PhD researcher position at the Institute of Public Health, Faculty of Biomedical Sciences at USI Università della Svizzera italiana

Università della Svizzera italiana (USI) is a young and lively university, a hub of opportunity open to the world where students are offered a quality interdisciplinary education in which they can be fully engaged and take center stage, and where our researchers can count on having the space to freely pursue their initiative.

Established in 1996, USI is in constant evolution, always taking on new challenges while remaining true to its three guiding principles: quality, openness and responsibility.

The Institute of Public Health (IPH) is an inter-faculty institute dedicated to teaching, research and service activities in public health sciences and its component disciplines. As such, it brings together, among others, the expertise of epidemiology, psychology, communication sciences, and economics. A key research area in the IPH is the study of determinants contributing to child and adolescent well-being and the identification of strategies and actions to promote a healthy development in early age.

The Institute invites applications for a fully funded Ph.D. position (100%) in a 3-year Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF) project titled AWARE: Mental Health Portrayals on Social Media and Implications on Adolescents’ Awareness and Well-being.

The project
Mental health is a prevalent topic on social media. While it raises awareness and promotes help-seeking behaviors, it can also lead to overinterpretation and self-diagnosis. To date, little is known about how and by whom mental illnesses like depression and anxiety are portrayed on social media and which implications the portrayal has on the perceptions, beliefs, and well-being of adolescent users. Project AWARE has four research objectives:
1. Investigating how adolescents perceive mental health, particularly depression and anxiety, in their daily lives (including social media).
2. Analyzing the portrayal of depression and anxiety on social media.
3. Examining the reciprocal relationships between exposure to these portrayals and adolescents’ perceptions, beliefs, and subjective well-being.
4. Investigating the influence of algorithm literacy, parental mediation, and perceived peer norms on these relationships.

The project uses a mixed-methods approach, including a focus group study, a content analysis of social media posts, a validation study adapting a previously developed Social Media Algorithm Literacy Scale, and a three-wave longitudinal school survey. The research will focus on adolescents aged 12 to 19 as social media use intensifies and peaks during this life stage.

Project AWARE is a joint project co-coordinated by Dr. Anne-Linda Camerini at USI in Switzerland, Prof. Dr. Kathrin Karsay at University of Vienna in Austria, and Prof. Dr. Ruth...
Wendt at LMU Munich in Germany. Three Ph.D. researchers (one at each university) will collaboratively work on the project that foresees data collection in German-speaking Switzerland, Austria and Germany.

The Ph.D. Position
The Ph.D. candidate at USI will be enrolled in the doctoral school of the Faculty of Biomedical Sciences and follow the Ph.D. program in Public Health. S/he will work under the scientific supervision of Dr. Anne-Linda Camerini, co-supervised by Prof. Dr. Ruth Wendt from LMU Munich.

The Ph.D. candidate will be involved in all phases of the project and closely collaborate with the other two Ph.D. candidates, though develop his or her own cumulative (paper-based) dissertation.

On the teaching side, s/he will work as teaching assistant in courses offered by Dr. Anne-Linda Camerini at either bachelor or master level, helping in the preparation of teaching materials and tutoring students.

The Ph.D. candidate is also asked to present the research output at scientific conferences and produce publications for scientific journals as part of his or her cumulative dissertation and beyond.

Candidates’ profile
Ideal candidates should satisfy the following requirements:

- Have a Master (or equivalent title) in Communication Science, Psychology, Public Health, or related disciplines
- Be German mother tongue (data collection in German-speaking schools)
- Have excellent skills in oral and written English (official language of the Ph.D. program)
- Be curious, creative, and interested in learning from different disciplines
- Be adept in qualitative and quantitative research methods, including data analysis, with a demonstrated ability to learn new techniques
- Be able to work independently, proactively plan and direct own work, and manage one’s time and resources efficiently
- Be able to work in a team while autonomous in scheduling research steps. Be interested in teaching and tutoring students and available to collaborate in an international team with colleagues from Germany and Austria.

Contract terms
Admission to the Ph.D. program is highly competitive. Admission decisions are based on the candidate’s background, interests, attitude and potential for academic achievement. Successful enrolment in the Ph.D. program and the position as doctoral researcher are not compatible with a further professional activity.

The position is fully financed for the duration of 3 years (36 months), and the salary levels correspond to those set by the Swiss National Science Foundation for Ph.D. researchers.

Workplace is USI Università della Svizzera italiana, located in Lugano, Switzerland. Availability to travel to other parts of Switzerland and abroad (for purposes of collaboration and research) is required.

Starting date is 1st December 2024. However, the position will be kept open until a suitable candidate has been found.
The Application
The application should contain:

- A letter in which the applicant describes his or her research interests and the motivation to apply for the specific project and position,
- A complete CV including any scientific output to date, if applicable
- Copies of relevant diplomas, certificates as well as the full transcript of records (ECTS) that prove the candidates’ eligibility for doctoral studies
- An electronic version of the Master thesis accompanied by a short summary in English (1 page maximum)
- A support letter written by the Master thesis supervisor (or another Professor who knows the candidate well)

Before proceeding with the ONLINE submission, please read the “Information on personal data processing of job candidates” available at the following LINK. In the online form, you will be asked to declare that you have read and understood our privacy policy.

Applications must be submitted ONLINE by filling out the form accessible through the following link: CANDIDATES. You will also need to upload the documents listed above.

Requests for further information to Dr. Anne-Linda Camerini (anne.linda.camerini@usi.ch).

Applications received before 30th September 2024, will be given priority. Shortlisted applicants will be invited to an online interview. Please remember that German mother tongue is required.

USI strives to be an equal opportunity and family friendly employer and is further responsive to the needs of dual career couples. We guarantee that the selection process will give equal opportunities to female and male researchers. As an institution that values diversity, USI particularly encourages applications from women and from all individuals from underrepresented groups.

Lugano, 11.07.2024