

Mark James Studentship (Geography Department, Birkbeck)

Project Title: Geospatial modelling of the prevalence of violence against children in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Project description

One billion children globally experience physical, sexual or emotional violence every year (Hillis et al., 2016). Violence against children (VAC) has numerous adverse health and social consequences on the victim as well as the family and the wider society. VAC victims are likely to suffer later from revictimisation, poor mental health outcomes and develop risk-taking behaviours (Chiang et al., 2016). Reducing such violence marks a global health and development priority, as featured in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals — 4: Quality Education and 16: Peace and Justice.

The prevalence and severity of VAC vary greatly within and between countries, but they are generally rife in low- and middle-income countries (Akmatov, 2011). Our preliminary investigation also suggests that the distribution of VAC shows clear patterns of clusters and other geographical characteristics at regional and smaller scales. However, almost no research to date has explored the geographical variations of VAC in detail and why such variations occur. Suggested contributing factors for VAC include local social norms/attitudes supportive of violence, conservative gender attitudes, and poor parental mental health and substance use (Cerna-Turoff *et al.*, 2021). These factors also show a varying degree of geographical variations, reflecting the local characteristics, but the extent to which the concurrent variation in these factors can explain the spatial patterning of violence is unclear. Evaluating the association between the geographical variations of VAC and those of local factors could offer deeper understanding on how and why VAC prevails in specific areas, and what can be done to reduce them.

The project aims to

1. Investigate the geospatial variations in children's experience of physical, mental or sexual violence,
2. Identify known and unknown contributing factors associated with the prevalence of violence, and
3. Understand the specific cultural and social contexts that create the regional variation of the factors associated with VAC.

The project will take a data-driven, quantitative approach, including

1. application of a range of spatial analytical methods against large sets of secondary data to discover the variations of violence against children at different geographical scales;
2. identification of local spatial tendencies among potential contributing factors; and
3. Evaluation of potential contributing factors through inferential geo-spatial modelling to reflect their regional characteristics.

Outcomes will be linked to the social-cultural contexts of the local units, as they may be attributed to unique local narratives.

The PhD study will begin in the academic year 2022/23 (October 2022). The studentship is open to both home and overseas students but will only cover home tuition fees and a stipend for up to 3 years. One of the successful projects under this scheme may cover the overseas tuition fees.

Subject areas/keywords:

Children, Violence, Spatial Analysis, Geographic Data Science

Key References:

Akmatov, M.K. (2011) Child abuse in 28 developing and transitional countries—results from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys. *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 40(1), 219–227. DOI:10.1093/ije/dyq168.

Cerna-Turoff, I., Fang, Z., Meierkord, A., Wu, Z., Yanguela, J., Bangirana, C.A. and Meinck, F. (2021) Factors associated with violence against children in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review and meta-regression of nationally representative data. *Trauma Violence Abuse*, 22(2): 219–232. DOI: 10.1177/1524838020985532.

Chiang, L.F., Kress, H., Sumner, S.A., Gleckel, J., Kawemama, P. and Gordon, R.N. (2016) Violence Against Children Surveys (VACS): Towards a global surveillance system. *Injury Prevention*, 2016 Apr; 22(Suppl 1): i17–i22. doi: 10.1136/injuryprev-2015-041820 DOI: 10.1136/injuryprev-2015-041820.

Hillis, S., Mercy, J., Amobi, A. and Kress, H. (2016) Global prevalence of past-year violence against children: A systematic review and minimum estimates. *Pediatrics*, 137(3): e20154079. DOI:10.1542/peds.2015-4079.

Further information:

Further information about PhDs at Birkbeck is available from the [research section of the Birkbeck website](#).

Application forms and instructions on how to apply are available from the [Geography, Environment and Development Studies programme page](#).

The application will prompt you to confirm details of any scholarships or grants (for your proposed study at Birkbeck).

Please ensure that you respond with: 'Mark James Scholarship'. (Failing to do so means that your application may not be considered for the scholarship.)

Please also ensure that, in the section where you identify your potential supervisor, you add the name of the supervisors and the title of the project you are applying for.

1. Check that you meet the **entry requirements**, including English language requirements, as below:

If English is not your first language or you have not previously studied in English, our usual requirement is the equivalent of an International English Language Testing System (IELTS Academic Test) score of 7.0, with not less than 6.5 in each of the sub-tests.

Visit the International section of our website to find out more about our [English language entry requirements and relevant requirements by country](#).

2. We request the following **documents** from each applicant:

- A recent CV
- Transcripts of relevant studies and – where appropriate – a letter from your course coordinator predicting the expected degree result (for those who are currently enrolled in a Master's-level programme or equivalent);
- A sample of writing such as your MA dissertation, or similar.
- A supporting statement. In the case of a Mark James scholarship, you will be applying for a specific project, which means you are not expected to submit your own research proposal. Instead, please state clearly in your application which project you are applying for, and use the Supporting Statement in the application to explain what attracted you to the project and why you are a suitable candidate for this research.

3. References

Referees will be automatically prompted to upload their references when you submit your application.

Please note that all references must be uploaded by **18 April 2022**. We strongly encourage you to contact your referees in advance to ensure they are prepared to upload their reference following submission of your application.

Closing date for applications is: 11 April 2022.

If you have any questions, please contact the respective supervisor(s) of the project you wish to apply for.