

Clinical Psychology Research Projects 2024

N.B., Masters projects supervised by staff not in Psychology may require co-supervisors; PhD projects must have a Psychology staff member as a primary supervisor.

CEPSW Psychology Staff

Ryan Balzan (Lecturer in Psychology)

My work has particularly focussed on the role that cognitive biases (i.e., problematic thinking styles) play in the development and maintenance of delusional beliefs in people with psychosis. I have also contributed to the development of novel psychological treatments, including the metacognitive training programme (MCT). MCT targets the cognitive biases thought to cause and maintain delusions, with the aim of reducing the severity of these symptoms. Recently, we've extended MCT to other diagnoses, such as eating disorders and depression. We have a couple ongoing MCT projects that might suit a Masters student – one looking at an 'MCT app' in a psychosis population, and one looking at an online version of MCT for older people with depressive symptoms (MCT-Silver).

Lisa Beatty (Associate Professor in Psychology)

My primary interest is psycho-oncology, defined as (1) the study of psychosocial responses to cancer, and (2) psychosocial factors that influence all stages of the disease process, from risk, detection, course, treatment, and outcomes. In particular, I have expertise in the development and evaluation of digital mental health interventions for cancer. Within these broad areas, I would welcome student ideas, or I have a number of specific research projects that would be appropriate, including:

- Exploring quantitative predictors of adherence / engagement with a self-directed online intervention for women with metastatic breast cancer (Finding My Way-Advanced);
- Co-designing and feasibility testing a digital micro-intervention for newly diagnosed cancer survivors (Finding My Way-Micro);
- To develop a 'blended therapy' version of our evidence-based digital mental health program for early-stage cancer (where a combination of face-to-face sessions with online self-guided sessions are utilised).

Mariëtte Berndsen (Lecturer in Psychology)

My primary research interests involve the social psychology of emotions, stigma, and prejudice. I would like to supervise projects in the area of:

- Stigma (Masters project). Individuals who deviate (in negative ways) from normative standards in their behaviour and/or appearance are often stigmatized. This is especially so when they are perceived to have some control over their behaviour/appearance (e.g., obese people, people who suffer from depression). How do stigmas affect one's life and can we reduce stigmas?

Sarah Cohen-Woods (Matthew Flinders Fellow in Psychology)

My research investigates the role of genetics and epigenetics on psychological outcomes, and how environmental risk/protective factors mediate their influence through our biology (i.e. via epigenetic change). Understanding how the environment interacts with our genetics to increase, or decrease, risk of poor mental health (or resilience in some cases) is the primary focal point. Students in my lab are encouraged to work together to maximise experience and opportunity. Possible projects include:

1. **Introduction of genomic newborn sequencing screening programs:** As it looks more and more likely these programs will be added to current traditional newborn screening approaches, it is important we understand psychological predictors and impacts of such screening. In this research project there is opportunity to explore the impact of receiving genomic information for newborns on parents.
2. **Psycho-oncology:** This is a collaborative psycho-oncology research project with investigators from the Flinders Centre for Innovation in Cancer using archival survey data. A potential project could be to evaluate psychological predictors related to bowel cancer prevention. This could involve applying health belief model principles, investigating influence of fear on cancer, comfort with medical professionals, and a range of other factors.
3. **Genetic counselling:** Polygenic risk scores are starting to gather pace, and to be used in the broader sphere of direct-to-consumer testing, despite few clinically approved. Glaucoma is one disease where such testing is close to clinical approval. This project is a collaborative project with investigators in the Department of Ophthalmology, which aims to evaluate the impact of receiving glaucoma polygenic risk score information.
4. **Decision making and relationship with a range of psychological measures:** Australian Research Council funded study investigating how decision making through basal ganglian processes (ie., reward processing) changes across the lifespan, and possible relationship with disordered eating, autism symptoms, depressive and anxiety symptoms, and food preferences.

