

The Role of Clinical Psychology: Integrating Science, Humanity, and Practice



Brigitte Khoury, Ph.D.
Professor, Clinical Psychologist
& Psychotherapist,
Department of Psychiatry, AUB-MC

Psychology has long been recognized as a discipline that bridges the gap between scientific inquiry and human experience. Clinical psychology, in particular, represents the most comprehensive integration of the humanities, behavioral science, theory, and applied clinical knowledge. It aims not only to describe human behavior but also to understand, prevent, and treat psychological disorders in a way that respects the complexity of individuals and the social and cultural worlds they inhabit.

At its core, clinical psychology is about understanding human suffering and wellbeing through multiple lenses. It draws from the humanities—philosophy, ethics, cultural studies—to understand meaning, identity, and lived experience. It draws from behavioral science—cognitive science, neuroscience, developmental psychology—to examine how the mind works. And it draws from years of clinical theory and research to identify evidence-based treatments for conditions that range from severe psychopathology such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, personality disorders, to milder conditions such as anxiety, depression, traumas, health-related psychological difficulties and much more. This integration allows clinicians to provide interventions that are compassionate, scientifically grounded, and culturally sensitive.

Clinical Psychologist vs. Psychologist vs. psychotherapist: What's the Difference?

Although the terms are often used interchangeably, there

is a clear distinction between a *Psychologist* and a *Clinical Psychologist*. A psychologist may hold an undergraduate or master's degree in general psychology and can work in education, human resources, research, or social programs. Their focus is typically on understanding behavior, supporting wellbeing, and applying psychological principles in non-clinical settings.

A *clinical psychologist*, however, completes specialized graduate-level training that involves clinical internships, supervised practice, and advanced study of mental disorders, assessment, and psychotherapy. They are qualified to conduct psychological diagnostics, administer standardized assessments, and provide psychotherapy for a wide range of psychological and psychiatric conditions. In some countries (USA, Canada) the term clinical psychologist is equivalent to a psychotherapist and trained as such. In other parts of the world such as some European countries and Lebanon these terms are not interchangeable. A psychotherapist, after completing studies in clinical psychology, is trained and supervised in a particular school of psychotherapy (cognitive behavioral, psychodynamic, psychoanalysis etc....) and practices within the parameters of this training.

In many countries, including Lebanon, clinical psychologists and psychotherapists operate within regulated ethical and legal frameworks that define their scope of practice, responsibilities, and standards of care. The Lebanese Order of Psychologists, established in 2022, is the regulating and licensing body of clinical and educational psychology in Lebanon.

When Should an Individual Be Referred to a Clinical Psychologist?

Referral to a clinical psychologist becomes appropriate when an individual shows signs of emotional, cognitive, or behavioral difficulties that begin to interfere with daily life, work, relationships, or physical health. Some

indicators include:

- Persistent sadness, anxiety, irritability, or mood instability
- Difficulty coping with stress or trauma
- Changes in sleep, appetite, motivation, or concentration
- Panic attacks or overwhelming worry
- Significant interpersonal conflict or withdrawal
- Behavioral problems in children or adolescents
- Chronic health issues that are exacerbated by psychological factors
- Unexplained physical symptoms that have a psychological component (e.g., somatic complaints)

Early intervention is crucial: research consistently shows that individuals who receive psychological treatment sooner experience faster and more sustained recovery.

Specializations in Psychology and Their Relevance in Lebanon

Psychology is a broad field with a diverse range of specializations. Some of the most established areas include:

- **Clinical Psychology** – diagnostic assessment and treatment of mental health disorders
- **Child and Adolescent Psychology** – diagnostic assessment and emotional and developmental support and treatment for younger populations
- **Counseling Psychology** – supporting wellbeing, adjustment, and life transitions
- **Educational/School Psychology** – learning difficulties, developmental issues, and behavioral support
- **Neuropsychology** – cognitive and neuro-psychological testing and assessment
- **Forensic Psychology** – applying psychology within legal and criminal justice settings
- **Organizational/Industrial Psychology** – workplace behavior, leadership, and human resources

In Lebanon, there is a growing demand for these specializations, particularly in clinical, educational and neuropsychological areas of expertise. Several factors drive this demand: rising awareness of mental health issues, increased stress due to socio-economic and political instability, the lasting psychological impact of major national crises, a younger generation more open to seeking psychological support, as well as an aging population in need of assessment for geriatric problems. Organizations, universities, hospitals, and NGOs often recruit specialized psychologists to support mental health programs.

Neuropsychology is also an emerging need in Lebanon,

especially in hospitals and rehabilitation centers where cognitive testing is essential for neurological conditions, post-stroke rehabilitation, dementia, and learning difficulties.

The Importance of Clinical Psychology for Societal Wellbeing

Clinical psychology contributes significantly to improving quality of life across communities. Effective psychological intervention reduces suffering, supports individuals in returning to work or school, strengthens families, reduces stigma, and improves social functioning. Mental health influences physical health, productivity, education, and community resilience. By addressing trauma, chronic stress, and psychiatric conditions, clinical psychologists play a vital role in building healthier communities, with better coping skills.

On a broader level, clinical psychologists help develop public policies, train and supervise healthcare professionals, and contribute to research that guides national guidelines for mental health. They also provide crisis intervention and support during community emergencies—an area of growing importance in Lebanon.

Is There Demand in Lebanon for Clinical Psychology Clinics?

Yes. In the past decade, Lebanon has seen a noticeable increase in individuals seeking psychological services, both in private clinics and institutional settings. Economic hardship, migration stress, political instability, and the aftermath of the Beirut explosion have intensified mental health needs across all age groups. Clinics offering evidence-based psychological treatments are seeing higher demand, and waiting lists are increasingly common.

At the same time, public awareness has improved. Younger populations in particular are more open to therapy, more informed about mental health, and more willing to seek help without stigma. Many families and schools now proactively involve clinical psychologists to support children and adolescents. This trend suggests that the demand for clinical psychology services will continue to grow in Lebanon, especially as the healthcare system increasingly recognizes mental health as a fundamental component of overall wellbeing.