

The Psychology of Genetics

✓ **A look at how genetic counsellors help families understand risk, testing, and difficult choices**

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THE field of genetics holds a wide range of lesser-known career opportunities. One such profession involves helping people understand the complexities of genetics and how it affects human life. Genetic counselling is a service provided by trained professionals to help individuals and families understand and adapt to the medical, psychological, and familial implications of genetic conditions.

"My interest started with genetics during college, but I didn't want a pure lab job. I was drawn to how genetics impacts families emotionally. Genetic counselling lets me combine my theoretical knowledge with direct patient support during very vulnerable decisions," says Sangeetha N G, Genetic Counsellor at the Center for Human Genetics, Bangalore.

To enter this field, one typically needs an MSc in Human Genetics, Genetic Counselling, or Biomedical Genetics with a specialisation in genetic counselling. In addition, many hospitals require certification from the Board of Genetic Counseling In-

dia for patient-facing roles.

"A typical workday involves about 50% counselling, along with case preparation, taking patient histories, follow-ups, coordinating with genetic labs, and writing case notes. Some days may also include teaching. Genetic counsellors do not perform medical procedures. Instead, their core responsibilities include risk assessment, pre- and post-test counselling, result disclosure, non-directive decision support, and case coordination," Sangeetha adds.

Genetic counsellors work across various settings, including hospital departments such as fetal medicine, oncology, neurology, and paediatrics, as well as genetic testing labs, IVF centres, research institutes, private practice, and the pharmaceutical and insurance industries.

To succeed in this career, one needs strong knowledge of genetics and probability, along with skills such as empathy, active listening, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to simplify complex information. Emotional resilience is crucial, as delivering difficult

news is often part of the job.

Although the starting salary in India is relatively low, around 3.3 LPA, the field is steadily growing. With increasing demand in areas such as cancer genomics, prenatal testing, and personalised medicine, genetic counselling has significant future potential.

