

## Roanna Chan, Clinical Psychology Registrar - Transcript

**Denise:** Today I'm talking to Roanna Chan. She is a Clinical Psychology Registrar and currently working at two places, at Nature and Nurture Child Psychology and Peter Walker and Associates Adult Psychology. She did her Bachelors and Honours of Psychology at UNSW and then went on to do her Master Clinical Psych at Sydney Uni. Hi Roanna.

**Roanna:** Hi, thanks for having me.

**Denise:** So, let's get right into the kind of work you're doing as a Clinical Psychology Registrar. Can you explain the kinds of things that you do?

**Roanna:** Yeah, so basically, it's just being a psychologist. But it's just this stage you have to go through a two-year stage before you get your endorsement or clinical title. And basically, I work between a child and an adult clinic and one of them I do child therapy and one of them I do adult therapy. So, sessions are one hour each and then most of my days I see between like 5 to 7 different clients and that'll be like my whole day. So, I'm booked up basically. And I do that three days a week, and two days I spend as like admin report, writing days, and one day I kind of do some like YouTube stuff as well.

**Denise:** OK thanks, so without disclosing anything that you can't obviously, can you give us an idea about what types of things you're doing when you you're doing therapy with either the children or the adults?

**Roanna:** Yeah, so obvious there's a pretty big range of concerns actually that people present with, but essentially, in Masters we're taught different types of therapies for different concerns. And so a very common one for adults as anxiety or depression, and so we might use Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and what that might look like is I see a client maybe for one hour every week or two weeks for maybe 10 weeks or so, and then we go through a CBT treatment for depression. And usually during the week the client goes off and they practise things, or they implement things that we've talked about in session, and hopefully after we've done a chunk of therapy, we're able to discharge, and that's how we kind of see clients and turnover.

**Denise:** OK, so when you're doing this kind of work, what does it really feel like for you? Because I think psychology students often aspire to do this kind of a job, but I know that it feels different from what we might expect. What does it feel like to do this work?

**Roanna:** I guess pros and cons. It is incredibly rewarding. So, I do feel a sense that I'm helping people, and especially when people come back and there's real change or over time, you see that they really improve. On the other hand, there is quite a lot of pressure because you're the only one working with this client. And I guess, you kind of get thrown straight into the deep end as soon as you graduate because as a psychologist, you are the one person who's looking after this person's mental health. You might have like a GP and some might have a psychiatrist, but then pretty much you're it. The touch point. And there's no other psychologists in the background or supervisor, and so I do feel a sense of pressure. And then there's also, depending on what they're coming in with, times when the stories that are shared can be traumatizing or difficult to hear. And there's often quite a lot of pain or weight to them as well. So, holding that space and being able to set some boundaries around hearing what's going

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on for them, but also not letting it impact me to the point where maybe I can't help other people, or it's overwhelming me. That's the struggle that I'm still kind of trying to fine tune and workout.

**Denise:** What kind of training did you get in your Masters program to help you prepare for this work? What was it like?

**Roanna:** Yeah, so the therapeutic skills were really helpful in Masters. So, they really pump you full of all the different types of therapies they there's all guest lecturers from all over Sydney. Different people who do different forms of therapy. And we also have a Masters thesis as well, which is like an abridged version of an Honours thesis. Sorry, we also get that research thing again. There's so much research I guess in undergrad, but you do more of it in Masters. And so therapeutically, you do get trained a lot, plus you have to go into placements. So, more than half the degree you're going between the internal uni clinic. So, I went to USyd and USyd actually has a psychology clinic for their trainees. And then we also get sent into external placements. So, I was at Saint George Hospital and then Sydney Children's Hospital doing 6-month placements where we actually just got thrown in and we just started practicing, but with a supervisor to look after us. And so, therapeutic skills wise, training is incredible. I do have to admit there's not as much of a focus on like self-care and the process of doing therapy and how to support yourself. There's a lot on how to support other people. So, I guess if there's ever a con with the training, it's that I didn't feel very well-equipped to look after myself as much.

**Denise:** Yeah, how are you learning how to do that now?

**Roanna:** Trial and error. So, one conscious move that I've made is instead of working four days a week, so I think that's considered the full-time load for a psychologist, four days practice, one day admin, I've decided to do 3 and I'm doing Monday, Wednesday, Friday, so I never worked 2 consecutive clinic days in a row and that's been really helpful to prevent burnout. And another thing is we have so much control over our calendars because we're contractors. So, I can literally say on Wednesday I'm starting at 10 and I don't finish until six, or on another day I need to finish at 4:00 PM. And so, if I'm ever really feeling it, I might block little slots in my calendar to make sure I have that time off. And I also make sure that I have like a really quite well-rounded self-care routine and it's become an actual routine that I am intentionally always practicing. Because I can definitely feel when I don't have that in place. So, I guess now I've been practicing a year and a half full-time and it's taken pretty much up until now to get that mix right.

