

# Public Health Institute Journal

“Celebrating academic work by  
students in environmental health,  
public health, and health and social  
care”

# Welcome

**Welcome to the ninth issue of the PHI journal. Our guest editorial comes from Graeme Mitchell who is the programme lead on the BSc Environmental Health. This year, Graeme was awarded the outstanding teacher award at the annual JMSU Student Experience Awards, voted for by LJMU students.**

The submission of your dissertation often signals the end of your time at LJMU, the culmination of three years hard work and commitment. I'm sure that the last three years have flown by, perhaps you recall someone telling you on your first day, that it will all be over in the blink of an eye? I'm sure you also recall thinking how impossible a dissertation sounded when you first came across it. How could you think of an idea, let alone undertake and write up an original piece of research? How could you write something that was 10,000 words long, when you doubted you even knew 10,000 words? But you did it, and you should be proud that you did.

Whilst I hope that your dissertation was all plain sailing, I suspect that for most of you there were a few bumps in the road along the way. In all fairness, no one promised that your dissertation was going to be a smooth ride but you navigated your way through it to the end. Your dissertation was three years in the making and the fact that your dissertation is included in this journal is a recognition of your success – trust me, I know that sometimes it takes a while to be recognised (I'll just say JMSU Outstanding Teacher award and leave that there).

It may be hard to believe, but as academics success to us is not just measured in terms of the marks achieved. It's also measured in seeing you as a student develop and grow as a person over the last three years, and it has been a pleasure and a privilege to be able to be part of your journey.

The dissertations contained within this years' journal cover a wide range of topics, which highlights the diversity of subjects, which formed part of your programmes, and how they have the potential to touch every aspect of our daily lives. I think this shows how important the subjects you have studied are and how you now, genuinely, have the opportunity to go out and make the world a better place.

It is easy to see your dissertation as an end point, as you transition from a student to a graduate, but in other ways it is also a beginning. As this is a beginning, it is worthwhile to consider for a moment what the future will hold – for some of you your dissertation will form the foundation of your new career, for others you'll take a different path, but regardless, always remember the skills, dedication and commitment you applied to your dissertation and be proud at what you have achieved.

So, congratulations and good luck for the start of your new journey, wherever that may take you.

*Graeme Mitchell*

# Lewis Allen

## Care beyond the city: the lived experiences of caring for a family member with dementia in rural Northern Ireland

Dementia is one of the most pressing health and social care challenges facing the United Kingdom, with over 900,000 people currently living with the condition. In Northern Ireland alone, more than 22,000 individuals are affected, a number projected to nearly double by 2040. While much of the research and policy focus has centred on urban care provision, less attention has been given to the distinct experiences of caregivers in rural settings. This dissertation explores the lived experiences of individuals caring for a family member with dementia in a rural area within Northern Ireland, a demographic that faces compounded challenges due to geographic isolation, limited services, and systemic gaps in support, leaving a gap in understanding how these rural-specific barriers affect informal carers. The central research question guiding this study was: What are carers' experiences of caring for a parent or family member with dementia in rural Northern Ireland? The study aimed to understand the unique difficulties faced by these caregivers, how they perceive and engage with formal and informal support systems, and the coping mechanisms they employ to manage emotional, physical, and logistical pressures. Five research objectives were developed to examine themes around isolation, access to services, support networks, rural-specific challenges, and potential improvements to care provision.

A qualitative research design was adopted using semi-structured online interviews with ten participants. Inclusion criteria required that participants were currently or had previously cared for a parent or family member with dementia for a minimum of six months while residing in a rural area in Northern Ireland. Participants were recruited via purposive and snowball sampling methods, with interviews conducted online via Microsoft Teams (MS Teams) to ensure accessibility across rural locations. The data collected was analysed using Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis, which enabled the identification of patterns of meaning across the dataset while acknowledging the active role of the researcher in the interpretive process. The findings reveal that caregivers in rural Northern Ireland experience high levels of emotional strain and burnout, exacerbated by limited access to healthcare, poor transport infrastructure, and the inflexibility of care packages. Many participants described feeling unsupported, both practically and emotionally, and often relied heavily on informal networks or self-taught strategies. However, a small number of participants also spoke positively about strong family support and trusted local healthcare providers.

This study concludes that caregiving in a rural area within Northern Ireland presents distinct and significant challenges that require targeted responses. Key recommendations include the decentralisation of dementia services, improved transport support, more flexible care packages, structured guidance for carers using direct payments, and the introduction of accessible training and emotional support resources for informal carers. These findings aim to inform local policy and service delivery to ensure that rural carers are better supported in their essential roles.

**Keywords:** Dementia, Caring, Informal Care, Family Caring, Northern Ireland, Rural



# Mohammad Alraddadi

## Vaping and public health: a critical review of health impacts, smoking cessation potential, and treatment challenges associated with disposable e-cigarettes

This dissertation aimed to explore the public health implications of vaping, including its efficacy as a smoking cessation device, the health consequences of its use, and the treatment issues of the introduction of disposable e-cigarettes (vapes). The research was literature-based, drawing on a broad range of peer-reviewed journals, government documents, and public health documents, with a focus on the UK context. The first half of the investigation considered the potential for e-cigarettes to aid in smoking cessation. It concluded that smoking e-cigarettes could lead to quitting in smokers when complemented by behaviour support, and could be superior to conventional nicotine replacement therapy. There remains, however, lingering issues of continuing nicotine dependence and dual use. The second half considered short-and long-term health damage from vaping. While marketed as healthier than smoking, studies indicated that they also creates respiratory, cardiovascular, and psychological risks to younger consumers especially. The latter subgroup targeted disposable vapes, referring to increased teen use and the fact that youth public health initiatives did not have age-specific treatment protocols in existing programs.

The research found that vaping is a useful harm reduction strategy for adult use but poses daunting challenges for non-medical youth consumption. The most severe obstacles are inconsistent product regulation, access to high-nicotine products, and weak public health communication and cessation resources. Recommendations involve implementing youth cessation programs targeted, enforcing current legislation more effectively, and long-term health impact and motivational behaviour youth vaping more studies. Public general education needs to clearly differentiate harm reduction in adult smokers from adult adolescent prevention strategies.

**Keywords:** Vaping, E-cigarettes, Smoking Cessation, Public Health, Youth, Disposable Vapes, Regulation



## Jessica Bain

A quantitative study to explore the public's knowledge, perceptions, and awareness of the role and function of Environmental Health Practitioners in protecting public health

Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) play an important role in protecting public health by ensuring that the physical environments in which we live, eat and work are safe. They aim to minimise risks and prevent illness, utilising their authoritative powers to enforce standards and ensure compliance from businesses and the public. Despite the significant contribution of EHPs, there is growing recognition of the limited understanding and awareness of their role among the general public. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the public's knowledge, perceptions and awareness of EHPs and their function in protecting public health. The methodology for this study involved the use of a questionnaire distributed via social media, which gathered responses from 71 participants. The findings revealed a general lack of knowledge and awareness, with many participants associating EHPs with environmental protection activities, while overlooking other key responsibilities such as food safety, housing enforcement, health and safety, and health promotion. Additionally, the results from the study suggest that the term "Environmental Health" may be unclear or misleading to the public, further reinforcing the need for improved communication and clearer representation of the profession. The study also identified a strong support for increased public education about the role of EHPs from participants. Based on these insights, the study concludes with recommendations of strategies to enhance public knowledge and awareness, including targeted awareness campaigns, increased media visibility and educational initiatives. Such efforts could significantly improve recognition of the EHP profession and its contribution to public health as well as supporting in increasing numbers entering the profession.

