

## **Job title**

Clinical Psychologist

## **General overview**

Clinical psychology is the study and observation of clients with the intention of promoting positive change in the face of mental illness (Compas & Gotlib, 2002). Clinical psychologists work with populations experiencing a variety of mental illnesses, and are particularly concerned with the assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of these mental disorders (O\*Net Online, 2012). The goal of clinical psychologists is to understand clients, and prevent and relieve psychologically based experiences of distress (Baharvand, 2012). Most commonly, they work in hospitals or private practices, and treat individuals whose lives have been interrupted by the presence of a mental illness or traumatic events (About: Education, n.d.). Clinical psychologists also work directly with clients and other health care specialists to develop and run treatment programs (O\*Net Online, 2012).

Many compare the career of clinical psychologist with that of a counselling psychologist. However, while counselling psychologists work with healthier populations, and conduct more cognitive assessments, clinical psychologists focus more on psychoanalytic approaches (Norcross, 2000). In comparison with the role of a psychiatrist, clinical psychologists are not considered medical doctors, and therefore may not prescribe medication to patients.

## **Job duties and responsibilities**

Clinical psychologists are client-oriented, and interact with clients on a weekly basis to assist them through mental health challenges. As such, they must establish constructive and supportive relationships with clients, while also maintaining personal and professional boundaries (Baharvand, 2012). Clinicians are responsible for identifying psychological, emotional, or behavioural issues to diagnose disorders using information they gain from interviews with clients (American Psychological Association, 2014).

While all clinical psychologists are interested in mental health, there are a wide variety of sub-specialties within the field (American Psychological Association, 2014). Some of these areas include child mental health, emotional disturbances, substance abuse, and geriatrics (American Psychological Association, 2014). Clinical psychologists often have specific areas of expertise, including specialization in certain kinds of disorders specifically (depression or eating disorders), or specialization with certain patient populations specifically (young offenders or victims of abuse) (About: Education, n.d.). As a whole, clinical psychologists are responsible for consulting and assessing patients and treatment methods, and evaluating the overall effectiveness of treatments (O\*Net Online, 2012).

## **Typical Workday**

Clinical psychologists are supports for individuals and groups in the face of personal challenges, typically involving distress and mental illness (Baharvand, 2012). They are a resource to assist patients through life challenges and achieve personal and social well-being. As such, the typical day of a clinical psychologist consists of meeting with clients, and looking to treat the root causes of each individual's mental illness (Albright, n.d.). In order to do so, clinicians interact with clients once a week to help them achieve personal goals and overcome personal challenges (O\*Net Online, 2012).

In addition client appointments, clinical psychologists meet daily with fellow clinicians within their workplace to discuss new cases and incoming clients (Brightside, n.d.). The average workday runs from 9 am to 5 pm, with clinicians in a hospital setting also often working on a rotating 24/7 on-call system for mental health crises and emergencies (Brightside, n.d.).

To respond to the disorders and challenges, clinical psychologists must constantly refer to a breadth of treatment methods, such as psychotherapy or cognitive behaviour therapy, in treating individual clients (Baharvand, 2012). As such, with permission of the client and client's family, after

meeting with clients, clinicians will communicate in conjunction with other professionals, including doctors and social workers, regarding clients' well-being (Brightside, n.d.)

### **Educational requirements and other qualifications**

The minimum education required for the position of a clinical psychologist is a doctoral degree. Students who are seeking to pursue doctoral graduate degree are recommended to first possess an undergraduate degree in psychology. For clinical psychologists, there are two major training models for expected doctoral degrees: the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Psychology, and the Doctor of Psychology (PsyD). The PhD focuses on the academic components of psychology, with emphasis upon research and publication. This program typically takes an average of seven years to complete. In comparison, the PsyD focuses on a more practical, hands-on approach to Psychology. This program typically takes one year fewer to complete than the PhD; however, the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) does not consistently accredit PsyD programs. The CPA accreditation demonstrates that graduates have exhibited the necessary skills and requirements of training to practice psychology (Canadian Psychological Association, n.d.).

In addition to a doctoral degree, students seeking to become a clinical psychologist must also complete an average of 600 hours of clinical experiences, including practicums and internships, prior to achieving their licensure as a clinical psychologist (Dalhousie University, 2013).

### **Related skills, interests, and qualities**

Clinical psychologists must possess strong communication skills, including strength in both verbal and non-verbal communication (Baharvand, 2012). As their role involves interacting with patients on a daily basis, they must possess strength in speaking with others, while also displaying strength in problem solving, and identifying non-verbal communication presented by others (O\*Net Online, 2012). Through taking time to understand the concerns and experiences of patients, and allowing them to effectively describe their thoughts and emotions, clinicians are able to clearly diagnose patients and comprehend underlying mental illnesses (Baharvand, 2012).

