PhD Studentship

Title: What are the character strengths of people working with domestic and/or sexual violence and how do they influence their professional practice and personal well-being?

Closing date: Monday 11th May 2020
Interview date: Monday 15th June 2020

Supervisory team
Director of Studies: Dr Holly Taylor-Dunn, University of Worcester
Supervisors: Dr Blaire Morgan and Dr Sarah Davis, University of Worcester

The Project
Applications are invited for a funded full-time PhD studentship exploring the role of character strengths in people working with victims and perpetrators of domestic and/or sexual violence.

Character strengths are trait-like dispositions that manifest in individuals’ behaviours, thoughts and feelings and contribute towards personal and societal wellbeing (Peterson & Park, 2004). Strengths of character have been found to buffer against and overcome negative experiences, enhance interpersonal relationships and improve wellbeing (VIA Institute). Whilst various classifications of character strengths exist, examples of those that have been studied within professional and academic fields include mindfulness, resilience, authenticity and emotional intelligence. Existing literature suggests that being able to employ one’s character strengths within their workplace is positively related to job satisfaction and workplace wellbeing (Harzer, Mubashar & Dubreuil, 2017), and that these strengths differ across occupational groups (Heinz & Ruch, 2019). Understanding the character strengths of occupational groups allows for opportunities to enhance personal and workplace wellbeing and can signpost strategies to improve workplace practices (Merritt, Huber & Bartkoski, 2018). The last twenty years have seen the increasing professionalisation of roles associated with domestic and sexual violence. In 2005, the Labour government created the position of Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (Home Office, 2005) and a year later, introduced Independent Sexual Violence Advisors (Home Office, 2007). Both roles involve one-to-one support with victims of domestic and sexual violence and are often, but not always, situated in Third sector organisations. In addition, statutory services, including the police, social services and the NHS have all established positions with a key focus on domestic and/or sexual violence due to the frequency with which they encounter both victims and perpetrators.
Alongside the professionalisation of these roles, research has identified the potential negative impact of this work, identifying vicarious trauma, burn-out and compassion fatigue in those working with domestic and sexual violence (Taylor, Gregory, Feder et al, 2019, Slattery and Goodman, 2009, Wies and Coy, 2013).

Importantly, the identification and use of character strengths has been consistently related to enhancements in wellbeing (Harzer, 2016) and could offer a possible mode of protecting individuals against burnout and secondary effects of dealing with trauma. For example, research has demonstrated that strengths such as social intelligence and perspective protect against the negative effects of stress and trauma (Park & Peterson, 2009). Whilst high levels of prudence and forgiveness have been found to predict burnout in counsellors (Allan, Owens & Douglass, 2019). In challenging occupational contexts demanding high levels of emotional labour and interpersonal skills (e.g., teaching and healthcare), emotional intelligence can act as a protective marker by buffering the effects of negative emotions on burnout (Mérida-López & Extremera, 2017; Szczygiel & Mikolajczak, 2016) and compassion fatigue (Zeidner, Hadar, Matthews, & Roberts, 2013). Conversely, heightened levels of character strengths such as empathy and honesty might be positively related to employee burnout (Allan et al., 2019).

To date, research on character strengths and domestic and/or sexual violence has tended to focus on enhancing the wellbeing of victims/survivors or rehabilitating perpetrators. For example, character strength programmes have focused on supporting post-traumatic growth and ending violence in the family (Duan & Guo, 2015; Lehmann & Simmons, 2009). Currently, however, little is known about the character strengths of people working in these areas and whether they may influence how they do their job, as well as how they cope with the associated challenges. This PhD takes a multi-disciplinary approach to explore these issues, with the aim of better understanding which character strengths can mitigate against the emotional burden of working with domestic and/or sexual violence.

References:


Qualifications needed

Essential:
Applicants should have or be able to evidence:
- Education to Masters Degree level in a relevant area.
- A First or Upper Second (2.1) Honours Degree
- A sound understanding of quantitative research methods, and interest in the psychology of individual differences
- Ability to contribute to research study design;
- Computer literacy;
- Proficiency in oral and written English;
- Ability to organise and meet deadlines;
- Good interpersonal skills;
- Ability to work independently and contribute to a team;
- Commitment and an enthusiastic approach to completing a higher research degree;

Desirable:
- Existing connections/links with appropriate communities/groups
- Full UK Driving Licence
- Knowledge and understanding of domestic abuse and/or sexual violence.