**Keywords:** Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs), Public Knowledge, Public Awareness, Public Perceptions, Public Health, Quantitative



## Clair Blake

A small-scale study to explore the experiences of people who travel abroad for bariatric surgery

Obesity is a growing public health problem which leads to a significant number of health issues including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancer. Bariatric surgery is an effective intervention to help people lose weight by removing parts of the stomach or inserting a band, both which restrict the amount of food that can be consumed. However, the waitlist in the UK for surgery is long, and requirements (i.e. BMI of 40+ or between 35-40 with a health condition) can be difficult to meet. This has increased the number of people choosing to travel abroad for bariatric surgery, leading to a rise in medical tourism-related emergencies for the NHS. There is limited literature identifying what motivates people to choose to travel abroad for bariatric surgery. This study used semi-structured interviews to collect data from six participants who have travelled to other countries for bariatric surgery. From the data, three main themes emerged: 1) Motivations for traveling abroad for bariatric surgery, 2) Experiences of bariatric surgery abroad and 3) Contrasting outcomes of bariatric surgery abroad. It was found that peoples' experiences can differ significantly. Many of the participants felt that bariatric surgery abroad was the only option for them. The expectations of surgery should be realistic, and the NICE guidelines used in UK provisions play a key role in sustainable weight loss and understanding the lifestyle changes required post-surgery. Due to the ease of accessibility to bariatric surgery in other countries, policies need to be implemented on an international level which promote safety for those that travel the surgery. Within the UK, there should also be clear information and guidelines provided to anyone who visits their GP seeking weight loss advice to give individuals an insight into potential risks of having surgery.

**Keywords:** Bariatric Surgery, Medical Tourism, Obesity, Weight Loss, Qualitative



# Ella Bowman

## Navigating the journey: a literature review of the personal and familial impact of dementia

Dementia is a huge health issue, affecting families, individuals and caregivers all over the world. The population of older people has increased due to improved living conditions and lifestyles resulting in a higher demand for and on dementia carers. For this reason, the health and wellbeing of family caregivers or professionals involved with dementia care should be prioritised and supported to ensure the best quality of care is being provided. As the number of dementia diagnosis increase globally, the government have been encouraged to make it a health priority. To do so, more knowledge, understanding and awareness needs to be shared at a universal level; this approach will minimise potential factors such as poor knowledge and stigma. Being aware of any signs or symptoms that could indicate dementia can help an individual gain an early diagnosis reducing the risk of the disease progressing and also provides time for the patient and families to prepare. Through careful research, it was clear that being aware of any coping strategies, support systems and other caring methods can help to improve the quality of life for the patient as well as any other individual involved. Effective standards of care can help improve the lifestyle of the patient encouraging a person-centred approach and an increased sense of empowerment

**Keywords:** Dementia, Careers, Care Homes, Empowerment, Quality of Life, Safeguarding, Emotions, State of Mind



# Jess Chappel-Robinson

Parental perceptions on the use of technical devices on children aged three to seven years old

This study explores parental perceptions on the use of technical devices by children aged 3-7 years old. This includes parents' opinions on how they perceive the use of electronic devices, for example, iPads, tablets, television, computers and game consoles as both positive and negative parts of children's development. With the growing increase of digital technology use within the younger generations, it is important parents are aware of their own personal attitudes, concerns and rationales regarding the use of screentime. This study examines what influences and shapes these perceptions, for example parental knowledge and how parents perceive the impact of these devices on their children's holistic developmental needs, as well as the factors influencing their decisions regarding screen time. Utilising a qualitative research design, data was collected via interviews with 6 parents. Interviews were done separately from their partners as some parents have different viewpoints than others. The findings indicate that while parents acknowledge both the educational benefits and potential drawbacks of technical devices, there is concern regarding overuse and its impact on relying on the use of iPad/consoles with some parents believing children have 'forgotten' how to play and be imaginative. Additionally parental perceptions were influenced by factors such as age, educational background, and personal experiences with technology. The study highlights the importance of balanced screen time, how parents perceive it to be both a negative and positive use of time, and why they may think it affects their child's use of social skills, creativity and playtime.

**Keywords:** Parental Perceptions, Technical Devices, Early Childhood Development, Screen Time, Educational Value, Behavioural Impact, Different Parental Views





# Ruby Craige

## The role of social stigma in male suicide: implications for health and social care in the UK

In the UK, male suicide rates and social stigma pose a serious public health concern. The significant effects of social stigma on male suicide rates are examined in this review, which also looks at how cultural norms and societal attitudes lead to men's mental health concerns being underreported and neglected. A major global health and social care concern, mental health is frequently impacted by several stressors, including poverty, violence, disability, prior trauma, societal injustices, and a host of other issues. Even while intervention can effectively treat many mental health issues, a sizable fraction goes untreated, and in certain circumstances, mental health can worsen to the point of suicide. Three-quarters of all suicide fatalities in the UK in 2022 were male, and this trend has not changed since the mid-1990s. This concerning figure emphasises how suicide disproportionately affects men, a problem that is made worse by the widespread stigma associated with mental health, especially among men. Men's unwillingness to ask for assistance or publicly talk about their difficulties is made worse by cultural standards of masculinity, which frequently encourage emotional stoicism and independence. This paper critically looks at how stigma contributes to these difficulties, concentrating on the obstacles men encounter while trying to get mental health treatment. Literature illustrates how social pressures, and a dearth of suitable support networks can cause despondency and feelings of loneliness. The analysis also explores the implications for UK health and social care systems, highlighting the need for specialised interventions that tackle the difficulties men encounter when seeking mental health care. With implications for policy, healthcare delivery, and wider cultural change, this work advocates for a comprehensive strategy to lessen stigma and enhance mental health assistance for men. It promotes better mental health education, more awareness, and the creation of resources that are accessible and sensitive to the needs of this vulnerable group of males.

