Growing awareness boosts demand for psychologists

Derek Abma, Postmedia News
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While much of the demand in the job market centres on technology and trade, there is also a growing need for those whose specialty is the human mind.

Psychologists are among the most in-demand professionals in Canada. In a report issued in late 2012, CIBC World Markets noted signs of a shortage of accredited psychologists in the country.

"Wages are actually rising and the unemployment rate is actually softening, which means there's an indication there is a shortage," says Benjamin Tal, deputy chief economist of CIBC World Markets. "The question is why there is a shortage, and one (answer) is maybe there's simply more demand, given the realization that this can help. People are more open to using (psychological services)."

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Information from Statistics Canada used by Tal for the CIBC report showed the unemployment rate among those in the category of psychologist, counsellor, social worker, clergy or probation officer had dropped steadily from 1997 to 2011, from 2.3 per cent to 1.4 per cent. The average income of a full-time psychologist in 2010 was $73,835, up from $62,469 in 2005.

"There's many that will say there's a shortage of psychologists," says Karen Cohen, chief executive of the Canadian Psychological Association, adding that awareness about the importance of mental health and shrinking stigma attached to those seeking help are part of what's driving demand.

In recent years, most new psychologists have been entering private practice rather than taking up positions in public institutions such as hospitals. Laura Nichols, an Ottawa psychologist who started her practice in June, says business is going well.

"I'm pleasantly surprised," she says. "Private practice is incredible. There's a lot of risk, of course, because you're on your own. You're an entrepreneur. You don't really get trained to be an entrepreneur. Most of us don't know anything about business and marketing, and so all of that is a big learning curve."

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