Careers in Psychology: Neuropsychology

Neuropsychologists are concerned with the relationship between behavior and both normal and abnormal brain functioning. They specialize in studying brain-behavior relationships and have extensive training in the anatomy, physiology, and pathology of the nervous system. Some neuropsychologists specialize in research whereas others specialize in evaluating and treating people who have something wrong with the way their central nervous system is functioning.

Job Description

Neuropsychologists have many types of jobs. Some administer psychological tests and perform assessments to diagnose specific disorders of the brain that produce problems with thinking, emotions, and/or behavior. Neuropsychological testing evaluates an individual’s capacity in the following areas: short and long term memory, abstract reasoning, attention, concentration, executive functioning, motor skills, and other cognitive functions. Along with other assignments, neuropsychologists might be asked to do an evaluation to detect neurological dysfunction following a head injury; to diagnose, monitor, and offer suggestions in the treatment of central nervous system (CNS) disorders; or to assess cognitive functioning in individuals with dementia and offer rehabilitation strategies to assist with daily living tasks.

Neuropsychologists also provide treatment to individuals with brain damage. They may help families try to understand how their loved one’s environment can be altered to improve daily functioning. Neuropsychologists are also employed at the university level to teach and conduct research. In addition, they can use their knowledge in the court system by assisting in legal cases. For example, a neuropsychologist may testify that an individual’s performance on a battery of tests is suggestive (or not suggestive) of cognitive and behavioral dysfunction that is not likely to improve with psychotherapy.

Educational Requirements

To work as a neuropsychologist, an individual should have a doctoral degree in clinical psychology from an accredited university. During graduate training, coursework must be completed in neuroanatomy, neuropathology, and neuropsychology. It is recommended that you go to a university that complies with the guidelines for neuropsychological training set forth by Division 40 (Neuropsychology) of the American Psychological Association. As with all clinical psychologists, a 1-year internship must be completed prior to receiving the doctoral degree. In addition, many neuropsychologists also have post-doctoral training. For further information about neuropsychology, go to the following resources:

www.apa.org (click into “Students” and then into “Considering a Career in Psychology?”)
Graduate Study in Psychology (updated frequently). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. A list of graduate programs in all fields of psychology with information about admission requirements. Ask for it at the reference desk in the library.

www.apa.org/about/division/div40.html The division of the APA for clinical neuropsychology.

www.nanonline.org Website for the National Academy of Neuropsychology.