

Research Topics & Ideas: Psychology

About this document

This PDF contains 50 **psychology research topics** for dissertations and theses, organized into 10 areas of psychology, from child and adolescent development to trauma, abuse and grief. Each topic is written as a researchable question and linked to a completed dissertation (2022–2026, 29 universities), so you can see how it was studied in practice. Use it to shortlist psychology dissertation topics and thesis ideas, then narrow one down to your own population, setting and timeframe.

By [Derek Jansen](#) (MBA) · Reviewed by [Eunice Rautenbach](#) (DTech) · Grad Coach · October 2026

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Child and adolescent development

1. What do the categories we sort toys into teach children before they play?

See it in a real dissertation: [The intersection of toys and play categories for young children](#) · Stephanie Joanna Long · Northeastern University · 2022

2. Where does identity formation belong in the education of children?

See it in a real dissertation: [The place of identity formation in the education of children](#) · Emily Raudenbush Gum · University of Oxford · 2025

3. Can you measure what happens between a parent and toddler without asking the parent?

See it in a real dissertation: [Utility of an Emotion Coding System for Parent-Child Interaction Therapy with Toddlers](#) · Christopher K. Owen · West Virginia University · 2023

4. Does an early parent bond shape how well a child takes another's perspective?

See it in a real dissertation: [Moderating Variables on the Relationship between Parent-Child Bonds and Mature Decentering](#) · Kathy Tehrani · University of North Texas · 2023

5. How does gender identity form in middle childhood, and does culture change it?

See it in a real dissertation: [Gender Identity Development in School-Age Children: A Cross-Cultural Examination of Identity, Emotional Well-being, and Academic Self-Concept](#) · Kuzyk, Olivia · Concordia University · 2025

Cognition, perception and judgment

6. Why does moral judgment so often fail to become moral action?

See it in a real dissertation: [From judgment to action: moral cognition and the tenuous link to moral courage](#) · Nathan Kemper · University at Albany, State University of New York · 2023

7. How much of perception is shaped by the particular body doing the perceiving?

See it in a real dissertation: [Not Just Any Body: Corporeally Mediated Experience, Meaning, and Perception](#) · Alessandra Lembo · University of Chicago · 2022

8. Can a deliberate eye movement before a test improve recognition memory?

See it in a real dissertation: [Effects of top-down attention and individual differences on recognition memory and recollective experience](#) · Anna Kelley · University of Louisville · 2022

9. What happens to a neuroscience finding once it enters ordinary conversation?

See it in a real dissertation: [Intuitions about innateness and their effects on the perception of neuroscience](#) · Gwendolyn Sandoboe · Northeastern University · 2022

10. Why are some spatial reasoning problems reliably harder than others?

See it in a real dissertation: [Modelling the Accuracy Rates of Spatial Relational Reasoning Problems: An Analysis Facilitating ACT-R and PRISM Theory](#) · Nicolas Turcas · Carleton University · 2022

Counseling practice, training and supervision

11. How does mentorship differ for Black students in counselor education programs?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Mentorship Experiences of Black Masters Students in CACREP-Accredited Counselor Education Programs](#) · Hailey Brierre Smith · University of North Texas · 2023

12. What actually happens during an internship when site supervision is thin?

See it in a real dissertation: [An Exploration of the Site Supervision During Internship Experience for Clinical Mental Health Counseling Students](#) · William Thomas Zaffiro · John Carroll University · 2026

13. How prepared are school counselors for the crisis everyone expects them to handle?

See it in a real dissertation: [School Counselor Preparedness With Mass School Shootings](#) · Lidia Oviedo · Walden University · 2026

14. What are counseling professionals actually judging when they judge hirability?

See it in a real dissertation: [Perceptions of Hirability: An Experiment of Counseling Professionals](#) · Rachael Longoria · Texas Tech University · 2026

15. Does postsecondary counseling change how prepared students feel, or how prepared they are?

See it in a real dissertation: [Perceptions of preparedness: the effects of postsecondary counseling](#) · Cory Glover · Northeastern University · 2023

Educational and school psychology

16. What helps a college student explore academically rather than narrow early?

See it in a real dissertation: [Perceiving the Complex Path: Encouraging and Supporting Academic Exploration for College Students](#) · Claudia Lang · Dominican University of California · 2022

17. Can achievement motivation be taught, and does it hold after the program ends?

See it in a real dissertation: [Supporting Achievement Motivation in Black and Latine Middle School Students: Development and Evaluation of the Feasibility and Acceptability of a Motivational Interviewing Intervention](#) · Austin Roy Cole · University of South Florida · 2025