**Keywords:** Social Stigma, Male Suicide, Mental Health, Help Seeking Behaviour, Health Care Implications, Social Care, UK, Masculinity, Mental Health Services, Suicide Prevention



# Georgia Crookes

## A hidden crisis: addressing the sexual exploitation of girls in England

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a critical and severe form of abuse that significantly affects girls globally. This literature review aims to shed light on the multifaceted factors associated with CSE specifically impacting girls in England. CSE is defined as the manipulation and coercion involved in engaging in sexual activities by a child, often in exchange for material goods, which highlights the exploitative nature of these interactions. Alarming, statistics reveal that CSE disproportionately affects girls more than boys, due to gender inequalities, complex family dynamics, and societal perceptions that correspond vulnerability with weakness. The urgency of addressing CSE has intensified following high-profile cases in Rochdale, Telford, and Rotherham, alongside various independent inquiries that have raised awareness and classified CSE as a national threat. In this dissertation, several crucial factors will be explored, including the roles of government and health practitioners, the dynamics of vulnerability and victimisation among girls, and strategies for prevention and recovery from CSE. This study seeks to thoroughly investigate the scope and prevalence of CSE while also analysing the insights, feelings, and experiences of both girls affected by CSE and the practitioners who work with them. The consequences of CSE are profound, leaving girls struggling with conditions such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and guilt, which severely delay their recovery journey. Another primary objective of this dissertation is to identify areas for improvement to broaden the understanding and scope of CSE. Furthermore, it aims to evaluate the effectiveness of current interventions, identifying which methods are successful and outlining aspects needing adjustment. This discussion also addresses the broader societal factors that contribute to exploitation, alongside any recommendations for improvement. The research highlights several key challenges encountered when identifying and responding to CSE-related issues. A significant finding emphasises the pressing need for enhanced training for professionals working in this field. This study specifically reinforces the critical importance of training, centred around the dynamics of victim blaming and the detrimental effects this attitude can have on the girls involved. The findings in this research stress the importance of safeguarding vulnerable girls and ensuring that their specific needs and desires are met, allowing them to receive the extensive support they rightfully deserve as they navigate the aftermath of experiencing CSE.

**Keywords:** Sexual Exploitation, Child, Girls, Young Girls, Vulnerable, Vulnerability, CSE, Government, Victimisation, Police, Prevention, Recovery, Justice System



# Eilish Endean

A literature-based dissertation exploring the factors influencing health and well-being in residents of residential care

The health and well-being of older adults within residential homes are shaped by a complex array of interrelated factors, including internal and external environmental conditions, social interactions and availabilities. As the global ageing population continues to grow, understanding the environmental influences is paramount for developing effective strategies to improve quality of life in care settings such as residential homes. Previous research has focused on theories and models such as the ecological model or the environmental press-competence model which help us to understand the relationship between the physical environment and human behaviour in ageing.

This literature-based dissertation undertakes a comprehensive analysis to explore the key determinants of health and well-being in residential homes, curating findings from existing literature to provide a holistic understanding of opportunities and outcomes provided within these environments. Drawing on sources from PubMed, ScienceDirect and JStor highlighted academic literature such as peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference papers and official reports. This dissertation most significant factors affecting resident's health and well-being have been split into three key themes. These were Environmental and Community Factors, focusing on the external environment, Internal Environment which focuses on the internal factors within the residential home and Design, Safety and Comfort, which focuses on the 'aesthetics' of the residential home. A key finding was the coalescing between each theme. Although each area has an impact on health and well-being the effects when conjoined are far greater, showcasing that although the environmental factors influence health and well-being, it is the way in which they interact which causes health outcomes in residents.

**Keywords:** Residential Home, Older Adults, Health, Well-Being, Environmental Influencers



# Aimee Finnigan

## Understanding self-harm in women through the lens of social expectations

This dissertation examines the intricate connection between social pressures and female self-harm, emphasising the social, cultural, and psychological elements that influence this form of behaviour. It explores the complex phenomenon of female self-harm, focusing on both personal experience and a comprehensive review of existing literature. This study examines how cultural expectations around success, beauty, and gender roles affect women's mental health and coping strategies using a mixed-methods approach that includes both qualitative interviews and quantitative questionnaires. The primary objectives are to identify the psychological, social, and cultural factors influencing self-harming behaviours among women and evaluate the effectiveness of current interventions. The results show that cultural narratives, peer interactions, and social media have a significant impact on how people feel about themselves and their emotional health, which makes them more likely to damage themselves. The implications of this study underscore the need to further personalise support systems and informed interventions that prioritise compassion and a deeper understanding for everyone. The research suggests the potential areas for future exploration, which will include the impact of digital media surrounding self-harm and the importance of intersectionality in understanding these certain behaviours. This study intends to offer a deeper understanding of the underlying problems and suggest remedies that address the cultural constraints causing this behaviour by elevating the voices of women who self-harm. Ultimately, this dissertation aims to raise awareness and advance more positive social norms that support women's resilience and mental health. It also aims to contribute to the development of effective support systems and interventions, which will foster a more compassionate and sympathetic approach to addressing the topic of self-harm in women.

**Keywords:** Mental Health, Self-Harm, Social Pressure, Emotional Regulation, Body Image, Stigma, Social Media, Disorders, Case Study, Coping Mechanisms, Emotion, Influence, Recovery, Support, Expectations, NSSI



# Grace Fowler

Navigating isolation: the impact of social distancing on men's mental health before, during and after COVID-19

This dissertation looks at the influence social distancing had on men's mental health before, during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It is shown that men's mental health is understudied, and that society is unaware of how vital it is to spread awareness on this public issue. Throughout, researching this topic it is highlighted that different types of psychological disorders are experienced by men, but also by certain demographics of men including elderly, adolescents, single men and different ethnicities. The significant effects of social distancing on men's mental health prior to, during, and following the COVID-19 epidemic are examined in this dissertation. Based on a thorough analysis of the body of research, the study looks at how social isolation and shifting social norms affected men's psychological health in three different stages: before the pandemic, during the epidemic, and during the recovery period that followed. The study looks at how men's reactions to loneliness are influenced by social ties, mental health stigma, and masculinity standards. It also draws attention to the difficulties that other male demographic groups, such as unmarried males, the elderly, and those without jobs, face. This research also assesses the long-term psychological effects of enforced social separation, the difficulties in obtaining conventional help, and the efficacy of digital mental health therapies. The study highlights important support system deficiencies and provides policy suggestions for creating focused, gender-sensitive mental health initiatives by synthesizing the literature in the fields of health, psychology, and social care. In the end, this study advances our knowledge of the relationship among social isolation, masculinity, and mental health in order to guide future treatments that promote men's mental health both during and after crises. As well as this it highlights the strengths and limitations that are shown in other studies and theories for men's mental health and the importance of acknowledging men's wellbeing.