Edney, Laura (Dr, Research Fellow)

I am a health economist with a background in psychology. I am interested in the application of health economics to mental health and wellbeing research to support evidence-informed policy and practice decisions for improved patient experience, population health and health system sustainability. I am happy to consider any projects that students may wish to explore in the area of health economics or health services research relevant to the field of mental health, or I have some specific projects that could be explored for either PhD or Masters projects, including:

1. Investigating the comparative funding of mental and physical health interventions by national- and local-level funding bodies and whether factors generally considered in sensitivity analyses of economic evaluations (e.g., time horizon, outcome measurement, perspective) may disproportionately impact mental health interventions,
2. Estimating the indirect impact of national health spending on wellbeing and the implications of this for the measurement of health opportunity costs and for national health technology assessment decision-making,
3. Developing reference models to be used in economic evaluations for mental health conditions,

4. Estimating the utilisation, costs and outcomes of health care provided to Australian veterans.

Eva Kemps (Professor in Psychology)

My research activities focus on applications of cognitive experimental psychology in health behaviours, in particular eating. One specific area of ongoing research with opportunities for several post-graduate research projects (both at the Masters and PhD level) focuses on subtly changing the food environment to promote healthier eating. In particular, there is an abundance of unhealthy food in the contemporary Western environment, contributing to poor eating habits and rising obesity rates. Emerging evidence, based on the principles of nudging, suggests that making subtle changes to the food environment could combat unhealthy eating and weight gain. The overarching aim of this research is to find the optimal way of presenting food to promote healthier eating. Outcomes have the potential to dramatically change the way in which food is presented to consumers in everyday settings, from how vending machines are stocked, to how service stations set out their food displays, and fast-food outlets, cafés and online food delivery applications construct their menus.

Here are some relevant references, including from current and past students in my lab (*).

References

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Daniel King (Associate Professor in Psychology)

I have a broad interest in the study of behavioural addictions in relation to digital technologies, including but not limited to video gaming and online gambling activities, social media use (Facebook, Instagram), and online purchasing/shopping behaviours. I am also interested in the cross-over/convergence of monetised gaming (e.g., microtransactions) and online gambling. My research has mainly adopted a clinical/social psychology perspective, including studies of the social, cognitive, and motivational determinants of excessive/repetitive behaviours, and investigations of the ways in which certain structural characteristics of these activities may relate to maladaptive behaviours.

Current projects:

- Systematic review and meta-analysis of the effectiveness of interventions for problematic internet use, including gaming, social media, and other activities.
- Survey-based studies: (1) Australian mental health practitioners' knowledge, attitudes toward, and experiences of problematic internet use, including problem gaming and gaming disorder; (2) Problem gaming and related mental health conditions among Australian young people, including adolescents and young adults.

Julie Mattiske (Senior Lecturer in Psychology)

For Masters projects, I am broadly interested in anxiety, anxiety disorders, and health-related issues. I have supervised Masters projects in a range of other areas including perfectionism, schizophrenia, and alcohol dependence. I would be very happy to serve as the internal co-supervisor for most of the nominated health projects, e.g., diabetes, oncology.

Annabelle Neall (Lecturer in Psychology)

Workplace bullying has serious consequences for target individuals and organisations. Much research has focussed on identifying antecedents and consequences, leaving significant gaps in knowledge regarding the processes involved. Studying the dynamics involved is important because bullying is not a single event or instance of harmful behaviour; rather, bullying escalates over time. Nascent evidence suggests that bullying exposure erodes personal and job resources. This study tests the premise that resource erosion is part of the bullying escalation process. The findings are expected to support a new theoretical explanation for the bullying process and guide early intervention and response strategies in organisations.

Reg Nixon (Professor in Psychology)

My primary interest is child and adult response to traumatic stressors, including acute stress disorder (ASD), posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and Complex PTSD. For 2024 I have projects that can leverage from a larger ongoing project focused on resilience training / mental health problem prevention [PTSD/depression] in first responders and wellbeing promotion in significant others/family members (see Protecting Emergency Responders with Evidence-Based Interventions (PEREI)). There is scope for either a

Masters project or PhD to be accommodated.

