

Journey Through Psychology from High School and Beyond

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Maybe, you feel that psychology could be a good match for you to pursue at university and decided to explore it more. Or you are fascinated by psychology and want to include it with whatever major you study as a concentration, track, minor, or simply take elective courses about it.

If these statements apply to you, good! You are in the right place. My presentation might help you with some general information about psychology, the education options you have in the field, and important tips while researching if you intend to do your own research during high school, including regulations regarding professional practice in Turkey and abroad. These were the steps that I followed to learn more extensively about this field and I want to share them with you hoping they help guide you in your decisions too.

What Psychology Encompasses

First of all, I believe that all students who want to pursue psychology should be aware of The American Psychological Association, shortly APA, and its function along with its guidelines in whatever country psychology is studied since science does not have borders. APA is the largest scientific and professional organization of psychologists in the United States, with a huge number of members, including scientists, educators, clinicians, consultants and students, and is a highly prestigious professional body having a significant role in psychological practice.

APA defines psychology as “the study of the mind and behavior” (APA, 2015a). This definition is as broad as it sounds; it encompasses every aspect of human life imaginable from the singular minds of individuals no matter their age or developmental level to the collective actions of large societies. Given this wide area of interest, at least one area of psychology should overlap perfectly with your interests.

Psychology has lots of subbranches (APA, 2013): Clinical, counseling and health psychology fields focus on helping individuals reach personal and interpersonal happiness, help treat their problems as they may exist or arise using scientific methods, and assist in forming healthy behavior patterns and coping strategies (APA, 2014b; 2014a; 2014e). Quantitative and experimental psychology fields focus more on the scientific method to study psychology as a whole; quantitative psychology deals with mathematical and statistical analysis of psychological processes and experimental psychology works to design experiments to explore questions about human and animal psychology (APA, 2014c; 2014d). There are even more subdisciplines that study a bit more specific topics but that are nevertheless very rich fields with a myriad of subjects: Cognitive psychology studies the brain; developmental psychology explores how one develops over their lifespan; educational psychology studies how people learn; industrial and organizational psychology field studies people's minds and performances in the workplace; engineering psychologists study people's interactions with technology and machines; and many more fields ranging from social to sports to environmental to forensic (See Table 1, APA, 2013).

Table 1*Psychology Subdisciplines.*

Research and Methodology Focused		
Quantitative Psychology	Experimental Psychology	
Specific Subjects		
Cognitive Psychology	Educational Psychology	Developmental Psychology
Industrial/Organizational Psychology	Engineering Psychology	Social Psychology
Climate and Environmental Psychology	Forensic and Public Service Psychology	Sport and Performance Psychology

Health Focused			
Clinical Psychology	Counselling Psychology	Health Psychology	Rehabilitation Psychology

Even if your main interests seem far from these established specializations in the discipline of psychology, they may end up connecting in the end! Since psychology focuses on human experience, it will keep growing and new fields will keep emerging as a necessity. APA calls this a “healthy sign” for the field because it demonstrates a wealth of discoveries and information (Breckler, 2005).

For example, the topic of artificial intelligence remains a relatively new field in psychology but it is a fast-growing one with many different dimensions: On one side, there is a need to understand human cognition to create better and smarter AI (Ruhela, 2019). On another, researchers seek to make the complex structures of their AI more understandable to outsiders to make AI not only efficient but also more transparent (Miller, 2018). And lastly, there are already plenty of attempts at using AI to simulate therapists and assist clinicians in screening and helping patients (Luxton, 2014), and AI-inspired psychology apps are already on our phones (Sutton, 2021).

What to Know About Studying Psychology in Higher Education

All these subdisciplines and subjects might be taught as a pure major in a university or included in the psychology curriculum as a core course, elective, concentration, minor, or option.

