Keele Mental Health Research Group PhD Studentship Programme

Studentship – culturally responsive resources for comorbid mental health and gastrointestinal conditions

Research School where studentship will be held	School of Medicine
Studentship reference	FMHS_CMHPH26
Web link to any further information (e.g. Research Institute/School/Faculty)	https://www.keele.ac.uk/health/fmhsresearchthemes/mentalhealthandwellbeing/
Research topic or field - title	Mental Health in Primary and Community Care
Research topic or field full description (or attached document).	Keele University has been awarded a prestigious research grant from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) to establish a Mental Health Research Group. As part of this we are offering a fully funded PhD studentship to commence in early 2027. The studentship topic will focus on **culturally responsive resources for comorbid mental health and gastrointestinal conditions**. See Supplementary Information below.
Expected start date	25.1.27
Mode of attendance	Full-time, Part-time (0.8FTE)
Funding support available – Fees, stipend, duration	Fully funded. 100% Home tuition fees for 3 years at £5,238 pa in 2026/7, exact rate for 2027/8 subject to confirmation and stipend support for 3 years at £21,805 pa in 2026/7, exact rate for 2027/8 subject to confirmation. International applicants are welcome and must be eligible for a student visa. The studentship covers tuition fees at the home rate only; therefore, international applicants will be required to fund the difference between the international and home fee rates. For 2026–27, this amounts to £12,616 per year (£17,854 less £5,238). Students are also provided with access to Faculty research training funds for research related expenses including - but not limited to - conference attendance, external training courses and UK fieldwork.
Source of funding	National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR)
Eligibility criteria	See candidate profile
Terms and conditions of studentship	As per the University Code of Practice
Number of studentships available	1
Application details	Please go to http://www.keele.ac.uk/pgresearch/studentships/ and click on the "Apply online here" button in this studentship. Please quote FMHS_CMHPH26 on your application.
Closing date for applications	3.1.27
Contact for further information and to whom applications will be sent	fmhs_pgradmin@keele.ac.uk b.saunders@keele.ac.uk

Candidate profile

	Essential	Desirable
Qualifications, Experience and Skills	An undergraduate degree in health sciences or other cognate discipline (e.g. psychology, sociology) Knowledge of mental health, healthcare policies and primary and community-based care Familiarity with theories and concepts relevant to mental health research	A postgraduate qualification in health sciences or other cognate discipline Familiarity with mental health service delivery and/or policy related issues Experience of working with diverse communities including public, private and voluntary sectors
Attitude and Personality	Effective communication (oral and written) skills, presentation and training skills Good interpersonal skills Ability to work independently and as part of a team on research programmes Ability to initiate, plan, organise, implement and deliver programmes of work Willingness to learn new skills	

Keele University values diversity and is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity. In support of these commitments, Keele University particularly welcomes applications from women and from individuals of black and ethnic minority backgrounds for this post. More information is available on these web pages:

https://www.keele.ac.uk/equalitydiversity/

https://www.keele.ac.uk/athenaswan/ https://www.keele.ac. uk/raceequalitycharter/disabilityconfident/

The Keele Mental Health Research Group PhD Studentship Programme

Supplementary Information

About the Programme

Keele University has been awarded a prestigious research grant from the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) to host a Mental Health Research Group (MHRG). As part of this we are offering a fully funded PhD studentship to commence in January/February 2027.

Keele University has a distinguished reputation for producing internationally excellent, creative, and innovative research across disciplines. Our research is positioned at the forefront of contemporary scholarly debates, delivering impact that extends beyond academia, engaging with and contributing to wider society. Through collaborations with our partner Higher Education Institutes (e.g. University of Birmingham, Kings College London), NHS partners (e.g. Midlands Foundation University NHS Foundation Trust) and other local, regional, and international partners, we foster interdisciplinary engagement with communities, industries, and global networks. Our Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) are at the heart of this work.

PGRs are supported by the Keele Doctoral Academy, which exists to cultivate postgraduate research and training of the highest standard, facilitating PGR productivity and development whilst promoting wellbeing.

We welcome applicants from all backgrounds to join our research community and engage with our high-quality programmes, world-leading research, and the broader opportunities we offer. We particularly welcome applications from prospective candidates from backgrounds that are historically underrepresented in Higher Education.

Studentship proposal: Co-designing culturally responsive resources to support primary care engagement for people with comorbid mental health and gastrointestinal conditions

Lead supervisor: Dr Ben Saunders b.saunders@keele.ac.uk

Aim

The aim of this PhD study is to understand and address socio-cultural factors and barriers to primary care help-seeking and care delivery for comorbid mental health conditions and physical health problems, such as gastrointestinal problems, among people from minority ethnic backgrounds, and to co-design resources to support individuals, communities and healthcare professionals.

Approach

A mixed methods study design will be adopted, across 3 phases:

Phase 1: Community-based participatory research (CBPR) within different ethnic and cultural communities, and primary care professional interviews:

- Creative qualitative methods, such as: Storytelling workshops, photo elicitation, or body mapping to explore lived experience, understandings, care needs and barriers to help-seeking.
- Faith leader engagement: Interviews or focus groups with imams, pastors and/or community leaders.
- Semi-structured interviews with primary care professionals

Phase 2: Secondary data analyses using existing population-based cohort data, such as the 1970 British Cohort

Study (BCS70), to examine how socio-cultural factors and ethnicity are associated with comorbid gastrointestinal and common mental health conditions, and patterns of health service use.

Phase 3: Co-design workshops with primary care professionals, members of ethnic and cultural communities and faith leaders to design culturally sensitive resources to:

- Increase awareness and understanding of gastrointestinal and mental health symptoms among different cultural communities
- Address socio-cultural and religious barriers to help-seeking
- Increase knowledge, skills and understanding of primary care professionals about cultural and religious considerations related to management of these conditions.

Output

An outline of the content and format of community-facing resources and training resources for primary care professionals will be produced, that can be co-developed and tested as part of a future research grant or postdoctoral fellowship.

Please note: *The studentship proposal is for guidance only. The successful candidate will be encouraged to work with their PhD supervisory to shape the research proposal.*