

Salaries and Job Satisfaction in the Psychology Baccalaureate Workforce

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Overview

There are over 3.5 million individuals in the United States who hold bachelor's degrees in psychology (NSF, NCSSES, 2017), 2 million of whom do not hold higher degrees in psychology or any other field. Despite the size of this population and the popularity of the psychology major, there is little information available about salaries and job satisfaction for psychology bachelor's degree holders.

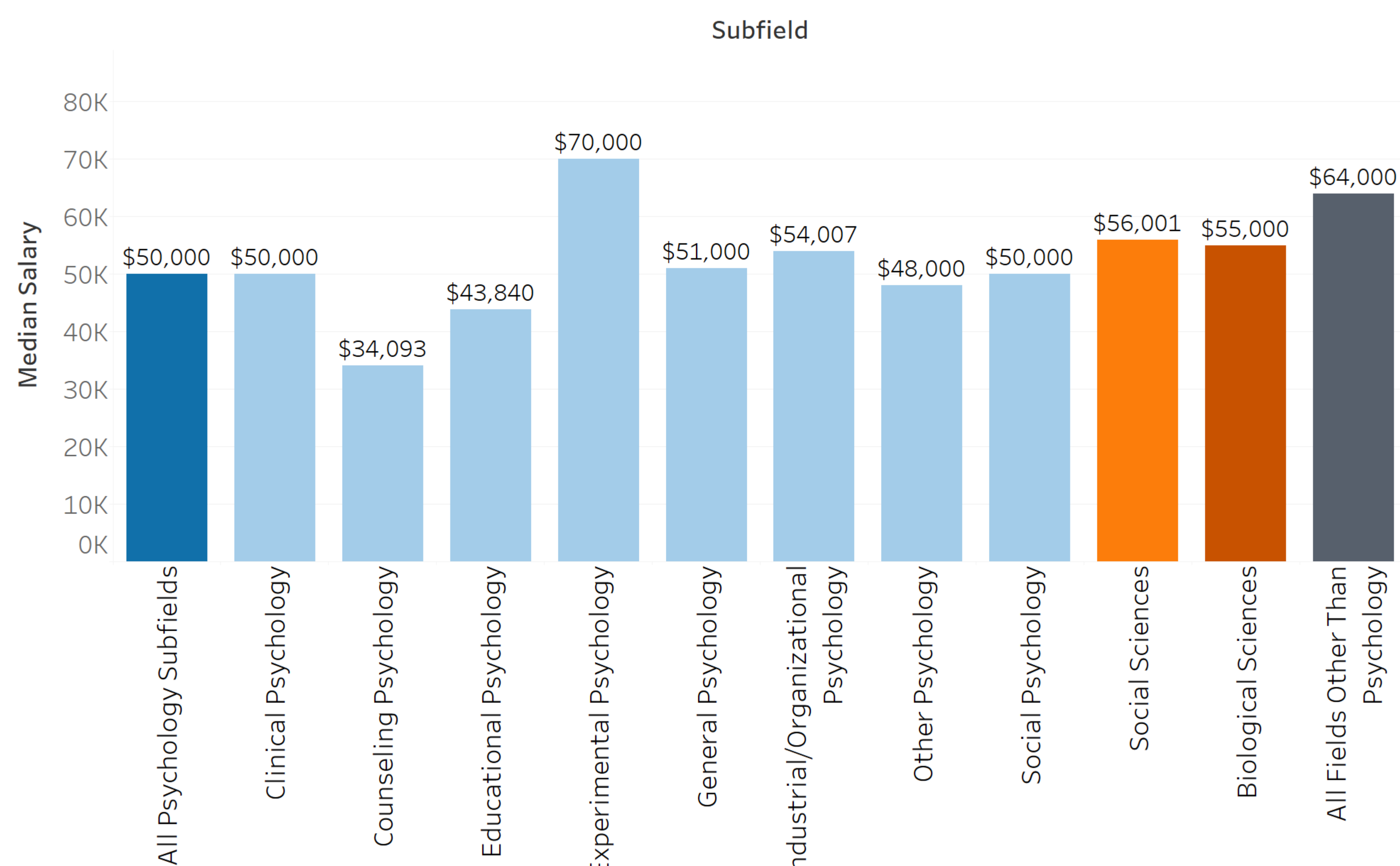
Method

A special analysis of the 2017 National Survey of College Graduates (NSCG; NSF, NCSSES, 2017) examined median salary and job satisfaction for psychology bachelor's degree holders working full-time in the workforce. The analysis included salary comparisons to all other fields, biological sciences, and social sciences and satisfaction comparisons to other levels of psychology degrees (master's and doctoral/professional degrees).

- NSCG is a nationally representative survey of the U.S. college-educated population.
- The present study analyzed data from a small number of questions relevant to salary, job satisfaction, and highest degree earned.
- Job satisfaction was based on a 4-point scale (very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied). This analysis reported the percent who reported being very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with overall job satisfaction and with each job element (Figure 2).

FIGURE 1. SALARIES OF PSYCHOLOGY BACHELOR'S DEGREE HOLDERS BY SUBFIELD

The median salary for psychology baccalaureate holders working full-time was lower than all other fields combined and lower than similar fields like biological sciences and social sciences



* Median Salary for all fields other than psychology includes biological and social sciences but not psychology

Key Findings

Psychology baccalaureates:

- earn less than other bachelor's degree holders
- Have high job satisfaction overall
- Are less satisfied with their jobs than other bachelor degree holders and degree holders at higher levels.

Implications

- While these findings may be discouraging, we believe there are opportunities to better prepare psychology undergraduates for the future.
- **Overall job satisfaction for psychology bachelor's degree holders was fairly high.** This finding suggests that these individuals were able to find meaningful work.
- We recommend psychology faculty **become aware of the career outcomes** of their undergraduate students and **provide concrete examples of how their psychology education develops skills needed at work.**
- **Additional research is needed** to clarify the relationship between psychology education and how psychology is used on the job.

FIGURE 2. JOB SATISFACTION BY DEGREE LEVEL AND FIELD ACROSS JOB CHARACTERISTICS

Despite being lower than degree holder's job satisfaction in other fields, the majority of psychology bachelor's degree holders report being satisfied with their jobs overall.

Job Characteristics	Bachelor's		Master's		Doctoral/Professional	
	Psychology	All Other Fields	Psychology	All Other Fields	Psychology	All Other Fields
Job Satisfaction Overall	85%**	88%	88%	90%	93%	91%
Salary	70%*	77%	74%*	78%	80%	80%
Benefits	71%*	76%	71%*	79%	73%*	82%
Location	88%	90%	91%**	88%	90%	89%
Job Security	84%	86%	83%	86%	83%**	88%
Opportunities for Advancement	63%**	66%	64%	67%	75%	74%
Intellectual Challenge	78%*	80%	86%	84%	94%*	92%
Degree of Independence	90%**	92%	92%**	91%	96%*	93%
Level of Responsibility	87%**	88%	90%	88%	93%	93%
Contribution to Society	84%	85%	94%*	98%	95%*	93%

Statistical significance was calculated between Psychology and All other fields at each degree level. * denotes significance of $p > 0.01$; ** denotes significance of $p > 0.05$. Statistical significance was calculated using the replicate weights provided by the NSCG.

Source

National Science Foundation, National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics. (2017). National Survey of College Graduates Public Use Microdata File and Codebook. <https://ncesdata.nsf.gov/datadownload>