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FORENSIC PSYCHOLOGY VS FORENSIC PSYCHIATRY

It is not unusual for lawyers or judges to turn to professionals in the field of psychiatry and psychology when the cases they are involved in are outside the realm of general law but turn on matters of human behavior. Forensic expert witness testimony is typically provided by only those who are very knowledgeable in their area of specialty. While many people have the idea that a forensic professional is one who works on major crimes (such as a forensic pathologist or coroner), it can actually refer to anything related to the law [5]. Forensic psychology and forensic psychiatry are both careers in the criminal justice system. However, each one has unique responsibilities not associated with the other. Both occupations require divergent educational directions as well [2].

Psychiatrists are physicians who have received extensive training in the areas of mental disorders, their diagnosis and treatment. Like other kinds of physicians, they can perform laboratory tests and prescribe medications for treatment, provide psychotherapy and provide therapy to individuals, couples or entire families. Psychologists, on the other hand, have no medical training, but have training and expertise in related important topics such as statistical analysis and psychological testing [4]. Forensic psychiatrists and psychologists are active in different areas of the justice system. However, both typically are highly active with the criminal population at some point in their career. Many times, they deal directly with the mental health of a criminal suspect. From different perspectives, the psychologist and the psychiatrist will determine the state of mental illness of the inmate.

Forensic psychiatrists have specialized training to help them identify and categorize the various symptoms associated with the inmate's mental disorders. It is usually their work that is utilized in legal proceedings as a way to assess and evaluate a suspect, a victim or a witness if it is deemed appropriate by the court system [2]. By the very nature of the type of work they perform, the forensic psychologist utilizes their services much different from those performed by the forensic psychiatrist. The psychologist is usually responsible at assessing whether or not the defendant has suffered some type of mental disorder.

This typically happens before the trial even begins. This is not to suggest that the forensic psychiatrist cannot determine the defendant's competency to stand trial. Both have the education and tools to be called to the stand as an expert witness in the case [1].

Either forensic psychiatrists or psychologists may work in a variety of situations, such as child custody evaluations or assessments to determine capacities of mentally ill people who are charged with a crime, providing judges or lawyers with information on the psychological implications of a case, and much more. Forensic psychiatrists are called on to provide information related to the use of psychiatric medicine or to perform psychiatric evaluations.

Forensic psychologists are also experts on the study of human behavior as well as psychological testing and can offer their opinion in a court of law. While neither of the professionals are lawyers, they often work closely with lawyers to provide the information about psychiatry that they are not familiar with [4].

It is the forensic psychologist that tends to focus on evaluating and measuring the mental capacity of the criminal defendant, especially as it directly applies to the crime involved in the case. It is usually their determination that makes an assumption of whether or not the defendant is found to have a sound mind. Still, the investigation and evaluation of the psychiatrist might have turned up evidence that contradicts the psychologist [3].

Thus, forensic psychiatry and psychology are rewarding careers that are highly respected in the criminal justice system.

List of references:

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