The Centre for the Psychology of Learning and Experimental Psychopathology at KU Leuven is looking for a bright and motivated PhD student for the following project:

The effects of sleep on fear generalization

The position is situated in a collaborative project that involves Prof. Tom Beckers and Dr. Yannick Boddez from the Centre for the Psychology of Learning and Experimental Psychopathology (KU Leuven, Belgium) and Prof. Philippe Peigneux from the Neuropsychology and Functional Imaging Research Group (ULB, Belgium).

The major research theme in the Centre for the Psychology of Learning and Experimental Psychopathology concerns fundamental processes of learning and memory, with a special focus on their role in psychopathology. The Neuropsychology and Functional Imaging Research Group focuses on the investigation of the relationship between sleep, learning and memory consolidation processes.

http://ppw.kuleuven.be/home/english/research/clep

Project

Arguably, fear generalization is the core aspect of what makes anxiety disorders so impairing: Fear does not remain specific to a single stimulus paired with danger but generalizes to a broad set of stimuli, resulting in a snowballing of complaints. A war veteran might, for instance, start to respond fearfully to anything remotely sounding like a gunshot, making life nothing short of unbearable. Because (1) generalization is a function of memory for specific stimulus attributes and (2) sleep enhances memory, sleep might be expected to reduce generalization, whereas sleep deprivation might enhance maladaptive fear generalization. In a coherent set of experiments that make use of the human fear conditioning paradigm, we will investigate how sleep and sleep deprivation affect fear generalization in healthy volunteers. The expected results will add to our theoretical knowledge of the interplay between generalization, memory, and sleep, and should help to understand the etiology, treatment and prevention of anxiety disorders.

Profile

• Applicants are enthusiastic academics who obtained a Master's Degree in psychology or a related discipline or will do so before 01/10/2015 and who have a strong interest in an experimental approach to psychopathology.
• Applicants have good data analytic skills, and have sufficient communicative skills in English, both verbally and in academic writing.
• Further indispensable assets are an inquisitive and creative mind, good problem solving skills and a collaborative and collegial attitude.

Offer

We offer a fulltime PhD position in a 4-year research project (initial 1-year position with 3-year extension pending satisfactory performance). The PhD researcher will be stationed at KU Leuven. KU Leuven is one of European’s top universities and is located in the vibrant city of Leuven, which has a strong international appeal. For more information, visit http://www.kuleuven.be/english. The salary will be competitive and in accordance with the University salary scales for PhD students. The starting date will be mutually agreed upon, but probably around October 1st 2015.

Interested?

For more information please contact Dr. Yannick Boddez, tel.: +32 16 32 58 67, mail: yannick.boddez@ppw.kuleuven.be or Prof. Dr. Tom Beckers, tel.: +32 16 32 61 34, mail: tom.beckers@ppw.kuleuven.be.

You can apply for this job no later than June 05, 2015 via the online application tool: https://icts.kuleuven.be/apps/jobsite/vacatures/53297653