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CAREER PATHS OF PSYCHOLOGY GRADUATES

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A thesis submitted for the degree of
Master of Science
of the Australian National University

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis reports my original work, and that no part of it has been previously accepted or presented for the award of a degree or diploma by any university. To the best of my knowledge no material previously published or written by another person is included except where due acknowledgement is given.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael Willem de Looper". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Michael Willem de Looper

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Abstract

Little is known about the employment patterns and career paths of psychology graduates following their graduation from university. The responses of 576 psychology graduates from five major metropolitan universities to a postal survey were studied in order to ascertain their career paths following graduation. Although a majority of graduates undertook studies in psychology in order to pursue a career in psychology, less than 20 per cent ultimately worked as psychologists. The remainder found careers in a wide variety of occupations and industries, mostly as professionals within the community services industry.

Employment histories of three graduate cohorts were followed throughout the 1980's, in order to examine changes in the psychology labour market over time. Increasing proportions of graduates found employment as managers/administrators and para-professionals, at the expense of traditional positions within the professionals sphere. Specifically, occupations in research, welfare and business increased in popularity, occupations in psychology and personnel remained steady, and clerical and teaching positions declined in popularity. Private sector employment increased steadily throughout the 1980's, whereas government and education sector employment decreased, the latter markedly.

A number of factors were found to influence career paths, notably, whether the undergraduate degree was of three or four years duration, whether the graduate had subsequently undertaken higher degree studies, and the amount of workforce experience the graduate had. The gender of the graduate was not found to be significant, although it was observed that on average male graduates worked in positions with higher occupational prestige. These factors were used to model career path development for psychology graduates.

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