**Denise:** Yeah, I imagine it's something you'll always be working on and fine tuning throughout your career as you change as well. So where do you go to from here? What happens after you finish your registrar component?

**Roanna:** Umm, absolutely nothing. So, as a registrar, I'm still doing the exact same work that I would be doing as a clinical psychologist, so pretty much the only thing that changes is maybe the scope of roles I can apply for. I might have an edge up because some roles only advertise for Clin Psychs, but apart from that at the clinics I'm working at nothing changes. I just continue with a new title basically.

**Denise:** So, did you always know that you wanted to do this kind of work? Is this what you intended when you started studying psychology?

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**Roanna:** Yeah, to be honest, it was the only thing I was aware I could do when I started studying psychology. I thought everyone who did intro to psych were gonna become psychologists. And yeah, so I did walk into it wanting to do Clin Psych and probably not until third or fourth year did I realize that not everyone does do it, and so I did start looking around for other things as well. I've always wanted to practice and I felt like it was really aligned with my values and who I wanted to be. So Clin was never like my top, like I had to become a Clin Psych. I was like I'll do 4 + 2, I'll do 5 + 1, I'll do like a couple of years work in research and come back to it. So, I didn't really mind how I got to practising, I just wanted to practise, so I guess it's been pretty straight and narrow in that sense.

**Denise:** And do you find that practising as a clinical psychologist now is what you thought it would be like?

**Roanna:** Yes and no. It is rewarding. I have a really great sense of like achievement and the sense that I'm really doing something that's useful, and I feel great usually when I leave work. And so there's this sense of like 'ah, I love this work,' but there are lots of little aspects that I had no idea came with the career. And so one thing, for instance, there is so much admin and I have not only become a psychologist, but I've also become like a business owner and I have to write accounting statements and submit business activity things and do my own tax. And that side of things, I had no preparation for and I hate accounting, so that's a really big chunk of my time. That I didn't expect. Another thing is the solo nature of the work. So, for instance, yesterday I was at the adult clinic and apart from seeing my clients, I only saw one colleague and he was running sessions all day as well. And so, in internal clinic or during Masters, you have this massive tea room where all the psychologists gather and chat in your in teams, but day-to-day practice you're really quite isolated by yourself. Private practice is a little bit different to hospital work, but yeah, in private practice, literally you could be by yourself for an entire week, and so the only people you get to chat to or your clients, and occasionally if you have some time, maybe the admin staff, and that's as social as it gets, basically. So that's been rough. Because yeah, you're so used to being in uni with massive groups.

**Denise:** Yeah, that sounds like a big change.

**Roanna:** Uh, yeah.

**Denise:** And some people would probably really love that and others would find it a bit cold. My understanding is that there are many different ways that clinical psychology can look. So, if you're doing private practice, then that's sort of the environment where it's quite independent, but you also mentioned hospital work. So, what are some of the other possible jobs that you might have as a clinical psychologist?

**Roanna:** So, this I also didn't realize, but basically there's a public health system and a private health system, and private health is actually going to be the majority of your psychology jobs, and they're like the clinics that you drive past on street corners and stuff like that. And then you've got your public health system, which is where you're actually employed by NSW Health. And so every local health district has a psychology centre, but they might only have like 10 psychologists per local health district. And so, when you're within the public health system, it's much more team based. You're working in a

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multidisciplinary team, so you've got like psychiatrists, social workers, physios, and usually it's for clients who they can't afford private health or have a more enduring and severe condition. For instance, a psychotic disorder like schizophrenia or like an eating disorder which requires a lot of like physical health intervention as well. And so, usually more chronic and severe clients present to public health system. That's also where you might say like inpatient psychiatric wards, locked wards, and then I also know there are some clin psychs who work a little bit in the legal system as well, with criminal justice stuff or occasionally have to make calls to child protection.

**Denise:** What's the what is the job search process like once you finish your Masters and you're looking at the registrar process and further employment, is it easy to find work as a clinical psychologist?