18. Does psychological capital protect community college students from dropping out?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Bolstering Effects of Psychological Capital on Community College Students](#) · Kyle Gamache · University of Rhode Island · 2022

19. How do school psychologists assess students whose first language is not English?

See it in a real dissertation: [California School Psychologists' Assessment Practices with CLD Students: A Phenomenological Study](#) · Hector Manuel Teran · University of San Diego · 2024

20. How does a school psychologist support a student with a brain injury nobody can see?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Experiences of School Psychologists Serving Students with Traumatic Brain Injuries: A Phenomenology](#) · E. Grace Ritchie · University of Denver · 2025

Forensic psychology and substance use

21. What is life actually like for women on death row?

See it in a real dissertation: [Capital punishment and imprisonment: understanding the experiences of women on death row in the United States](#) · S J Singh · University of Oxford · 2026

22. What happens to a tenant who defends an eviction without a lawyer?

See it in a real dissertation: [Equal justice under law: eviction reform and the experience of justice for pro se defendant tenants](#) · Kathryn Spencer White · Northeastern University · 2022

23. Does psychological capital predict how well an evaluator performs?

See it in a real dissertation: [Exploring the Relationship Between Psychological Capital and Social Justice Evaluator Performance](#) · Jennifer Villalobos · Claremont Graduate University · 2024

24. What does reentry actually ask of a man once he is released?

See it in a real dissertation: [Lived Experience of African American Males Upon Community Reentry Postincarceration in California](#) · Dan Ugochukwu Duruobishiri · Walden University · 2025

25. Can probation be built around support rather than surveillance?

See it in a real dissertation: [Exploring an alternative model of community supervision for men on probation](#) · John Voss · Cardiff Metropolitan University · 2026

Mindfulness, wellbeing and positive psychology

26. Can telling an awe story build resilience, or only describe it?

See it in a real dissertation: [Narrative psychology: Examining the science of awe stories in fostering resilience and well-being](#) · Jeff Thompson · Edinburgh Napier University · 2025

27. What do student-athletes expect from mindfulness, and does the practice match?

See it in a real dissertation: [How do college student-athletes' understanding and expectations of mindfulness and self-compassion change through an intervention?](#) · Blake Costalupes · West Virginia University · 2023

28. Does graduate student burnout look the same across two cultures?

See it in a real dissertation: [Burnout and Psychological Wellbeing among Taiwanese and American Graduate Students in Mental Health Services: Role of Adult Attachment, Emotion Regulation, and Self-Compassion](#) · Wan-Ju Chao · University of North Texas · 2023

29. What does awe do that ordinary positive affect does not?

See it in a real dissertation: [Awe and Positive Affect: the Role of Self-Transcendence and Self-Focused Attention](#) · Autumn Chall · Illinois State University · 2023

30. Does mindfulness training make flow more likely for a college athlete?

See it in a real dissertation: [How Mindfulness Influences the Frequency of Flow in Collegiate Athletes](#) · Kelly Torres · Clemson University · 2026

Psychotherapy approaches and outcomes

31. How much of a therapeutic outcome is set by what the client expected going in?

See it in a real dissertation: [Elucidating the Effects of Pre-Treatment Expectation Measures on Therapeutic Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis](#) · Christa N. Herrera · University of North Texas · 2022

32. What does a career intervention look like when the community designs it?

See it in a real dissertation: [Collaborating with Black first-generation African youth for local career interventions](#) · Johanna Milord · University of Missouri · 2023

33. Can a hands-on creative practice support early substance use recovery?

See it in a real dissertation: [Clay Use as Mindfulness for Women in Early Substance Use Recovery](#) · Cheryl Feldman · Dominican University of California · 2023

34. Does a treatment checklist improve opioid use disorder care in primary practice?

See it in a real dissertation: [Implementation of Comprehensive Checklist for Opioid Use Disorder Treatment in Primary Care](#) · Sophia R. Madden · University of San Diego · 2026

35. Does adapted CBT help when the health condition itself will not go away?

See it in a real dissertation: [Exploring the long-term health experiences of cognitive behavioural therapy \(CBT\) for adults with long-term conditions \(LTC\) in NHS talking therapies services: A qualitative study from the client's perspective](#) · Jodie Hawkins · University of the West of England · 2025

Social identity, culture and belonging

36. How do racial microaggressions affect belonging for students of color?

See it in a real dissertation: [Racial Microaggressions, Racial/Ethnic Identity, and Sense of Belonging among Students of Color](#) · Cameron W. Davis · University of North Texas · 2022

