

**Doctoral Degree in Counselling Psychology (Glasgow Caledonian University, UK).**

**Dr.Kristen Xerri Frendo**

I am writing to express my sincere gratitude to the Tertiary Education Scholarship Scheme Malta. The research work disclosed in this publication was carried out following the award of the Tertiary Education Scholarship.

Having successfully graduated as professional social worker and as a child and adolescent research specialist, I decided to go a step further and advance my studies on a doctoral level. My decision to continue pursue my studies emerged from the felt need to continue master my knowledge, skills and experiences in the mental health sector. Hence, I decided to carry out a doctoral degree in Counselling Psychology in the United Kingdom. The course of study involved a 3-year intense full-time program which included both practical and research-based components. While the doctoral degree helped me to master my research skills it also gave me the chance to experience intensive therapeutic clinics in different settings such as NHS and trauma private clinics which continued to enhance my experiences to work with individuals experiencing various psychological difficulties. In order to be able to provide a person-centred psychological care, the doctoral training equipped me with knowledge and skills about various therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Person Centred, Compassion Focused, Psychodynamic, Family Therapy and others. Such knowledge gave me the skill and capacity to combine evidence-based research with practical therapeutic interventions, which is the best form of integrative care. Eventually, this doctoral degree also gave me the protected title of a professional Counselling Psychologist and Scientist Practitioner accredited by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). Such title brings with it duties and obligations in line with ethical codes in order to serve the public in the most accountable, integrous and respectful manner.

A particular area which I decided to focus my research project on was the field of child sexual abuse. As part of my research, I was interested to explore the role of Counselling Psychologists specialised skills, knowledge and experience to be able to work effectively with child sexual abuse survivors. My research employed a qualitative methodology where a sample of 20 Counselling Psychologists were interviewed using a semi-structured approach based on a thematic analysis procedure. The outcome of the project clearly portrayed the importance for Counselling Psychologists to use their skills, knowledge and experience to strengthen their understanding of child sexual abuse survivors' experiences in therapy. Moreover, the study showed that skills, knowledge and experience can serve to enable safer trauma processing that can lead to positive therapeutic outcome and improvement in the client's holistic wellbeing.