Jessica Paterson (Associate Professor in Psychology)

My primary interest is in the relationship between sleep, mental health, and psychopathology in children and adults. I also have an interest in the relationship between trauma and sleep – across the lifespan, as well as for anyone who routinely experiences both trauma exposure and sleep disturbance, e.g., emergency service workers. I welcome student ideas within these areas, but also have some specific projects that could be appropriate for either Masters or PhD candidates:

1. PhD or Masters: Assessing the feasibility and efficacy of an intervention integrating existing evidence-based traumatic stress *and* sleep interventions
2. PhD or Masters: What is the mechanistic role of sleep in trauma symptomology? How does sleep before and after treatment sessions impact the efficacy of trauma focused cognitive therapy?
3. PhD or Masters: Sleep, mental health and secondary traumatic stress in children of military families
4. Masters: The psychological, social and emotional impact of caring for someone with PTSD

Melanie Takarangi (Associate Professor in Psychology)

Not available for supervision in 2024

Emma Thomas (Professor in Psychology)

Not available for supervision in 2024

Tracey Wade (Matthew Flinders Distinguished Professor in Psychology)

Not available for supervision in 2024

Michael Wenzel (Professor in Psychology)

My research currently focuses on responses to victimizations and wrongdoing in interpersonal or intergroup contexts. I am interested in victims' and wrongdoers' responses to wrongdoing in the form of confession, apology, forgiveness and self-forgiveness, punishment and self-punishment, etc., and the role of these responses in the restoration of justice perceptions, moral identities, and social relationships. I am also specifically interested in the dynamics between these victim and offender responses, the co-engagement of relationship partners about the wrongdoing, and their effects on self and relationship repair. These projects will be well-suited to a PhD (Clinical Psychology) candidate.

Tim Windsor (Associate Professor in Psychology)

My research interests are concerned with ageing well, and in particular engagement with

life in older adulthood. I would be interested in supervising Masters projects concerned with relationships between psychosocial aspects of ageing and aspects of mental ill-being (e.g., depression and anxiety symptoms) and well-being (e.g., subjective well-being and aspects of psychological well-being). Current topics of particular interest include positive solitude and self-regulatory energy as resources for coping with ageing-related losses, awareness of ageing-related change (both losses and gains) and self-compassion.

Stephanie Wong (NHMRC Research Fellow & Lecturer in Psychology)

My research focuses on the cognitive and behavioural symptoms of dementia and related conditions. I am interested in understanding the neurobiological mechanisms that drive these symptoms, improving the way we assess these symptoms in clinical practice, and developing effective interventions. My research methods typically involve a combination of behavioural tasks (e.g., reinforcement learning), standardised questionnaires and neuropsychological tests, clinical interviews and focus groups. These projects would be suitable for either Masters or PhD students.

Current projects include:

- *Cognitive impairment and financial capability*. Financial mismanagement and exploitation are common in individuals with cognitive impairment. This project aims to investigate the cognitive skills required to undertake everyday financial tasks (e.g., budgeting, paying bills, decision-making), and to develop targeted interventions to support difficulties in performing these tasks.
- *Behavioural changes in dementia*. When most people hear about dementia, memory loss is often the first thing that comes to mind. However, memory impairment is only one symptom of dementia. Other symptoms, such as apathy, socially inappropriate behaviour, reduced empathy and poor financial judgment, are also common. The underlying neurobiological mechanisms of these symptoms are not well understood. This project will involve a combination of various methodologies, including cognitive and clinical investigations, psychophysiology and eye tracking.
- *Behavioural interventions in dementia*. In the absence of a cure for dementia, effective non-pharmacological behavioural interventions are urgently needed. This project will adapt, implement and evaluate behavioural interventions for symptoms such as apathy and anhedonia in individuals with dementia.
- *Spatial navigation assessment for diagnosis of dementia*. Current clinical tests for Alzheimer's disease are not sensitive enough to detect brain changes that begin 10-20 years before memory symptoms appear. We have developed novel tests of spatial navigation (how we navigate our surroundings) that are highly sensitive to these early brain changes. This project will involve cognitive assessments of older adults and people with dementia and validation of these new assessments, and may include structural neuroimaging analysis.

