

## Research Project/Studentship Description

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| <b>Studentship Ref: Psychology NWSSDTP</b>   | <b>Closing Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2025</b>  |
| <b>School</b>  | Psychology and Humanities  |
| <b>Centre</b>  | Research Centre for Translational Biosciences and Behaviour  |
| <b>Proposed Director of Studies</b>  | Dr Carol A. Ireland  |
| <b>Contact Details</b>   | <a href="mailto:caireland@uclan.ac.uk">caireland@uclan.ac.uk</a>   |
| <b>Programme</b>   | PhD via MPhil  |
| <b>Duration of Studentship</b>   | 3.5 years  |
| <b>Hours</b> (Full or Part Time)   | Full Time  |
| <b>Tuition Fees</b>  | Fees covered   |
| <b>Maintenance Grant</b>   | Stipend (currently £19,237 per annum)  |
| <b>Any Entry Requirements</b><br>(e.g. 2:1 classification/restricted to UK residences only)  | Candidates should have a UK BSc Honours degree at 2:1 level or above in Psychology (or equivalent qualification) and have completed a Masters level qualification in a relevant area (e.g., forensic psychology, mental health and/or research). EU and International applicants require an English Language level of UKVI IELTS 6.5 with no sub-score less than 6.0 (or acceptable UCLan equivalent qualification). |
| <b>Any Special Requirements</b> (e.g. driving licence)   | UK driving license preferable  |
| <b>Project Title:</b> Child Criminal and Sexual Exploitation: Identifying vulnerability risk markers to support client safety and professional intervention  |  |
| <b>Project Description</b>   |  |
| <p>Child exploitation has developed into two separate but related academic silos: Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE). Both relate to a child being coerced, manipulated and/or controlled into criminal/abusive activity for perpetrator gain (HM Government, 2018). Academic attention into CSE has resulted from high media profile cases, e.g., Rotherham CSE Independent Enquiry (Jay, 2014). CCE has received less attention, due to less media/government focus (Wroe and Manister, 2024); the UK Government only categorised <i>criminal</i> exploitation as a distinct type in 2019. Yet, it is prevalent among children, with numbers increasing (<a href="http://www.gov.uk">www.gov.uk</a>). Regarding CSE, Alderson et al. (2022) consistently notes half of UK children under 16 have been approached sexually by an adult, with 25% of these approached subsequently exploited.</p> <p>Further, emerging research captures negative mental health impacts for victims and risk markers for continuing exploitation, fitting with the <i>Protect and Vulnerability Model against CSE</i> (PVM-CSE; Alderson et al., 2022) and <i>Ecological Systems Theory</i> (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Overall, there is a need to detect and prevent exploitation risks, to learn from previous enquiries, avoid repeated service failures and ensure good-quality child-focused risk preventative assessments, to minimise and eradicate exploitation risk (Jay, 2014). Currently, services lack an empirical basis to determine these areas. To address this important area of need, this research programme will consider the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The prevalence of CSE/CCE and their co-occurrence.</li> <li>2. Vulnerability risk markers (behavioural/mental health) that perpetrators are targeting (and operationalising Ecological Systems Theory by doing so).</li> <li>3. Protective factors that offset vulnerability risk markers.</li> <li>4. Level of service engagement required to keep a child safe; areas of resource plentifulness/deficit.</li> </ol> |  |

5. Strategies for professional intervention to protect a child once CSE/CCE has commenced, reducing negative impacts and effective prevention.

To address this, we will collaborate with clinical services specialising in child exploitation, namely CAMHS (Wales) and HMPPS Youth Custody Services. Both have active interest in theoretically-informed assessments that assist child safeguarding.

To carry out this important work, the University of Central Lancashire invites applications to take up a full PhD studentship funded by the ESRC in partnership with **CAMHS (North Wales) and HMPPS Youth Custody Services**. The successful candidate will be physically part of a stimulating university environment at UCLan. There is also the provision for a physical base at CAMHS (North Wales) for the latter end of the research when/if required, and for the potential to spend time in a secure hospital in Liverpool to provide a variety of experiences for the successful candidate. Overall, the setting will provide unsurpassed clinical and academic support and expertise, a robust research environment and thriving research student community, which together will cultivate research talent and maximise opportunities for professional development.

The project benefits from the full support of **CAMHS (North Wales) and HMPPS Youth Custody Services**, and the student will operate under the terms of the standard honorary contracts. The student will also benefit from a broad range of professional training in related mental health and exploitation areas (e.g., vulnerability and protective factor assessment, risk assessment, clinical interviewing) that may be relevant to the project or their future professional aspirations.

Candidates should have a UK BSc Honours degree at 2:1 level or above in Psychology (or equivalent qualification) and have completed a Masters level qualification in a relevant area (e.g., forensic psychology, mental health and/or research). EU and International applicants require an English Language level of UKVI IELTS 6.5 with no sub-score less than 6.0 (or acceptable UCLan equivalent qualification).

Interviews will be held on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2025.

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| <b>Project Title:</b>                      | Child Criminal and Sexual Exploitation: Identifying vulnerability risk markers to support client safety and professional intervention |   |  |
| <b>School:</b>                             | Psychology and Humanities   |   |  |
| <b>Centre:</b>                             | Research Centre for Translational Biosciences and Behaviour   |   |  |
| <b>Contact:</b>                            | Dr. Carol A. Ireland ( <a href="mailto:caireland@uclan.ac.uk">caireland@uclan.ac.uk</a> )   |   |  |

| <b>Attributes</b>            | <b>Essential</b>  | <b>Desirable</b>  | <b>Measured By</b>        |
|------------------------------|---|---|---------------------------|
| Education/<br>Qualifications | <p>UK BSc Honours degree at 2:1 level or above in Psychology (or equivalent qualification).</p> <p>Completed a Masters level qualification in a relevant area (e.g., forensic psychology, mental health and/or research).</p> <p>EU and International applicants will need to hold an English Language qualification at IELTS 6.5 (no sub-score below 6.0) or equivalent qualification.</p> | Merit or above in a relevant Master's degree (or equivalent international qualification)  | Application               |
| Experience                   | <p>Knowledge and skill in quantitative and qualitative research methods.</p> <p>Knowledge and interest in forensic psychological fields of research, including application to working with victims of exploitation and/or mental health.</p>  | <p>Experience of working within an applied and/or forensic setting (e.g. prison, secure hospital, probation, police).</p> <p>Experience of conducting applied research within an applied and/or forensic setting.</p> | Application/<br>Interview |
| Skills/Abilities             | <p>High level of competence in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• designing/executing quantitative/qualitative research projects</li> <li>• numeracy, data handling, SPSS</li> <li>• scientific writing and oral communication</li> <li>• independent working and team working</li> <li>• self-organisation, ability to meet deadlines</li> </ul>                                |   | Interview                 |