Please note applicants may need to undergo a DBS check as part of the PhD.

Details of the studentship:
During the period of your studentship you will receive the following:
- a tax free bursary of £15,009 for a period of 3 years
- a fee-waiver for 4 years
- a budget to support your project costs for the first 3 years of the project
- a laptop
- use of the Research Student Study Space in Research School

You will be expected to play an active role in the life of both the Research School and of the School. You will be given opportunities to gain experience in learning and teaching within the School under the guidance of your Director of Studies.

Application Process:
To begin the application process for this studentship please go to our webpage www.worcester.ac.uk/studentships and click apply now next to the project you wish to apply for. In your application please demonstrate how you meet the essential and desirable criteria noted above.

The Interview:
The interview will provisionally be held on Monday 15th June 2020. All successful, shortlisted applicants will be interviewed. The interview process normally lasts around one and a half hours in total and includes a meeting with the project supervisors, and an opportunity to view the campus and the Research School.
In advance of interview, shortlisted candidates will be asked to submit:

- A sample of written academic work.

Shortlisted applicants invited for interview will be asked to give a short presentation (no more than 15 minutes long) which provides an overview of a recent piece of research you have conducted. You should conclude your presentation with a discussion of some potential research questions you would like to pursue as part of the proposed project. The use of Powerpoint or Prezi is optional.

Research at the University of Worcester
Research at the University of Worcester has grown significantly over the last 10 years. This growth is reflected in the outcomes of the Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014). Worcester was the most improved University in the UK based on Research Fortnight's "Research Power" measure, reflecting a more than four-fold increase in the number of staff submitted compared to RAE 2008 and a commensurate increase in the quality of the research. The University will submit 50% more staff to REF 2021 than in 2014 and is expecting significant further improvements in its outcomes. It is also reflected in the increase in Research & Knowledge Exchange funding over this period. The University has been successful in winning funding from a wide range of major funders: Research Councils such as AHRC, BBSRC, ESRC and NERC; major charities such as the Leverhulme Trust, the Alzheimer's Society and the British Academy; health-research funders such as the NIHR, the Department of Health and local NHS Trusts; European funding through Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+; and funding from local, national and global businesses.

The University is focused on research which addresses real world challenges and provides solutions to these challenges:

- **Human Health and Wellbeing** with research groups looking, for example, at mood disorders, dementia care, biomedical research, and violence prevention
- **Sustainable Futures** with research groups looking, for example, at crop protection, eco-system services, aerobiology and sustainability education
- **Professional Education** with research groups looking, for example, at the social psychology of education and the philosophy and ethics of professional practice)
- **Identity and Inclusion** with research groups looking, for example, at social justice, inclusive approaches to sport, religion & society, and Early Modern culture & society

The University continues to provide a robust infrastructure for research. It has a well-established Research School which houses its growing research student body and which provides a comprehensive programme of researcher development for staff and students. It established a Research Office in 2013, responsible for research funding, governance and strategy. The University is committed to further developing its research profile, through a strategic approach to its support for and investment in research. Its fully-funded studentships are part of this investment.
Research School
The Research School is a focal point for all our research students. It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking station
- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors
- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars

School of Psychology:
Furthering understanding of all areas of psychology is a key objective of the School and we conduct research that helps us to shape and understand our lives.

The University's transformational research projects seek to address some of the major issues both within our professions, local services, our community and beyond it. By pulling together academics working across Schools and disciplines to tackle important, social, scientific and environmental challenges, these projects are making an impact on people's lives and helping to expand our base of world-leading research.

Our research-excellence underpins the content and delivery of all our teaching programmes – undergraduate and postgraduate. We are committed to enabling all of our students to profit from a culture of learning aligned with our research and knowledge-transfer ethos, which is based upon critical enquiry, debate and self-motivation.

You can feed your appetite for knowledge at the University's research seminars, which run throughout the year on topical subjects, often closely related to individual research projects. We invite distinguished speakers from the University and beyond to deliver these free lectures.

Widening Participation:
As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and/or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

For further information or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Dr Taylor-Dunn (Director of Studies) via email at holly.taylor@worc.ac.uk

Applications can be online made at: www.worcester.ac.uk/studentships