First, let me define some academic jargon: A major is a specific subject area in which students specialize. Typically, between one-third and one-half of the courses, you'll take in college will be in your major or related to it. This means that if you choose psychology as a major to study, then, depending on your university, half or one-third of the full courses that you

will need to take will be related to psychology. A minor can be taken alongside a major with its own, smaller percentage of prerequisite courses (15% for minor as opposed to 25% for major) depending on the subject (Sul Ross State University, n.d.). As an example, Northwestern University (n.d.) requires Psychology majors and minors to complete 3 core psychology courses while major students need 8 additional psychology elective courses to get their degree versus minors who need only 4 additional psychology elective courses. In contrast, a concentration is a specialized track within a major that may focus on one or a few related subdisciplines in the overall discipline of the major topic. For example, Brown University (2022) Psychology concentration requires 12 psychology courses for a Bachelor of Arts degree and an additional 5 science and laboratory courses for a Bachelor of Science degree. Lastly, much like the difference between majors and minors, options differ from concentrations in that they require fewer prerequisite classes but in a narrower choice of topics (PennState Smeal College of Business, n.d.).

We are a generation very fortunate to have a good deal of freedom to design our programs. Of course, there are core courses that are prerequisites to be completed in a discipline meaning they have to be completed to graduate from the program, and the specifics for graduation can change from one university to another and from one country to another. Therefore, it is our responsibility to explore well what we are going to complete in our future studies and we should be careful in our university selections.

For example, if you are considering studying industrial and organizational psychology in Turkey, if you look into them in detail, you may see that many undergraduate psychology programs may only have one or two industrial or organizational psychology courses and some might not even have one. So, if Turkey is your only choice, then you may need to think about

taking extra courses in organizational psychology or whatever your interest topic is in psychology at the credit level from an accredited institute as an online or onsite course. This may lead you to understand the topic better and grasp the insight of that topic, consequently making you more confident about what you would like to pursue afterward.

This also helps to be eligible to study that topic more at a graduate level further down the line. So, choosing the undergraduate program correctly is crucial since it also influences our graduate prospects. Although it is hard to know what we going to study at the graduate level while studying at high school, this may form firmly at the end of the second year or in the third year. Then, without losing any time, it is important to find out the required courses for that program and take those courses externally if they do not exist in the curriculum to further enrich our own academic journey and get ready for the future.

Career Prospects in Psychology

When many people hear the title “psychologist” or imagine their careers as psychologists, they actually think of clinical psychologists. Clinical psychologists guide and treat counselees through mental, behavioral, and emotional disorders most typically in one-on-one therapy sessions. This is only one career prospect after studying psychology in higher education and is subject to much regulation internationally: For example, in Turkey, one has to hold a bachelor’s degree in psychology with a master’s degree in clinical psychology or if they hold a different bachelor’s degree, hold both a master’s and doctoral degree in clinical and counseling psychology to be able to legally hold the title of “clinical psychologist” (Türk Psikologlar Derneği, 2020). Whereas in the United States, a doctoral degree in psychology is expected to hold the title and graduates are still subject to reaching various practice criteria as assessed by their state’s official Psychology Boards and these criteria vary state by state (APA, 2015b).

The reason for such strict regulations is to make sure that anyone who holds the title of clinical psychologist has gone through rigorous training and has been supervised while counseling to make sure they have what it takes to be helpful to their counselees, protect their privacy, and stay within ethical boundaries; and this supervision process may vary from country to country and even institution to institution. This means more often than not; psychologists would need to get accredited and licensed again by new states or countries if they want to move their practices. European Federation of Psychologists Association (EFPA), which consists of psychologists' associations from more than 30 European countries including the Turkish Psychologists Association, works to check and help regulate psychology education quality across national borders and allow psychologists more mobility with their practice (Europsy, 2022a). Several Turkish institutions are confirmed as meeting quality criteria by EFPA's body so graduates who hold both bachelor's and master's degrees from those institutions (or, are accredited by at least 300 ECTS) and have been supervised as clinicians for at least a year are eligible for certification (Europsy, 2022b; Türk Psikologlar Derneği, 2015).