**Keywords:** Social Isolation, Loneliness, Mental Health, Psychological Distress, Coronavirus, Social Distancing, Traditional Masculinity, Quarantine, Suicide, Restrictions, Regulations, Demographics



# Munenyasha Vivian Gambiza

A quantitative study investigating the influence health content on TikTok has on 18–27-year-olds supplement purchasing decisions

TikTok launched globally in 2018 and has evolved from a lip-syncing app into a significant social media platform known for its short-form video content, which continues to grow. What began as a platform for dance challenges and comedy sketches has transformed into a space where content creators can build substantial followings and influence consumer behaviour across industries. Influencers have played a significant role in purchasing decisions for years, predating TikTok on platforms like Instagram. These influencers aim to influence consumers with their thoughts, attitudes, and opinions and, in return, significantly impact trends in demand for a particular product. With this upper hand, companies have begun to utilise these influencers as a channel to market and sell their products. This poses a health risk and a potential public health risk when promoting particular health products or practices that may be potentially dangerous, including health supplements. In addition to influencer content, users also post health content on the platform, recommending products they have used and sharing their experiences with various health situations. This sharing allows communities to build with the platform, but it also breeds misinformation that may contribute to unsafe supplement purchases. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between health influencers' marketing on TikTok and the supplement purchases of young adults. A survey was conducted with participants who had been using TikTok for six months or more between the ages of 18 and 27. The researcher used convenience and snowball sampling to gain responses from 71 people. The data produced was analysed using SPSS, and question responses were compared with TikTok dynamics, such as how often respondents use TikTok, and if they follow any health or wellness influencers. The results of these analyses were presented in bar charts, pie charts, and tables. This study revealed a statistically significant relationship between TikTok usage and the frequency with which participants encounter health content. It was revealed that 24.29% of participants have purchased supplements through TikTok. A significant relationship was also identified between following health influencers and trust in their recommendations, with those following multiple influencers showing higher trust levels. The findings of this study suggest that while young adults maintain some critical evaluation of influencer claims, a contradiction exists between stated preferences and actual behaviour. The research indicates that exposure frequency, trust in relationships, and engagement intensity with influencers impact purchasing decisions, highlighting the powerful and persuasive nature of TikTok's delivery system. This calls for a need for higher levels of health literacy within society and better guidelines when it comes to advertising on social media.

**Keywords:** Tiktok, Supplement Purchasing, Health Influencers, Young Adults, Social Media



# Becki Harris

“It’s only a bit of weed” A critical exploration of cannabis use and young people

This dissertation aims to present an accurate representation of cannabis use among young people (under eighteen) in the United Kingdom (UK) and the effects it can have on individuals and society. Research supports that young people using cannabis is a rising health and social problem that requires rapid intervention. Findings have likened cannabis use in young people as an impending epidemic with potential negative effects including mental health crisis, a lack of educational opportunities, criminality and death. I used peer reviewed articles, empirical research studies, government legislation, government statistics, and grey literature to explore these factors. Every study I analysed acknowledged the potential negative effects cannabis use has on young people. The literature also highlighted the vulnerabilities which may arise for young people living in areas of deprivation, with parental substance abuse, the effect cannabis use can have on a young person’s education, as well as the serious links to abuse, violence, grooming and organised crime gang (OCG’s) related behaviour. ‘Labelling Theory and ‘umbrella terms’ allowed me to explain and understand how society’s labels for people can influence their behaviour. From the findings of this dissertation I found that early intervention and education are needed desperately before damage is done beyond repair. We as a nation need to sit up and take notice of what is happening around us before more young people are lost into a world of mass personal destruction, drug abuse and addiction, anti-social behaviour, the ‘hamster wheel’ of criminality, loss of opportunities and potential death. As nation we are facing significant issues which could result in further and increasing pressure on the NHS and increasing levels of mental health issues among young people if we do not act now.... it may be too late.

**Keywords:** Cannabis, Young People, Mental Health, Parental Substance Abuse, Social, Dynamics, Popular Culture, Minority Groups, NHS, Statistics, Education, Abuse, Violence, OCGs, Debt, County Lines, Addiction, Psychosis, Education, Health, Social, Youth Justice, Crime, Anti-Social Behaviour, Vulnerable, Slavery Act, Deprivation, Poverty



# Lauren Hibbert

## UK incarceration conditions: health implications and government legislations

The study purpose is to explore the impact of UK prison living standards upon the health and wellbeing of individuals incarcerated and how the government legislation is upheld and how the principles outlined within the legislations influence health implications. The results from this study present that the standard of UK prison accommodations in fact does have an overall negative impact upon the health and wellbeing of inmates, with mental health being influenced and impacted by the majority. The study also highlights the distinct differences between the health impacts for incarcerated men in comparison to women incarcerated, through investigating women's prisons in regards to maternal and perinatal concerns and the problems this inflicts upon their mental health, ranging from depression and anxiety to attachment, as well as the physical health and wellbeing. Furthermore, after exploring government policies and legislation regarding the health and wellbeing of incarcerated people, the results clearly outline the organisations involved and responsible for ensuring the safety, health and wellbeing of inmates within the UK, and how multi-disciplinary working is used in order to attempt to upkeep this. On the whole, the dissertation exemplifies how the prison establishments of the UK, typically worsen health and wellbeing in all aspects and throughout the chapters focuses on specific issues created and prolonged through essentially living within a UK prison.

**Keywords:** UK Prison Living Conditions, Prison Overcrowding, Prison Design Structure, Social Determinants Of Health, UK Women's Prisoner Legislation, Prison Health Care Services, Government Legislation





# Chloe Hill

“Childhood trauma doesn’t come in one single package”: exploring the cycle of abuse from childhood to adulthood with a focus on childhood sexual abuse (CSA)

This dissertation is focused around the cycle of abuse and the journey a victim takes from childhood to adulthood including any gender-based differences. Each chapter explored a different journey a victim could take following their abuse and what factors could contribute to the different outcomes. The first chapter explored the victim-to-victimiser theory. This is where the possibility for an abused child going on to abuse others in adulthood, with some of the contributing factors being hypersexuality and the social learning theory that supports learned behaviour. Intergenerational sexual abuse is researched to determine if victims learn from the abuse from a family member and then go on to inflict the same abuse on their own children. The second chapter investigated the likelihood of a victim being revictimised in their adult life and, what about their past CSA makes them more susceptible. Some contributing factors found were alcohol and dissociation which separate the victim from their conscious mind and make them more vulnerable to experiencing sexual abuse again. The third chapter explored how we can break of the cycle of sexual abuse. The two concepts investigated were coping and resilience. Each of these contributed to a victim's journey to a survivor and was essential in the prevention of the other harmful pathways that are possible following CSA.

**Keywords:** Cycle Of Abuse, Childhood Sexual Abuse, Cycle Of Sexual Abuse, Girls, Boys, Intergenerational Cycle Of Abuse, Substance Abuse, Gender Stigma, Social Learning Theory, Dissociation, Coping, Resilience



# Zoe Hooton

The awareness of energy drinks in the United Kingdom and the associated health implications

Energy drinks are becoming a growing public health issue. Due to their popularity, there are growing concerns about the impacts of young people and children overconsuming them. This includes effects on people's mental health especially increased risk of anxiety, stress, depression and suicidal thoughts. Energy drinks are full of caffeine, sugar and other stimulants that can also have a negative effect on your physical health such as high blood pressure, an increased heart rate, dehydration and insomnia. This literature-based study aims to critically analyse relevant available literature about energy drinks and the effects on health to measure how big the problem is in the UK. A study from the Association for the Study of Obesity highlights that the UK government ran a consultation on ending the sale of energy drinks to children under 16 in a 2019 green paper but has still been no further action.

