Chapter 1
Introduction to Forensic Psychology
Definition of Forensic Psychology

• Dramatic Increase in Popularity
  • Due to Popularity of Television Dramas and Managed Care Obstacles for Professionals

• Numerous misconceptions about the field: often confused with other forensic sciences such as crime scene investigation, etc.
Defining Forensic Psychology

• First need to define psychology
• **Psychology** is the science that seeks to understand behavior and mental processes

• Psychology is a broad field
  • Most people are familiar with clinical psychology – a specialty and one of the four applied areas recognized by the APA
Areas of Study in Psychology

- **APPLIED AREAS**
  - Clinical
  - Counseling
  - School
  - Industrial/Organizational

- Developmental
- Social
- Cognitive
- Educational
- Biological
- Psychometrics
- Health
Broad and Narrow Definition of Forensic Psychology

• Broad definition – *any application of psychological knowledge or methods to a task faced by the legal system*
  • Includes just about everything from insanity pleas to testifying about the psychological impact of trade mark infringement
Broad and Narrow Definition of Forensic Psychology

• Narrow definition – the *practice of psychology as related to the law and legal profession*
  • This definition, adopted by the American Psychological Association, focuses on the applied aspect of the field... that is, the practice of psychology
Forensic Psychology versus Legal Psychology

• **Forensic psychology** – *application of clinical specialties to the law*
  • Examples: insanity plea, competency hearings, child custody, death penalty sentencing, sexual predator evaluations, parole hearings, etc.

• **Legal psychology** – *experimental areas of psychology as applied to legal questions*
  • Examples: accuracy of eyewitness testimony, size of the jury, effects of pretrial publicity, trial consultation, etc.
Legal Psychology

• Consists primarily of the *non-applied* areas of psychology addressing legal questions: non-applied refers to the APA's definition of applied psychology

• Distinction between *non-applied* and *applied* areas of psychology

• Legal Psychology can include
  • Social Psychology
  • Cognitive Psychology
  • Developmental Psychology
  • As well as other specialties in psychology
Example of Legal Psychology

A developmental psychologist may have determined that this boy is mature enough to be a credible witness.
Legal Psychology

- Social psychology – study of the individual in the group
  - Social psychologists can work as trial consultants:
    - research on effects of pretrial publicity, mock jury trials to test persuasiveness of courtroom strategy,
    - jury selection,
    - witness preparation,
    - this area is discussed in chapter 9 of the text
  - Social psychologists can also study legal issues such as the size of a jury or effects of judge’s instructions to the jury
Legal Psychology

• *Cognitive psychology* – study of human thought (cognition)
  • Cognitive psychologists serve as expert witness on accuracy of eyewitness testimony, recovered memories and false memory syndrome
  • Cognitive psychologists can also conduct research on ways to improve gathering of eyewitness evidence
A legal psychologist may do a detailed crime scene analysis in an effort to identify the perpetrator’s “signature” of modus operandi.
The Practice of Forensic Psychology

• A specialty in the professional practice (applied areas) of psychology
  • Applied areas of psychology include clinical, counseling, school, and industrial/organizational.

• Most forensic psychologists are *clinical* psychologists who practice in the specialty of forensic psychology

• Large part of forensic psychology involves assessment and treatment

• Psychologists are frequently asked to assess an individual on a *psycholegal* question and then report back to the court, offering an *expert opinion*
Examples of common forensic evaluations are: (1)

- Insanity plea evaluations
- Competency evaluations including:
  - competency to stand trial, civil competency, competency to waive Miranda rights, to offer a confession, to be executed.
- Child custody evaluations
- Death penalty sentencing evaluations as in mitigating or aggravating factors
- Risk assessment for individuals about to be released from prison
  - Sexual Predator Evaluations (SVP Laws)
  - Dangerousness
Examples of common forensic evaluations are: (2)

• Suicide risk assessments for inmates
• Clinical assessment for inmates
• Fitness-for-duty evaluations for law enforcement
• Pre-employment evaluations for law enforcement candidates
• Assessment of psychological injury for personal injury lawsuits
Forensic Psychology: Treatment

• Provision of treatment in correctional facilities (Correctional Psychology – discussed in chapter 6 of the text)

• Post-release treatment in the community
  • Sex offender groups, anger management, domestic violence, drug treatment, etc.
  • Often times this type of treatment is mandated as part of the conditional-release
Training and Credentials in Forensic Psychology

• Most forensic psychologists are clinical (or counseling) psychologists

• Ph.D. or the Psy.D in clinical or counseling psychology with specialized training in forensic work, usually post-doctoral work in the form of continuing education; possibly a forensic internship or fellowship
Training and Credentials in Forensic Psychology

• Master-level practitioners – usually provide direct mental health services within correctional or police settings or community-based treatment programs

• Although work is available at the master’s level, credibility increases with the doctoral degree for work as an expert witness in court proceedings
Basic skills required beyond the academic degree

• Psychological Assessment Skills:
  • intellectual, personality and specialty areas, such as competency, violence potential, criminal responsibility, etc.

• Strong writing skills:
  • Reports to the courts, lawyers, probation officers, etc.

• Oral presentation skills:
  • Social presence when appearing as an expert witness
Career Opportunities in Forensic and Legal Psychology

• Forensic Psychology
  • Full time v. part time work as a practitioner
  • Correctional Psychology
  • Police Psychology

• Legal Psychology
  • Work in academic settings as researcher and mentor
  • Work as a consultant to attorneys
Brief Overview of the Course Topics (1)

- Ethical Issues in Forensic Psychology
  - Clash of psychological and legal professional ethics
- Forensic Assessment
  - Differences between clinical and forensic assessment
  - Overview of assessment instruments
- Criminal Responsibility, Competency to Stand Trial Evaluations and Risk Assessment
  - Case law
  - Assessment instruments
Brief Overview of the Course Topics (2)

• Police Psychology
  • Selection of law enforcement personnel
  • Fitness-for-duty evaluations
  • Counseling and Peer counseling

• Correctional Psychology
  • Unique role of the correctional psychologist

• Assessment of Psychological Injury
  • Tort Law
  • Evaluation for psychological damages
One of the responsibilities of police psychology is to aid in the selecting police officers.
Brief Overview of the Course Topics (3)

• Child Custody Evaluations
• Trial Consultation
  • Jury selection
  • Change of venue request
  • Witness preparation
• Criminal Investigative Techniques
  • Detection of deception
  • Investigative Hypnosis
  • Criminal Profiling
  • Psychological Autopsies
Brief Overview of the Course Topics (4)

• Eyewitness Memory and Recovered Memory
  • Accuracy of eyewitness memory
  • Techniques to improve eyewitness evidence
  • Repressed memories and false memory syndrome

• Emerging Trends in the Field of Forensic Psychology
  • Increase growth and sophistication
  • Increased cooperation between the two professions
  • Future training models in forensic psychology
  • Therapeutic Jurisprudence
Web Sites

• American Board of Forensic Psychology
  • www.abpp.org

• American Psychology-Law Society
  • www.ap-ls.org

• American Psychological Association
  • www.apa.org

• American Psychology-Law Student Section
  • www.aplsstudentsection.com