



PhD Studentship Available!

The development and causes of psychotic experiences in adolescence

Psychotic experiences, such as paranoid thinking and hallucinations, are common in adolescence. It is not known why some teenagers have these experiences, and why they can become persistent and distressing. Recent research has shown that psychotic experiences are associated with stressful life events, bullying victimization, and cannabis use. There is a long-standing theoretical debate regarding the relationship between traits such as paranoia, and psychiatric conditions such as schizophrenia and major depression. The very latest research is clarifying the link between psychotic experiences and psychiatric conditions empirically.

This studentship will provide an ambitious and talented student with the opportunity to make considerable ground-breaking theoretical and empirical findings in the area of psychotic experiences and more broadly, developmental psychopathology and quantitative genetics. The post has additional opportunities for psychological investigations into psychotic experiences and conditions such as schizophrenia. Furthermore, there may be opportunities to develop international collaborations across countries and institutions.

The student will be based at the Genes Environment Lifespan (GEL) laboratory (www.gel.bbk.ac.uk), headed by Dr Angelica Ronald. The GEL lab conducts award-winning research into the causes of developmental mental health conditions. The GEL lab is based in the Department of Psychological Sciences at Birkbeck, currently rated as the 5th equal leading Psychology department in the UK by the last Research Excellence Framework (<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/psychology/>).

Candidate requirements

Candidates must have a First class or Upper Second undergraduate degree in a relevant scientific discipline, including but not limited to psychology, human sciences, life sciences, genetics, biology or mathematics. Candidates must in addition have at least one of the following:

- A Masters degree in a relevant scientific discipline
- Experience working in a research assistant post
- Other experience of working in a professional environment, ideally in a relevant discipline such as in a mental health or psychology-related role, or a pharmaceutical company.

There will be excellent opportunities for research and training. The successful applicant will be a member of the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development within Birkbeck (www.cbcd.bbk.ac.uk), an internationally-recognised research centre with an equal focus on theoretical, methodological, and empirical advances in understanding brain development. They will also be part of the Bloomsbury Centre for Genetic Epidemiology and Statistics (BCGES; <http://bcges.lshtm.ac.uk>), which includes research groups across Birkbeck, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and University College London. At Birkbeck, the student will be trained within the Genes Environment Lifespan laboratory, and exposed to the fields of behaviour genetics and developmental neuroscience. As such, the student will gain highly sought after interdisciplinary training in both quantitative genetics and developmental psychopathology. The student will be encouraged to attend training courses and conferences both within the UK and overseas.

Key References

Ronald, A. (2015). Recent quantitative genetic research on psychotic experiences: New approaches to old

questions. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 2, 81-88.

Ronald A, Sieradzka D, Cardno A. G., Haworth C. M. A, McGuire P, & Freeman D. (2014). Characterization of psychotic experiences in adolescence using the Specific Psychotic Experiences Questionnaire (SPEQ): Findings from a study of 5000 16-year-old twins. *Schizophrenia Bulletin*, 40, 868-77.

Shakoor, S., Zavos, H., Haworth, C. M. A., McGuire, P., Cardno, A. G., Freeman, D., & Ronald, A. (2016). Association between stressful life events and psychotic experiences in adolescence: evidence for gene-environment correlations. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 208, 532-8.

Shakoor, S., Zavos, H. M. S., McGuire, P., Cardno, A. G., Freeman, D., & Ronald, A. (2015). Psychotic experiences are linked to cannabis use in adolescents in the community because of common underlying environmental risk factors. *Psychiatry Research*, 227, 144-151.

Further details about the project may be obtained from: Dr Angelica Ronald, Email: a.ronald@bbk.ac.uk

Please click [here](#) for further information about PhDs at Birkbeck and how to [apply](#)

Please note Application Requirements include a CV, cover letter, 2 academic references, an example piece of academic writing and the standard application form and you must state that you are applying for the studentship with Dr Angelica Ronald.

Questions regarding the application process can be directed to the Postgraduate Administrator: Ida Akhtar email: i.akhtar@bbk.ac.uk

Closing date for applications is July 31st 2016.

Please note that interviews will be held in the week of 15th -19th August 2016.