**Keywords:** Energy Drinks, Awareness, Health Implications, Government, Caffeine



# Menna Jones

An online survey to examine knowledge, perceptions and effectiveness of calorie labelling on menus

Calorie labelling on menus has been introduced as a public health measure to encourage healthier eating habits and address rising obesity rates. The United Kingdom (UK) government implemented mandatory calorie labelling for large food businesses to promote informed decision making among consumers. However, the effectiveness of this policy remains uncertain and despite extensive research on calorie labelling's influence on food choices, there is limited evidence on public awareness of the legislation and how perceptions vary across different body types. Due to this, this study aims to explore public knowledge of calorie labelling with focus on awareness of the policy, its influence on consumer food choices, and to assess whether individuals with different body types interpret and respond to calorie labelling differently. By addressing these aspects, the study aims to contribute to existing literature and identify areas that may require further research or policy adjustments. An anonymous, structured, online questionnaire was conducted with 80 participants, that collected both quantitative and qualitative data through open and closed ended questions. The questionnaire was distributed through social media platforms using voluntary response sampling and snowball sampling to reach a wider range of participants, with a target population of individuals over the age of 18. The findings revealed that 43% of participants were aware of the calorie labelling legislation but only 20% had a clear understanding of what it actually entails. Additionally, 71% of participants reported noticing calories on menus, with women being more likely to do so than men. However, despite this high level of awareness, only 11% actively consider the labels when selecting their food choice. Among those who do use calorie information on menus, the majority expressed a desire for a smaller body type than they currently have, suggesting a potential link between calorie awareness and body image concerns. Qualitative responses further emphasised this, as several participants shared that calorie labelling made them feel guilty about their food choices and expressed concerns about the potential impact on individuals with eating disorders. This study contributes to existing literature by addressing key gaps, particularly regarding public awareness of the calorie labelling policy. The key implication of the study is for businesses to offer optional calorie menus, allowing customers to choose whether they want to see calorie information. This approach would be beneficial for those who find calorie labels helpful, while also supporting individuals struggling with disordered eating habits by reducing potential triggers associated with food guilt and anxiety.

**Keywords:** Calories Labelling, Obesity, Behaviour Change, Health Policy, Body Types, Healthy Eating and Calorie Awareness



# Jewel Joseph

## Tackling stigma in people with Post-traumatic stress disorder: the barriers to seeking help

This research evaluates the stigma-related obstacles that hinder individuals with Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from seeking professional help, with a specific focus on gender and age differences. Gender norms notably affect help-seeking behaviour, due to stigma related to traditional masculinity. Age also plays a pivotal role, as young individuals struggle with peer pressure and limited access, while older individuals may neglect symptoms and lack of awareness. Middle-aged individuals, though more inclined to seek support, are often burdened by life responsibilities. Mitigating these aspects requires targeted, inclusive and trauma-informed approaches. Tailored interventions that significantly consider gender and age-specific factors are significant for breaking the stigma and increasing accessibility to efficient PTSD care and support throughout the world. Research in this area has focused on the stigma associated with PTSD individuals, emphasising on theoretical understanding of the perceptions and beliefs that dwell in different communities regarding PTSD. The stigma and fear delay the treatment process of individuals suffering from PTSD. The external barriers that have been explored include the cultural beliefs and prevalence of lack of healthcare infrastructure associated with the poor socio-economic status of individuals living in the rural areas. Strategies that have been found to be significant have been the “Psychoeducation” and “Trauma-Informed Care”, which considerably help PTSD individuals to overcome stigma and improve mental health.

**Keywords:** PTSD, Stigma, Cultural Beliefs, Traumatic Stress



# Grace Lawrence

What are the barriers to being a mother studying an undergraduate degree?

My name is Grace, a 21-year-old woman navigating my way through motherhood for the first time whilst completing my final year of university, studying Health and Social Care. I fell pregnant with my son within the second year of university and gave birth to him at the start of the first year. Throughout this period, I found myself really interested in journalling. I would write in my journal my thoughts and feelings at certain stages of both my prepartum and postpartum journey, whilst studying my degree. This really helped me to connect not only my emotions but to also discover various barriers I found whilst juggling motherhood and my university degree. This is what led me to wanting to carry out my dissertation in the form of an autoethnography. I believe that stories shared by me on my motherhood and student journey would really help to inspire other students with babies or expecting. The main aim of this autoethnography is for universities to pick up on the barriers and struggles of studying for a degree whilst being a mum and to put more in place to aid and motivate these students to be able to carry on with their degree whilst being a mother. I feel as though during my studies this year although I've had an immense amount of support off lecturers to help me to carry out my studies online there have been a few barriers to my university experience as a mother. Becoming a mom has shaped me in many ways both emotionally and physically. It has made me a stronger person, and I now believe that not only do I have a different outlook on life, but I also have a new focus and purpose in my life. My studies have always been very important to me however, since becoming a mum they have been precious to me. This is because I aspire to be the best role model to my son and inspire him to aim high within his educational studies and go on to have a successful future with a career he wishes to pursue. As a 21-year-old first time mum balancing my home life and studies hasn't been easy. I feel as though I have learnt a lot about myself along my journey to motherhood. I have underestimated my strength and determination. This year has been challenging but through my dedication I've got where I wanted to with my degree. I metaphorically would describe my journey through my last year of university as a rollercoaster. This is because I've had many highs where I have had strength to do well and lows where I was struggling to juggle life as a mum and life as an undergraduate.

**Keywords:** Motherhood, Student, Barriers, Undergraduate, Autoethnography, Journey, Lived Experiences, Son, Stereotypes, Pregnancy, Pre-partum Journey, Postpartum Journey



# Imogen Longman

Breaking the silence: understanding mental health stigma among young adults in higher education in the UK

This dissertation reviews the literature on how young adults in UK Higher Education perceive mental health stigma. With an emphasis on how stigma around mental health impacts students' desire to seek treatment, the review summarise the body of research on the prevalence, causes, and consequences of mental health stigma in academic contexts. The literature identifies important factors that support the continuing existence of stigma among young adults, including peer reviews, cultural attitudes, and institutional support systems. Through an analysis of qualitative and quantitative studies, the review explores how stigma affects social integration, academic achievement, and mental health outcomes. It also focuses on interventions and initiatives aimed at reducing stigma, such as mental health awareness campaigns and peer-led support groups. The findings imply that although there has been progress in increasing awareness, there are still significant limitations to overcome in order to combat the stigma attached to mental health, especially among male students and members of particular cultural groups. The research concludes with suggestions regarding how universities might foster more welcoming cultures, promote open conversations about mental health, and offer focused assistance to underserved student groups.

**Keywords:** Mental Health, Stigma, Higher Education, UK, Students, Young Adults/People



# Holly Lynch

The relationship between trauma and substance use: analysing the link between early trauma and later addiction

This literature-based dissertation explores the complex relationship between adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and substance use disorders, with a focus on how the adversities experienced in early life can shape the patterns of substance use in later life. It provides a clear insight into the link between trauma and substance abuse. The aim of this dissertation is to explore how early trauma contributes to substance use disorders, emphasising the role of social care, coping strategies, and the environment in shaping the outcomes. Research found that individuals who experienced adversity in early childhood are at an increased risk of developing substance use disorders in later life. The severity of this can be influenced by support systems, skills and coping strategies. This review examines key theories such as Bowlby's attachment theory and the self-medication hypothesis, evaluating how these frameworks can inform treatment and interventions. This study examines existing policies and strategies and identifies gaps within trauma informed care and the integration of substance use treatment. Findings emphasise the requirement for coordinated care that takes a holistic approach. Through the collaboration of social care providers, mental health professionals, and healthcare providers, professionals are able to address the complex needs of individuals impacted by both ACEs and SUDs.

