

Prison psychologist career and salary profile www.floridatechonline.com

Prison psychologists play a key role in society – for inmates, the prison system and greater society. Both rehabilitation and managing the criminally insane require skilled prison psychologists, who can navigate this harsh environment and drive a positive outcome. Demand for prison psychologists is high, with 14% of all prisoners meeting the threshold for serious psychological distress (SPD) in the past 30 days, according to a 2017 report from the [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#). The occurrence of SPD in prisoners is nearly three times that of the general population, which is a reported 5%. And of those who have been diagnosed with a mental disorder, nearly one quarter (24%) of prisoners have a major depressive disorder.

Job Responsibilities

A prison psychologist works with prisoners, offering treatment and support through their psychological problems, anger management issues and substance abuse. Their work environment may range from asylums for the criminally insane, to jails, courthouses and maximum security prisons. Inmates grapple with a complex array of issues that span poverty, abuse, trauma and drug addiction. According to the [American Psychological Association](#), prison psychologists are tasked with treating inmates – who may be a violent offender, sexual predator, white-collar criminal or murderer – both for existing mental disorders and to prevent them from committing any additional crimes.

The day-to-day tasks of a prison psychologist may include:

- facilitating individual and group therapy
- conducting client assessment crisis intervention
- applying drug-treatment services
- contributing to employee-assistance programs
- conducting initial and developmental mental health screenings

According to an article Marisa Mauro, PsyD [wrote for Psychology Today](#) on her work as a prison psychologist, both psychologists and psychiatrists take on-call shifts for mental health crises, which may mean addressing suicidal thoughts, homicidal thoughts, victimization, rape, major depression, mania, panic attacks, death or grief. Additionally, psychologists may receive emergency calls for inmates acting out of the ordinary, as that can increase an inmate's risk of victimization.

According to Dr. Scott Whitacre, [Florida Tech psychology](#) professor and prison psychologist, telepsychiatry is sometimes used to meet the high demand for prison psychologists:

"The prison that I work at, we are fully staffed. I work with two psychiatrists on a daily basis and so on, but there are other prisons in the state that don't have psychiatry there. So what happens is once a week our psychiatrists go in and they will see an inmate at another prison and [do some telepsychiatry](#) so to speak, talk to them, be able to prescribe medication for them."

In some cases, prison psychologists may administer court-ordered assessments, which are often applied to better understand a defendant's sentence, and whether prison time or probation is appropriate. For example, an assessment may establish

whether a defendant should receive parole with a requirement of attending therapy or if prison time should be ordered.

One critical component of the role is to support rehabilitation, which includes helping inmates establish the skillset necessary to manage anger, mental health, and addiction and mitigating the chance they will return to prison.

Salary

Government-employed psychologists were the top earners compared to psychologists in other sectors in 2016, with a [median annual wage of \\$92,880](#), according to the BLS. In the field overall, the median annual wage was \$95,710, with the highest 10 percent earning upwards of \$121,610.

Because salary potential and employment opportunities may vary depending on factors such as a candidate's education and experience, as well as regional market conditions, prospective students are encouraged to conduct independent research.

Career Outlook

Overall, demand for psychologists is expected to grow by 19% from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the overall. Clinical and counseling psychologists are expected to grow by 20 percent during that same timeframe, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS).

With the prison population expanding, the demand for psychologists in prison should grow specifically. Hundreds of psychologists work for the Federal Bureau of Prisons, which [the APA](#) says will continue to need more mental health experts. With sizable mental health professionals on staff, opportunities to advance from internship to positions of oversight and leadership,

Education and Skills

As with other areas of psychology, state laws will dictate educational requirements; however, typically prison psychologists must earn a PhD or PsyD in psychology from an accredited institution. The intense environment requires prison psychologists to handle highly stressful environments, establish boundaries, exhibit compassion, adapt quickly and demonstrate resilience.

The rigorous nature of this role may require two internships, most likely a federal internship that requires inmate evaluation. Study specific to the field may include understanding how the law related to psychology, dealing with violent offenders, self-defense, [developmental psychology](#), abnormal psychology, [social psychology](#), [forensic psychology](#), advanced counseling, and specific study on