Areas of Specialization in Psychology

Behavioral and Cognitive Psychology
Behavioral and cognitive psychologists study cognitive processes such as how people learn and organize information and how these processes affect behavior. By using theories of human learning and cognitive processing, these psychologists attempt to create meaningful change in maladaptive behaviors. Specific areas of study in this field are thought, knowledge, memory, and language. These professions are often trained within the research-scientist model and can be found in academic or research positions.

Clinical Psychology
Clinical psychologists assess and treat people with psychological problems. Generally, they work with individuals who are suffering from chronic psychiatric disorders. They may work with a wide variety of clients from many backgrounds or they may be trained to work with specific groups like children, the elderly, or those with specific disorders (e.g. schizophrenia). They can be employed in a wide variety of settings such as academic institutions, hospitals, community health centers, or private practice. Within the field of clinical psychology there are many specializations, such as clinical health psychology, clinical child psychology, and clinical neuropsychology. *Clinical psychologists are more concerned with working with individuals with severe psychopathology whereas counseling psychologists work with individuals who are experiencing normal psychological crises.*

Community Psychology
These psychologists study communities of people rather than individuals and are similar in many ways to sociologists. Community psychologists often study special populations, especially groups that might be at risk for emotional or behavioral difficulties. They often work with health agencies, schools, or community offices to promote mental health for large populations of people.

Counseling Psychology
Distinct from clinical psychology, counseling psychology tends to focus more on individuals with adjustment problems or problems normally encountered in the lifespan, not persons suffering from severe psychological disorders. Counseling psychologists help people with physical, emotional, and mental health issues to improve their overall wellbeing and resolve problems they face. These professionals may also work with individuals, groups, and people of all ages.

Developmental Psychology
Developmental psychologists study how we grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally over the life span. Some focus on just one period of life (e.g. childhood or adolescence) while others study the entire lifespan. They usually do research and/or teach in academic settings, but many act as consultants to daycares, schools, or social service agencies.

Educational and School Psychologists
Educational and school psychologists are involved in enhancing the development of children in educational settings. They assess children’s psychoeducational abilities and recommend actions to facilitate learning. They are typically trained in Schools of Education and work in public or private school systems. They often act as consultants between parents, teachers, and administrators to optimize the learning environment of specific students.
Forensic Psychology
Forensic psychologists are involved in analyzing crime evidence and aiding law enforcement in criminal investigations. These individuals may have training or a degree in law in addition to their psychological training. Primarily, their job is to provide professional psychological expertise within the judicial and legal system.

Health Psychology
Health psychologists apply knowledge of the relationship between behavioral, emotional, cognitive, social and biological components of health in order to prevent and treat illness. They may design and conduct programs to help individuals stop smoking, lose weight, manage stress, and stay physically fit. They are employed in hospitals, medical schools, rehabilitation centers, public health agencies, academic settings, and private practice.

Industrial/Organizational Psychology
Industrial/organizational psychologists are primarily concerned with the relationships between people and their work environments. They may develop new ways to increase productivity or be involved in personnel selection. They are employed in business, government agencies, and academic settings.

Neuropsychology
Neuropsychologists are concerned with brain/behavior relationships. They may be involved in clinical work, in the assessment of brain-damaged patients, or in research, such as attempts to relate cognitive activity to brain activity as seen in brain scans.

School Psychology
School psychologists are involved in enhancing the development of children in educational settings. They assess children’s psychoeducational abilities and recommend actions to facilitate student learning. They are typically trained in Schools of Education and work in public school systems. They often act as consultants to parents, teachers, and administrators to optimize the learning environments of specific students.

Social Psychology
Social psychologists study how our beliefs, feelings, and behaviors are affected by other persons. Some topics of interest to social psychologists are attitude formation and change, aggression, prejudice, and interpersonal attraction. Most social psychologists work in academic settings, but some work in federal agencies and businesses doing applied research.

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