As varied as psychology is as a discipline, so are other career prospects after having studied them. Even simply a bachelor's degree in Psychology prepares its graduates for jobs in many fields other than strictly psychology as it ensures they have good research and analysis skills, which allows them to both land jobs in advisory positions in public and private institutions and pursue higher education in other, non-psychology fields if they choose so (APA, 2008). Holding at least a master's degree is preferred however for more advanced job prospects in conducting research, studying social developments as developmental psychologists, teaching students as counselors, promoting physical and mental health as practitioners, supporting

communities as community psychologists, or supervising work environments as I/O psychologists.

This variety in possible jobs only makes it clearer to us students how important it is to always think ahead when we are planning on which universities and programs to which we apply. APA's advice for postdoctoral psychologists applies to us too: We must assess what we know, explore our options and set our goals based on what we want and what we currently lack, and we must do this over and over again as we advance in our educational journeys to keep us on our desired tracks; "[t]he sooner [we] start, the better" (APA, 2016).

Psychology Research Guidelines

How else to get ready? You can start your research journey early too. If you choose to study in Turkey, most probably there will be no research option in the undergraduate curriculum of the program that you will attend. Then, keeping your GPA as high as possible, you may investigate external research opportunities. In the USA, the leading universities offer research opportunities at the undergraduate level, and in Europe, in many undergraduate programs, research is always a part of the curriculum valued at 15% of the entire program. In the UK, all students finish the program either with a project or a dissertation. For instance, in the EU most bachelor programs in research universities are 180 European Credits and each year is 60 credits. Research is mostly 30 ECTS out of 180 ECTS (European Education Area, n.d.). Keep in mind that these are not rigid rules, their application may vary from one institution to another.

But why wait until university? You may also look into research in high school. Of course, doing research during the high school years is not common and it might be hard where to begin. If that is the case for you too, International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) resources might be helpful as their Psychology courses include research projects and papers, and

psychology experiments that are evaluated on academic standards. IB Psychology allows you to prepare a work called Extended Essay which is a research project and paper where you are required to ask a research question and try to answer that question by examining existing literature and synthesizing that information within a paper (Karmakar, 2020b, 2020c). In contrast, another possible project called Internal Assessment requires you to design your experiment or survey to answer a research question on your own (Karmakar, 2020a). Examining these two projects' grading criteria could already give you a great idea of what academically studying Psychology at university entails.

I also want to include an AP teacher's suggestions in my presentation as she not only suggests some topics but also addresses her ethical considerations which show us research process is a process that should be well thought carrying a low level of risk (Weseley, n.d.). Some topics may have a high level of risk and the best is to be supervised by a psychology teacher, and if possible, the teacher and student should seek the approval of a higher committee.

This level of scrutiny does not only extend to high school students looking to do research; it is standard practice in the field. It would be very beneficial for a student who would like to pursue psychology to be familiar with the ethical rules including personal data protection rules both in Turkey and abroad. This would enlarge the vision of the student regarding the occupational insight of the major. For Turkey, I suggest taking a look at the Turkish Psychologists Association's (Türk Psikologlar Derneği – TPD) Ethics Guide for detailed information on disciplinary standards overall in this field (TPD, 2004/2018).

Because psychology focuses on the human experience, wherever there is human experience, there is a need for data protection too. In the digital age, personal data has gained the utmost importance in all parts of life and therefore a strong need arose to protect it and avoid its

misuse. In this context, the EU prepared the “General Data Protection Regulation” (GDPR) as an EU Law on data protection and privacy in the European Union and the European Economic Area (Intersoft Consulting, n.d.). It is an important component of EU privacy law and human rights law. For example, the British Psychological Society (BPS) has updated its ethical guidelines for data protection since the GDPR law has been put into place (BPS, 2018). Although it is a law prepared for EU and EEC countries, many other countries also highly value this law. American Psychological Association points out that its divisions work diligently to support efforts to achieve and maintain compliance with GDPR (APA, 2019). In Turkey, data protection regulations are named “Kişisel Verilerin Korunması Kanunu” (KVKK) (T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Mevzuat Bilgi Sistemi, 2016) and although it predates the issue of the specific European GDPR law, Turkish associations should and do give both regulations equal weight and do their best to comply with both (KVK VERBİS, n.d.).

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