**Project Title:** Populations Based Models of Childhood Trauma and Hallucinations.

**Supervisors:** Professor Mark Shevlin and Dr Jamie Murphy

**Contact Details:** Tel: 028 71 375619  
Email: m.shevlin@ulster.ac.uk

**Level:** PhD

**Background to the project:**

Several large nationally representative samples have identified associations between psychological trauma and psychosis \(^1\)\(^-\)\(^4\). Many of these studies have identified traumatic childhood experiences to be powerful predictors of subsequent psychotic-like experiences (particularly hallucinations) or a diagnosis of a psychotic disorder. Indeed, there is evidence that different types of childhood traumas (e.g. sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect) produce different hallucinatory experiences (e.g. visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile) \(^5\)\(^-\)\(^7\).

It is also well established that early traumatic experiences predict additional future traumas during adolescence and adulthood. Such multiple, or cumulative, traumas have been shown to be related to psychotic experiences and diagnosis in a dose-response relationship\(^8\). Indeed, multiple traumas are associated with many other psychological problems such as posttraumatic stress disorder, alcohol and drug abuse, and other neurotic disorders\(^9\).

This research project is designed to examine how early traumatic experiences can lead to subsequent adverse events and how this process is related to the development of psychotic-like symptoms, in particular hallucinations. The study will be based on two large scale mental health surveys that have been conducted in the United States of America: The National Latino and Asian American Study and the National Survey of American Life. These two datasets have information on almost 10,000 participants on which to conduct analyses.

**Methods to be used:**

The objectives of this research programme are to

- Describe patterns of traumatic experiences, both in childhood and later life.
- Model the longitudinal changes in traumatic experiences
- Assess the distribution of hallucinatory experiences at the population level.
- Model the association between traumatic experiences and hallucinatory experiences
- Examine the extent of co-morbid psychological disorders and problems in function and how these are related to trauma and hallucinatory experiences

**Objectives of the research:**

The main objective of the research is to identify the role that trauma plays in the development of psychotic-like experiences. In addition, it will address the important issue of the moderating influence of gender.
Skills required of applicant:

The applicant should

- Have an interest in mental health issues and adversity in childhood
- Be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the influences of early life events on adult mental health status.
- Have a broad understanding of statistical analysis
- Want to develop their quantitative skills

References: