

**Typical Day Practicing Clinical and Counseling Psychology**

A typical day as a clinical or counseling psychologist is difficult to describe because the work is so varied. For example, a psychologist in private practice may have some extra responsibilities than one working in a hospital or clinic setting. Regardless, each clinical and counseling psychologist encounters many of the same things throughout a typical day.

The beginning of the day starts with the psychologist getting the files ready of the clients being seen that day. Typically a psychologist will see no more than five clients per day. Psychologists see a variety of clients ranging from children to adults and couples to families. Each client brings along their own personal problems and individual needs. All this must be taken into account when deciding which therapy is best for each specific client.

Children and adolescents are the most difficult population to work with, typically because it may be difficult to gain the parents' cooperation with therapy. Disorders such as depression and anxiety are on the average relatively easy to treat. More difficult to treat are obsessive-compulsive disorder and bipolar disorder, depending on the severity of each. Schizophrenia is by far the hardest disorder to treat. If caught in its early stages, it can be maintained; however, people suffering from schizophrenia will never lead a normal life.

At the end of the day, which sometimes lasts up to 12 hours, psychologists must complete the appropriate paperwork for the clients seen that day. This can be a very tedious task because insurance companies require detailed paperwork on clients.

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