

Psychologists and psychological associates study how we think, feel and behave from a scientific viewpoint and apply that knowledge to help people understand, explain and change their behavior; to reduce suffering from various mental and physical disorders

What do Psychologists and Psychological Associates Do?

Psychologists and psychological associates engage in research, teaching and clinical practice across a wide range of topics that reflect how people think, feel and behave. Their research has revolutionized our understanding of how the brain functions and every day transformative discoveries are made. Psychologists and psychological associates clinically practice in many arenas, such as primary care, hospitals, long-term care facilities, schools, mental health clinics, correctional facilities and private practices. The variety of evidence-based services that they provide to individuals is as extensive as the topic areas where psychologists focus their research, teaching and practice endeavours. Some of the topic areas include the following:

- Mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, phobias, etc.
- Neurological, genetic, psychological and social determinates of behaviour
- Acquired brain injuries and degenerative brain diseases
- Perception and management of pain
- Psychological factors and problems associated with physical conditions and chronic disorders such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, cancers and respiratory diseases
- Promotion and maintenance of wellness behaviours to prevent chronic diseases
- Psychological factors and the management of terminal illnesses
- 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 activities
- Addictions and substance use and abuse (e.g. smoking, alcohol, street and prescription drug use)
- Stress, anger management and other aspects of lifestyle management
- Marital and family relationships and problems
- Court consultations addressing the impact and the role of psychological and cognitive factors in collisions causing injuries, parenting capacity and competencies to manage one's personal affairs
- Support for victims of sexual assault, domestic abuse and other violent crimes
- Support for lawyers in addressing the rights of the mentally ill in the courtrooms
- Application of psychological factors and issues in the workplace such as harassment and bullying, mentally healthy and psychologically safe workplaces and other factors such as leadership development, motivation, productivity, marketing, ergonomics, assessment of WSIB claims and treatment of workplace-related mental disorders
- Researching and assessing social and cultural behaviours and attitudes and the relationship between the individual and the many groups that he/she belongs to including family, work, school, and society in general

- The role and impact of psychological factors on performance at work, recreation and sports.

What Do Psychologists, Psychological Associates and Psychiatrists Have in Common?

From time to time, psychologists and psychological associates are told that they are just “highpriced social workers”. In reality, the scope of practice of psychologists and psychological associates is more similar to that of psychiatrists. When psychologists or psychological associates and psychiatrists practice in concert with one another, the synergy that occurs provides patients with a level of care that none could provide alone or in a parallel practice model.

A psychologist holds a Doctoral degree in psychology that involves 10 or more years of university study on how people think, feel and behave. Psychologists use the title “Dr.” and are registered with the College of Psychologists of Ontario. Typically, they will have completed their university training in clinical psychology, counselling psychology, clinical neuropsychology or educational/school psychology.

During graduate school, internship/residency, and supervised practice years, psychologists develop competencies in working with specific groups of patients and practice areas. Many psychologists also complete a post-doctoral fellowship.

Psychological associates hold a Masters degree in psychology and have the same scope of practice as psychologists.

Psychiatrists are graduates of a medical school who complete a residency program in psychiatry. As physicians, they review patients’ symptoms, establish a diagnosis and decide upon a treatment plan. They often use medications to help their patients to manage their mental disorders, especially for disorders such as schizophrenia. Some psychiatrists and family physicians also provide psychotherapy.

Psychologists and psychological associates provide comprehensive assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of disorders that underlie impairment in thinking, feeling and behaviour. They utilize various psychological interventions that have been proven to be as or more effective than medication.

It is becoming quite common for psychologists, psychological associates, psychiatrists and family physicians to work in a collaborative care model often referred to as a “Behavioural Home” to share expertise and create a high level of synergy. In such a model, patients receive comprehensive and continuing care that is not possible when the various disciplines work in silos. Patients with complex conditions stabilize and are able to maintain their mental health status effectively. The OPA is actively advocating for collaborative practices amongst psychologists, psychological associates, physicians, and other mental health providers.