

Differences between psychology, psychiatry and psychotherapy

This page explains the significant differences between roles in psychology, psychiatry and psychotherapy.

Staff working in these roles tend to deal with different types of problems, although there is also considerable overlap in their work.

Male psychologist with patient

Below is a brief description of each of the different areas.

- What is psychology?
- What is psychiatry?
- What is psychotherapy?

What is psychology?

Psychology is the study of people: how they think, how they act, react and interact. It's concerned with all aspects of behaviour and the thoughts, feelings and motivation underlying such behaviour.

Psychology is a discipline that is firstly concerned with the normal functioning of the mind and has explored areas such as learning, remembering and the normal psychological development of children. It has been one of the fastest growing university subjects and is increasingly available in schools and colleges.

Psychologists are not usually medically qualified and only a small proportion of people studying psychology degrees will go on to work with patients.

Psychologists can specialise in a number of areas, such as mental health and educational and occupational psychology. In healthcare, psychologists specialise in clinical, counselling, forensic or health psychology.

Psychological therapy roles

- [Find out more about the work of clinical psychologists](#) ^[1]
- [Find out more about the work of counselling psychologists](#) ^[2]

- [Find out more about the work of forensic psychologists](#) [3]
- [Find out more about the work of health psychologists](#) [4]

There are also roles using psychology for other staff, including [assistant psychologists](#) [5], [psychological wellbeing practitioners](#) [6] and [high intensity therapists](#) [7]

What is psychiatry?

Psychiatry is the study of mental health problems and their diagnosis, management and prevention. Psychiatrists are medical doctors who have qualified in psychiatry. They often combine a broad general caseload alongside an area of special expertise and research.

- [Find out more about the work of psychiatrists](#) [8]

What is psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy is conducted with individuals, groups, couples and families. Psychotherapists help people to overcome stress, emotional and relationship problems or troublesome habits.

There are many different approaches in psychotherapy, or talking therapies, which include:

- cognitive behavioural therapies
- psychoanalytic therapies
- psychodynamic therapies
- systemic and family psychotherapy
- arts and play therapies
- humanistic and integrative psychotherapies
- hypno-psychotherapy
- experiential constructivist therapies

A psychotherapist may be a psychiatrist, psychologist or other mental health professional, who has had further specialist training in psychotherapy. Increasingly, there are a number of psychotherapists who do not have backgrounds in the above fields, but who have undertaken in-depth training in this area.

Medical psychotherapists are fully-qualified doctors who have qualified in psychiatry and then undertaken a three or four-year specialist training in psychotherapy. Their role is in the psychotherapeutic treatment of patients with psychiatric illnesses.

- [Find out more about the role of psychotherapists](#) [9]

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