**Keywords:** Childhood Trauma, Substance Use, Addiction, Substance Use Disorders (SUDs), Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Trauma And Addiction, Psychological Mechanisms Of Addiction, Attachment Theory, Self-Medication Hypothesis



# Anya Marston

A qualitative study to explore parental views on how fast-food consumption can impact on primary school children's health in Leeds

Parents play a crucial role in the development of their children's eating habits, due to being responsible for food choice, meal patterns, whilst ensuring children get the required nutrients. Fast-food is energy-dense and high in salt, sugar and saturated fats. Frequent fast-food consumption plays a role in the development of childhood obesity. This causes harm to individuals' mental and physical health, whilst hindering economic development and adding pressure to services. The UK is currently experiencing an obesity epidemic. The chosen location for this study is Leeds due to it being one of the first UK cities to see a decline in rates of obesity. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling using the researcher's personal contacts who met the inclusion criteria. Participants self-included or excluded to take part in an online semi-structured interview on Microsoft teams. Overall, six participants were interviewed. All interviews underwent thematic analysis, identifying four themes: fast-food consumption, understanding a balanced diet, sources of knowledge, and the support needed for parents.

Parents discussed feeding their children fast-food approximately once per week. Common motivations identified by parents included convenience, cost and children's preference. Parents identified all the common physical health impacts of frequent fast-food consumption such as diabetes and heart problems. However, few identified the mental health impacts. All parents displayed strong background knowledge surrounding a balanced diet and the essential vitamins needed for children's development. Parents mentioned they were trying to introduce a balanced diet whilst their children's palates were forming. Parents identified a range of sources they ascertained their knowledge from. They all mentioned social media, their upbringing, books and advice from professionals. Parents identified that support is required for parents to educate and raise awareness around fast-food consumption and the health impacts. Parents emphasised the Government should take responsibility through social media, marketing campaigns and reducing the advertising of junk food. Parents highlighted working with supermarkets, schools and targeting actions to low-income families.

Recommendations from this study include further research into the mental health impacts faced by obese children, which could be utilised for future campaigns. Public health campaigns should be delivered by the NHS educating parents on the importance of vitamins and supplements for children's health. Further research could be conducted into parents knowledge of children's nutrition, which would highlight the most efficient ways to educate parents. The Government should attempt to regulate nutrition information posted on social media, as misinformation can lead to the development of incorrect dietary habits. To ensure the success of future actions, a collaborative approach between the government, NHS, local authorities and charities is needed. Finally, the Government needs to strengthen current policy actions among the deprived communities.

**Keywords:** Fast-Food, Primary School Aged Children, Childhood Obesity





# Aimee McCloy

Exploring the prevalence and impact of food poverty among university students in the UK through quantitative survey analysis

Over the past few years' food poverty has become an increasingly pressing issue brought to light by the current 'cost-of-living crises'. While previous studies have addressed food poverty and the effects of rising prices on the UK population as a whole, the specific challenges being faced by students remain relatively unexplored. Understanding the true extent of the problem is critical to developing policies and support systems to alleviate the problems being faced by students. The aim of this study was to understand the prevalence and impacts of food poverty among students in the UK. The objectives of the study were to gain an overall understanding of the severity of food poverty among students, to identify the underlying causes and reasons, to assess the impact of food poverty on students' health and well-being and to understand the impact food poverty has on academic performance. This quantitative study used questionnaires to gather relevant information. The questionnaire was posted online with the target population being students over the age of 18 at university in the United Kingdom. The researcher used a self-selecting sampling method to gain responses from 121 participants. The data was analysed by a researcher using Google Sheets and SPSS was used to carry out Chi-squared tests on the data. The main findings show a significant issue of food poverty among students in the UK and highlight the need for urgent policy changes and support systems to address food poverty in higher education. Many respondents to the questionnaire reported issues including worrying about running out of food or being unable to afford food, skipping meals due to financial difficulties, putting the price of food above the nutritional value of it and having to choose between buying food or paying for essentials. A small proportion of participants have also reported having to use a food bank in the past 12 months. Additionally, the questionnaire found a lack of awareness of initiatives available to support students, and some students were facing significant negative effects on academic performance as a result of food poverty. The research provides valuable insights into the experiences of food poverty among this often-overlooked demographic. However, more in-depth research is needed to gain a representative understanding of the extent of the problem across the UK. The researcher recommends the government reviews the student loan policy and increases loans in line with rising living costs and universities introduce initiatives to support students and raises awareness of food poverty issues.

**Keywords:** Food Poverty, Food Insecurity, Students, Public Health, Impacts, Cost Of Living Crises, Environmental Health, Mental Health, Physical Health, University



# Morgan Jade Metcalf

A quantitative study exploring the main effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the mental health of young adults

Several pieces of literature have expressed concern regarding the fact that mental health issues among young adults have continued to rise since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic. Mental health issues are influenced by a number of social, psychological, physical, environmental, and biological factors including loneliness and isolation, relationship challenges, lack of physical activity, domestic violence situations, and a family history of mental illness or substance misuse. These factors, more often than not, contribute to mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and chronic stress. The aim of this study was to explore the effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the mental health of young adults and the three main objectives studied throughout were to investigate whether young adults worried about their financial situation during the pandemic, to explore whether young adults feared the virus and the idea that they might contract the virus, and to conduct research in order to determine whether there was an increase in mental health issues in young adults due to the various lockdowns. This study was quantitative and the method used was an anonymous, online self-select questionnaire. Seventy-nine respondents were involved in the study and the target population was young adults between the ages of eighteen and thirty years old of whom were able to fluently speak the English language. Once this study was conducted, the researcher discovered a number of different findings. The majority of young adults have experienced mental health issues to some extent, and pre-existing mental health conditions have worsened since the coronavirus pandemic and most respondents felt that their mental health had declined post-pandemic. It was also found that individuals who rated their mental health higher tended to feel less lonely in comparison to those who rated their mental health poorly. Young adults also stated that their financial situations were a contributing factor to their mental health worsening and that this had become more apparent since the coronavirus pandemic had occurred. Finally, very few young adults worried about contracting the virus all of the time, and those who did worry often did little to protect themselves or others. There were some gaps across existing research studies, therefore it was recommended that these gaps be filled in so that future researchers have a stronger understanding in relation to this area of research. As well as this, interventions for young adults should be implemented as there are few interventions available to young adults compared to the resources on offer for children and adolescents.