37. How does social media shape whether a Black student seeks counseling?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Lived Experiences of Black College Students and Counseling Based Upon Social Media Influences](#) · Shamanda Burston · Walden University · 2024

38. What does a community college intervention change beyond grades?

See it in a real dissertation: [Strengthening our assets and resilience: an analysis of the educational and social impacts of a community college intervention on currently and formerly incarcerated students](#) · Antonio K. Watkins · Northeastern University · 2025

39. What does the fear of confirming a stereotype cost in everyday speech?

See it in a real dissertation: [Speaking while Black: The Relationship between African Americans' Racial Identity, Fear of Confirming Stereotypes, and Public Speaking Anxiety](#) · Mayowa Obasaju · Georgia State University · 2022

40. Does claiming not to see race make a counselor less competent across cultures?

See it in a real dissertation: [The Mediation Effect of White Racial Affect on Color-Blind Racial Attitudes and Multicultural Counseling Competence](#) · Noah Scanlon · University of Denver · 2025

Sport and performance psychology

41. Which psychosocial skills does a coach actually need, as against the ones they are taught?

See it in a real dissertation: [Enabling Performance - Psychosocial Skills for Gaelic Games Coaches](#) · Paul Aherne · Leeds Beckett University · 2026

42. What stops athletes from seeking psychological support even when it is offered?

See it in a real dissertation: [Saudi Male Athletes' Experience Using Mental Skills and Attitudes toward Seeking Psychological Assistance in Sport](#) · Alhassan Abdulshakur · University of North Texas · 2022

43. What does social media cost an elite athlete, and what does it give back?

See it in a real dissertation: [An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Female Olympic Athletes' Experiences with Social Media](#) · Mercedes M. Sanchez · San Jose State University · 2023

44. How should a performance framework handle racial identity rather than ignore it?

See it in a real dissertation: [There Is No Finish Line: The RAMPS Framework – An Evolving Model for Working with Racial Identities in Sport and Performance Psychology](#) · Dylan Vas · University of Denver · 2025

45. Does prescribing exercise to adolescents change behavior or only intention?

See it in a real dissertation: [A Prescription for Exercise in Adolescents: A Pilot Project](#) · Alexa Sikalis · University of San Diego · 2023

Trauma, abuse and grief

46. Which early developmental wounds show up later as trouble with other people?

See it in a real dissertation: [Early Developmental Wounds to Interpersonal Struggles: The Role of Emotion Dysregulation](#) · Parth Sompura · Long Island University · 2026

47. Can a faith community open a conversation about family violence that services cannot?

See it in a real dissertation: [Using Transformational Preaching and Life-Skill Seminars To Promote Conversation and Dialogue on Abuse and Family Violence at Mount Olive Seventh-day Adventist Church in Toronto](#) · Jacqueline Peart · Andrews University · 2022

48. How should clinical training prepare someone to treat trauma in adolescents?

See it in a real dissertation: [Diagnosis and Treatment of Trauma in Adolescents: A Doctoral-Level Clinical Psychology Course](#) · Jasmine Cervantes · University of Denver · 2026

49. Do novice counselors feel prepared for trauma clients, and are they right?

See it in a real dissertation: [Prepared or Not? Perceptions of Novice Counseling Professionals on Working With Trauma Clients](#) · Christina L. Richardson · Walden University · 2026

50. Why is grief for a companion animal so rarely treated as real grief?

See it in a real dissertation: [Complexity and continuity in the human-animal bond - a thematic and storied exploration of companion animal bereavement](#) · Joana Czycholl · University of the West of England · 2025

How to turn a topic into your research question

A topic is a starting point, not something you can research yet. These four steps take you from a topic on this list to a focused question you can actually answer.

- 1. Shortlist three, not one.** Pick three topics from this list that genuinely interest you and fit the access you have to people and data.

Recommended reading: [How to find and choose a dissertation topic](#)

- 2. Read the dissertation behind each one.** Its literature review and its "recommendations for future research" section show you what is already known and what is still open.

Recommended reading: [How to find a research gap](#)

- 3. Narrow it to your setting.** Name one population, one setting and one thing you will measure or explore. That turns a broad topic into a question you can finish.

Recommended reading: [How to write a research question](#)

- 4. Line up your aims, objectives and questions.** Your committee will check that they agree.

Recommended reading: [Research aims, objectives and questions](#)

Work through these once and you will have a focused question rather than a broad topic, which is what the rest of your proposal is built on.