I am also happy to discuss other project ideas relating to memory, executive function and social cognition in ageing and dementia.

Lydia Woodyatt (Associate Professor in Psychology)

TBC

Robyn Young (Professor in Psychology)

Autism is my main area of interest and I would be happy to supervise any structured well considered project in this area.

- Cross cultural identification by persons on the spectrum.
- Training persons with ASD in how to identify being scammed. How responsive are persons with ASD to training. Are they more vulnerable and are they able to be trained. Is this related to Theory of Mind?

CMPH & CNHS Staff

Dr Gorica Micic and A/Prof Nicole Lovato (Adelaide Institute for Sleep Health: A Flinders Centre of Research Excellence, College of Medicine & Public Health)

Masters students only.

We are interested in the basic and clinical aspects of sleep, insomnia, circadian rhythms, mental health and their interplay. Particularly the development of new, innovative therapeutic interventions and models of care for the management of chronic insomnia, circadian disruption and associated mental ill-health. The broad scope for potential projects are listed below. Each project has the potential to accommodate the interests of the student, so please discuss your ideas with us.

- We co-ordinate a research-focussed, public sleep health treatment service aimed to translate the combination of the latest research and technology into evidence-based clinical practice. Central to the agenda is the delivery of the non-drug and first-line treatment for insomnia, namely Cognitive Behaviour Therapy for Insomnia. Patient progress through the program is standardised to best-practices and data collected to inform ongoing research. Datasets contain self-reported and objective (e.g., Polysomnography results and wearable technologies) sleep and circadian rhythm data that are collected at baseline, post-treatment, 3- and 6-month follow-up. These data can accommodate various interests and research projects which we are happy to discuss.
- We are conducting a large-scale implementation trial on the management of insomnia in Primary Care. Insomnia is the most common sleep disorder and impairs the lives of 10-30% of the Australian, but <1% of sufferers can access the best evidence-based care being Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBTi). General practitioners, at the forefront of health service delivery, are ideally placed to manage insomnia but lack clear clinical guidelines, resources, specialist sleep training, support and tools. This project addresses the insomnia treatment gap in Primary Care management by implementing and evaluating a new evidenced-based model of care to promote feasible, evidence-based, cost-effective care pathways to reduce the health burden of insomnia for patients and the community. This project can accommodate a range of projects that we are happy to discuss with you.
- We have several additional datasets including our insomnia clinical service, an Australia-wide sleep health survey, consumer sleep tracking devices that have collected sleep data in the home-environment, and a survey of help-seeking behaviours in those experiencing sleeping difficulties. Broadly, these datasets include demographic information, sleep outcomes, psychological and physiological health, quality of life, treatment response, and

environmental factors (noise, light). If there is a particular area of sleep you are interested in, or a question you might have, please reach out to us.

Ivanka Prichard (Associate Professor in Health & Exercise Psychology, College of Nursing & Health Sciences)

My current research interests lie in the area of health psychology and body image, with a focus on the impact of social media on physical activity, food consumption, and body image.

Two broad areas of ongoing research with opportunities for several post-graduate research projects include:

- **Social media & body image:** Social media use is linked to a myriad of mental health concerns, including increased depression, body dissatisfaction and disordered eating symptomatology, and decreased self-esteem. This line of research aims to examine components of social media to determine the impact of different forms of social media (i.e. different platforms, different content) on body image.
- **Mothers, families, and body image:** Becoming a new mother is a significant time full of important identity and bodily changes for women. This area of research focuses on understanding body image in the postpartum period and developing interventions to promote body confidence (see <https://www.bodyconfidentmums.org/> for more information)