**Keywords:** Mental health, Depression, Anxiety, Stress, Young people, Covid-19, Coronavirus



# India Meyer

A study investigating the knowledge and awareness university students have surrounding Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and any stigma that surrounds taking it

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a somewhat of a taboo topic in the UK with low public knowledge and awareness and research still emerging. PrEP is a revolutionary and highly effective new drug but the uptake levels are still lower than they should be. A higher understanding of PrEP is crucial. Educating in schools, universities and colleges would be extremely beneficial for the uptake of PrEP. The aim of this research was to investigate the knowledge and awareness of PrEP in young people and the stigma surrounding it. A total of 25 university students completed an online anonymous questionnaire, the questionnaire investigated the knowledge of what PrEP was, how it is used, the effectiveness of PrEP, their knowledge of HIV and AIDs, how sexually transmitted diseases are spread, where to access PrEP and the knowledge of stigma and self-stigma in university students. The main findings of the study were that most individuals had heard of PrEP and when trying to explain what it was used for or who would benefit most from it, answered the question wrong or did not know. Another main finding was that the majority of the participants knew how sexually transmitted infections were spread but did not know that PrEP was a preventive rather than treatment. It is evident that there needs to be more education and research to maintain the uptake of PrEP use. Even though my study was small scale I would hope that the research completed and the questions asked have contributed to some people researching PrEP and possibly even considering taking it in the future.

**Keywords:** Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, HIV, AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Infections, MSM - Men Who Have Sex With Men



# Charlotte Morrison

## The effect of infertility on women's sexual behaviours and attitudes

This literature-based dissertation provides an exploration into the experience of women facing an infertility diagnosis. Infertility, defined as the inability to become pregnant after 12 months of regular and unprotected intercourse, affects millions of people worldwide. This dissertation will focus on the effect it has on women excluding any impact on men. This review delves into the impact of infertility on a woman's psychological well-being, social experiences, and relationship dynamics. However, the main focus of this dissertation is to investigate what impact an infertility diagnosis has on a woman's sexual attitudes and behaviours. It hopes to examine how cultural and societal expectations of motherhood influence the sexual well-being of infertile women as well as, to investigate the psychological and emotional impact of infertility on the sexual well-being of affected women. Consistent themes are highlighted within this review such as, a decline in sexual desire, the psychological toll that infertility has on women and an emotional disconnection within relationships. This study also highlights the significant role of cultural and societal expectations in shaping a woman's experience of infertility. Moreover, it explores the impact on a woman's self-esteem and self-worth and how this impacts their attitudes towards sex and their sexual behaviours. The dissertation provides recommendations on how better support can be provided for infertile women, for example, implementing psychosexual support into fertility treatments. Additionally further research into the link between female infertility and sexual orientation has been suggested in this dissertation as a way to harness a deeper understanding of infertility's sexual, psychological and relational impacts as well as to improve the inclusivity of fertility support.

**Keywords:** Female Infertility, Infertile, Fertility, Sexual Dysfunction, Sexual Behaviour, Sexual Attitudes, Cultural Expectations, Societal Stigma, IVF, Psychological Impacts, Relationship Dynamics



# Cynthia Mumporeze

## Evaluating telehealth: a systematic review of its effectiveness and challenges post Covid-19

Telehealth has never been so popular as it has been since the start and of the COVID- 19 pandemic. Telehealth use first increased when the pandemic limited people from seeking regular healthcare services at their regular local hospitals and clinics. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness and challenges of telehealth post-COVID-19 and make a comparative analysis between telehealth and traditional in-person healthcare services. The methodology involved a comprehensive literature search, selecting studies from various databases that addressed the effectiveness and challenges of telehealth post-COVID-19. Inclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies, focusing on peer-reviewed articles, case studies, and reviews published between 2020 and 2025. The findings indicate that while telehealth exhibits significant potential and effectiveness for improving healthcare accessibility and efficiency and is slightly preferred to in-person healthcare services, it still faces ongoing challenges in its implementation and widespread adoption. The review highlights both the effectiveness of telehealth in various healthcare settings and the need for addressing issues related to technological infrastructure, patient privacy, technological familiarity and training to ensure its long-term success. In conclusion, while telehealth offers substantial benefits for healthcare delivery, its effectiveness is dependent upon addressing the identified challenges. The study emphasizes the need for a collaborative approach involving healthcare providers, policymakers, and technology developers to create a sustainable and equitable telehealth framework. Proper investment in technology, comprehensive training programs, and supportive policy development are crucial for overcoming the barriers to fully harnessing the benefits of telehealth in the post-COVID-19 era.

**Keywords:** Telehealth, Post-Covid-19, Healthcare Services, Effectiveness, Challenges



## Caitlin Murray

Protecting mental health and well-being after parental loss: a review of the literature on how children and adolescents cope with cancer bereavement



The death of a parent to cancer during childhood or adolescence can be a life-altering event that can deeply affect a child or adolescent's mental health, well-being and development. This dissertation explores how bereaved children (0 to 12 years) or adolescents (13 to 18 years) who experience parental loss process grief, the coping strategies they use, and the long-term impact on their mental health. A scoping search was conducted using the Liverpool John Moores University's Discover Library, PsycINFO, Web of Science, and CINAHL Ultimate. Search terms followed the population, exposure and outcome (PEO) framework, combining keywords such as "childhood bereavement" and "mental health" with Boolean operators. Of 215 initial records, 26 studies met inclusion criteria after duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, and full-text review. Most studies included focused exclusively on cancer-related parental loss, with data extracted and thematically analysed using a study characteristic table. The findings of this dissertation show that children and adolescents experience grief differently depending on their age. Younger children struggle with death's permanence, while adolescents experience intense sadness and confusion while navigating independence. Anticipatory grief can provide emotional preparation but also exposes children to traumatic decline. Although family, school and community support help to cope, services in the United Kingdom (UK) remain insufficient, where only 13.8% of hospices offer specific bereavement care. Key recommendations are enhanced pre-bereaved support, cancer-specific bereavement programs, and professional grief training for healthcare professionals.

**Keywords:** Parental Cancer, Grief, Adolescents, Children, Coping Mechanisms, Bereavement Support, Mental Health, Well-Being, Interventions, Anticipatory Grief



# Bethany Nye

Perceptions of vaccine ideology following COVID-19 (regarding AstraZeneca and Pfizer)

The COVID-19 vaccination rollout to date has been a momentous and rapid response to a worldwide pandemic taking the lives of over 7 million people. Undoubtedly, the most effective method of disease transmission prevention is through immunisation and the COVID-19 vaccines have had a significant impact on protecting the public. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), working alongside Public Health England, has developed and performed clinical trials to initiate the rollout of vaccines such as AstraZeneca/Oxford and Pfizer/BioNTech to the UK public. By August 2022, it was estimated 50 million individuals had received their first dose of the vaccine. With the prominence of vaccinations over the past years, the perception of vaccination ideology has been at the forefront of individuals' lives, with the media and organisations presenting conflicting opinions. With this, vaccine hesitancy and the spread of misinformation have become contending factors in the prevention of vaccination rollout, therefore sparking an uproar of mistrust in the UK government and healthcare organisations. This study aims to explore these issues further by understanding personal experiences in relation to AstraZeneca and Pfizer and potential Adverse Drug Reactions (ADRs), further exploring individuals' perceptions related to vaccine ideology. A sample of 100 participants were recruited via snowball sampling to complete an online questionnaire to provide quantitative results, with partial qualitative data to allow for interpretation of their attitudes linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and vaccines. Although current epidemiology acknowledges potential minor side effects of the vaccine, as well as rarer more significant effects, this undergraduate study explores the more extreme ADRs experienced by participants, especially the experiences of individuals who were part of a vaccine damage forum, and the effect this has had on their perceptions of vaccine ideology and hesitancy. Results emphasised the overall mistrust individuals feel towards the UK government and NHS and the need to control the spread of misinformation and conspiracies spread via the media in order to suppress levels of vaccine hesitancy amongst the UK population.