**Roanna:** I have to admit my little job search journey was a bit of a wreck because it happened right when I came back from the first COVID lockdown. So, I was backpacking in South America and then I got stuck there for like a month and I couldn't get back home. And then by the time I got back home, everyone was on telehealth and so I think my job search was definitely not typical. To answer the question, yes, it's really easy to get a job as a Clin Psych, but no, it's not really easy to get a job that is suitable for early career. So, as a Clin Psych, I could go into practice by myself and open up my own practice. Or I could join a whole host of clinics all over Australia, but not that many of them are actually going to have adequate supervision where they actually walk you through and give you like really high quality supervision. I have unfortunately heard horror stories of people getting burnt out where supervisors forced them to just see you know 8-9 clients a day and they don't give them adequate support. And because we're recent grads, we kind of feel this need to please and we're just like, okay, I'll take it. And then there are also some clinics where there's a lot of other things that you have to do yourself, so like if you have to do your own admin and manage payments and there's no admin support. That's also pretty rough for early career psych. So, there are definitely always going to be jobs for psychologists I think, but finding a role that was actually suitable for me took probably like 3 months because I interviewed between different public health and private health roles, I probably interviewed at like 8 to 10 places before I settled on my final two that I'm at now.

**Denise:** So, Roanna, having now been in some practice, gone through the Masters and then doing the work, what kind of person do you think would really do well and enjoy this kind of work? Beyond maybe the skills that we know about, such as empathy and caring for others? What else?

**Roanna:** Actually, one thing I think is really important is the ability to like self-manage and have good time management, organizational skills and. I think in people's CVs and in interviews are always like, 'oh these are great skills to have,' but especially if you're doing private practice work as a psychologist because you are fully in control of your own timetable, you have to write reports outside of normal work hours. A lot of it is actually you figuring out your entire calendar, organizing school visits, NDIS reports, GP letters. And it's kind of comforting in uni, where people are always telling you when assignments are due and you know you just rock up to class and then you've got a bit of a structure. If you really enjoy structure and kind of having a set task list then it's difficult because as a psychologist it's pretty much you have a certain number of clients and then you have to manage all of the care for them in your own time. And you have to set your own boundaries, and you have to figure out what things are working.

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You have to motivate yourself when you don't feel like working and so yeah, just the ability to do that all yourself.

**Denise:** Absolutely, so it sounds like a lot of self-regulation.

**Roanna:** Yeah, time management. Organizational skills planning. I have a bullet journal that I obsessively love.

**Denise:** I love new bullet journal. I have organizational systems, but it took me years to figure them out. I imagine that it's hard to be developing all of those skills while under pressure to start practising as therapist with people. You know all of your brain will go towards your new role as a clinical psychologist...

**Roanna:** Yeah, yeah.

**Denise:** ... how am I helping these people? How am I using the things that I learnt to help them the best way? But actually, at the same time you're learning all of these other business skills.

**Roanna:** Exactly.

**Denise:** Mmm, I empathize with you.

**Roanna:** Thank you.

**Denise:** Roanna, do you have any advice for people who are looking ahead at possibly studying Masters of Clinical Psych and becoming a clinical psychologist? Is there something that you kind of wish that you'd known before you followed down this whole path?

**Roanna:** Yeah, I mean, I kind of wish I knew what the day-to-day looked a bit more like and I wouldn't change my choice because I do feel really quite grateful and happy to have the role and I find it's a good fit right now, but I think, have a think about whether you are okay being very solo for most of the time. It's going to be quite difficult, especially if you're a little bit young. I didn't take a break between Honours and Masters, so I just kind of did from Kindy all the way through to uni and Masters, and so I also physically look a little bit young, and so I think that is also associated with a bit of impostor syndrome, and that continues on forever. Masters itself is incredibly gruelling. If I could talk to my younger self, I would actually say take a year or two off and like try some research work. I have a couple friends who are doing Masters now and so they actually went and did two years of clinical trial work or worked doing research and to be honest I think they're actually better. They had a better time going through Masters because they had both some finances to get them through the journey because you can't really work too much during Masters. And also, they had a bit of a break to decompress and not go from a stressful Honours year straight into a stressful 2 years of Masters. And the other thing is just like figure out your self-care routine. Like, really prioritize that. Often, I feel like we're so pressured and we feel so stressed that we have to perform really well in undergrad and Masters. But if you get burnt out, then you can't do anything properly, like you can't help other people properly. But also, you can't really give that much energy to assignments. And yeah, so really prioritizing self-care would be like my number one piece of advice.

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**Denise:** Alright, thank you so much Roanna, and thank you for talking with me today this has been really helpful.

**Roanna:** You're so welcome. Nice meeting you.