Similarly, clinical psychologists must possess a high degree of emotional intelligence, including the facets of social awareness, self-awareness, self-management, and relationship management (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Clinical psychologists may often face a risk of burnout due to the demanding nature of the conversations they are holding with mentally ill patients (About: Education, n.d.); as such, emotional intelligence is an important component of ensuring that clinicians remain rationally detached from clients, while also effectively managing relationships and reducing their own stress (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Through awareness and understanding of the reactions of oneself and others, clinical psychologists are able to pick up on what is, and is not, being said (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009).

### **Relevance of psychology undergraduate degree**

Clinical psychologists address a breadth of mental, emotional, and behavioural disorders, and work to integrate what they learn throughout their undergraduate and graduate degrees with the treatment of such disorders. Throughout the psychology undergraduate degree, students learn about assessment, diagnosis and treatment of a wide variety of complicated human problems, while examining a variety of methods in a historical context. Most evidently, classes during an undergraduate psychology degree complement the work that clinical psychologists complete. An example of this is through the Abnormal Psychology undergraduate class, where students learn the breadth of personality disorders and symptoms, their typical causal factors, and effective treatment methods. Exposure to this information provides students with theoretical knowledge to support the clinical practice they will receive during their doctoral degree, and the underlying disorders that are being experienced by clients in their practice.

In addition to this, clinical psychologists are expected to react to a variety of people, contexts, and concerns. As such, a thorough knowledge of a variety of domains is necessary for those looking to identify the causes of behaviour and mental states in patients (O\*Net Online, 2012). Throughout an undergraduate degree in psychology, students are required to take a breadth of courses in a variety of psychology domains, including health and personality. These domains allow clinicians to have knowledge of correlational factors, and relate to the theory and context that may describe each patient individually and uniquely. Moreover, all of the areas of psychology can be applied differently depending on what areas of clinical psychology clinicians specialize in – e.g. addiction, personality disorders, etc. (Baharvand, 2012). As a result, clinical psychologists pull upon the basis of knowledge gained in their undergraduate degree in psychology to support the treatment of mental, physical, behavioural disorders.

### **Salary potential**

The average salary for a Canadian psychologist is \$70,610 annually; however, the average starting salary is typically \$45,500 annually (Payscale, n.d.). Experienced clinical psychologists with ten years in the field can almost double their starting salary (Payscale, n.d.). In addition to this, clinicians engaging in private practice will most often create their own hourly rate for patients (Payscale, n.d.). A report compiled by Canadian Business (2014) describes that clinical psychologists in private practice could make up to \$200,000 a year. However, the average top pay for a clinician in North America is approximately \$170,000 (CNN Money, 2012).

### **Job outlook**

Mental illness is a growing concern in today's society (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2012). As such, the demand for clinical psychologists in response to the rising rates of mental illness is increasing. Therefore, the career of a clinical psychologist is ranked high for future growth and job security (O\*Net Online, 2012). Although the application to graduate studies in clinical psychology is extremely competitive (with typically five in 200 receiving admission) (UBC, 2014), in a CNN Money Report (2012) report, clinical psychology was ranked #55 on a list of the "Best Jobs in North America". This report indicates that there are currently over 150,000 jobs for individuals with a degree in clinical psychology, with a projected growth of 22% over the next ten years (Canadian Business, 2014; CNN Money, 2012). This report also outlines that the job prospect for clinical psychologists is expected to remain strong until at least 2020 (Canadian Business, 2014).

Quality of life ratings completed by clinicians provides the career of clinical psychologist top marks in terms of personal satisfaction and benefit to society (CNN Money, 2012). Although clinicians interact with patients experiencing a wide range of life-threatening psychological conditions, they typically gain a sense of fulfillment in improving the lives of others, and providing support and relief during clients' times of difficulty (CNN Money, 2012).

### **To apply**

Interested applicants with the suitable level of education and certification may apply to positions through contacting organizations directly, and through exploring online job search websites. Many positions are often posted via the websites for the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and the Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre, Ottawa.

### **To know more**

To learn more about a career in clinical psychology, please visit [www.cpa.ca/students/career](http://www.cpa.ca/students/career). For more information about a typical day in the life of a clinical psychologist, visit <http://www.shmoop.com/careers/psychologist/typical-day.html>.

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