**Keywords:** AstraZeneca/Oxford, Pfizer/BioNTech, Vaccination, ADRs, COVID-19, Epidemiology, Vaccine Ideology, Vaccine Hesitancy





# Scarlett Parkes

Breaking the silence: young people's awareness, knowledge and attitudes towards autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and social stigma



Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a neurological condition which impacts individuals' ability to communicate, interact in social settings, and their overall behaviour. Despite the growing understanding and misconceptions, the stigma around ASD is present, especially among young people, influencing their opinions and attitudes towards autistic people. Recognising young people's views towards ASD serves as an essential for encouraging inclusivity and reducing stigma. The study seeks to analyse young people's awareness, knowledge, and attitudes around ASD, with emphasis on how social stigma impacts their opinions and actions. It is intended to find potential gaps in understanding and explore the factors which influence young people's views for the purpose of educating future awareness initiatives. The study employed a quantitative research design. Online questionnaires, which incorporated both closed and open-ended questions enabled the collecting of numerical data to disclose general patterns, as well as qualitative insights which represented more comprehensive perspectives of individuals views and experiences. The questionnaire was distributed through social media networks and university connections to individuals aged 18 to 25 years old. This age group was chosen primarily due to their active participation in online settings and their influential role in developing an inclusive society. Findings highlighted that participants had a moderate amount of awareness and knowledge around ASD but there were some gaps in accurate knowledge and understandings. There were also some misconceptions around both the cause and symptoms of ASD. Stigmatising attitudes were generally associated with a lack of education or direct experience, which reflects individuals' responses. The participants that may have been exposed to ASD through education, personal experiences or employment were more informed on the topic and provided some valuable insights. Overall, the study stresses the need for more inclusive, accurate, and accessible education for young people regarding ASD, to combat persistent stereotypes and disregarding social stigma. The use of educational programs, which promote accurate information and inclusivity can help develop understanding amongst young individuals and provide an enhanced society for everyone.

**Keywords:** Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Autism, Social Stigma, Young Individuals, Education, Inclusivity, Misconceptions, Awareness, Knowledge, Attitudes





# Christy Pedlow

## Investigation of carbon monoxide (CO) knowledge and awareness in students studying at university

Carbon monoxide (CO) remains one of the most common forms of poisoning and a massive public health issue, despite being highly preventable. There is a lack of research on students' knowledge and awareness of CO exposure and poisoning even though they are considered to be one of the most vulnerable groups. This may be because university tends to be the first time a person moves away from home, where they may not need to be as aware of this topic. This study aims to discover what exactly students know about CO exposure and poisoning, where there is a knowledge gap and what variables affects this knowledge, or lack of. An online questionnaire was distributed to students studying at LJMU university via their LJMU email address. The results from this study suggest that although students may have a basic understanding of what CO is, they lack a deeper understanding of how to prevent CO exposure and poisoning, pick up on warning signs and many were aware of just how harmful the effects can have on an individuals' health and quality of life. This study's findings were limited as it was a small-scale research study – more participants would have made the results more accurate and allow for generalisability of the student population.

**Keywords:** Carbon Monoxide, Exposure, Poisoning, Students, University, Knowledge, Awareness



# Marta Radomska

A qualitative study to explore port health officers' opinions of the challenges for port health in the next five years



The term port health refers to a function of environmental health which comprises of the protection of both public health and animal health and is carried out by the Local Authorities' Port Health Authorities at airports and at seaports. Like the environmental health profession, port health is facing some significant challenges. Despite the importance of the port health function, there are no previous studies which have investigated the challenges for port health and so the aim of this study is to explore opinions of the challenges for port health in the next five years among port health officers in order to enhance our understanding of the importance of the port health function and challenges which could affect the way how this function is delivered. A qualitative research approach was selected. One-to-one semi-structured interviews were adopted as the most suitable data collection method. Using both convenience sampling and snowball sampling, four participants were recruited. The data was thematically analysed manually and five broad themes emerged: the importance of the port health function, challenges for port health, effectiveness of legislation, consequences/effects of challenges and potential solutions. These were discussed in relation to the literature and showed that the challenges for port health are an important issue which needs to be recognized and addressed effectively. If the challenges are not addressed effectively, it could affect how port health is delivered and increase the risk of an outbreak of a new animal or plant pest or pathogen which could affect public, animal and environmental health leading to devastating consequences for industry and economy of the country.

**Keywords:** Port Health Function, Seaports, Challenges, Legislation, Infectious Diseases, Food Safety, Biosecurity, Consequences, Solutions



# Queli Ribeiro

## Understanding the impact of child sexual abuse (CSA): a comprehensive analysis of psychological, legal, and social implications in the UK

Sexual abuse affects millions of children and adolescents globally - 18% of girls and 8% of boys, posing a significant public health issue and human rights violation. It is estimated that 18 million children in the European Region have experienced sexual abuse before they turn 18 years old. It is a solemn concern that demands attention and action from public health officials as well as society at large. In addition to being a grave violation of fundamental human rights, this poses a serious public health risk. The effects of child sexual abuse (CSA) go well beyond the immediate physical harm; they frequently show up as long-lasting mental health issues that can last a person's entire life. It is strongly linked to various short- and long-term negative consequences, according to scholars working in the field. The most serious violation of children's rights and a major mental health issue for societies is CSA causing severe and often fatal consequences on survivors, including mental illness, self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts, affecting them throughout their lifetime. Thus, comprehensive measures are needed to ensure survivors receive necessary resources for healing and prevent atrocities while raising awareness and taking collective action can protect society's most vulnerable citizens. Since CSA is a worldwide issue and a very broad topic, it would be endless to investigate on a global scale; therefore, this dissertation will concentrate on CSA in the UK. The aim of this dissertation is to explore the short and long-term effects on children's mental health, the effects on their brain, common intervention strategies, legal responses to child sexual abuse (challenges and gaps), institutional settings and CSA from a global perspective; understanding the perpetrators: profile and risk factors; the impact of child sexual abuse on family dynamics; the role of social media in child sexual abuse: risks and prevention; the role of media in shaping public perception of CSA; the role of social workers and child protection services in the UK; the role of education in preventing CSA. The overall conclusion is that CSA has been treated with a certain degree of levity and justice has been done very slowly over the years, and a series of measures are needed to address all the gaps and challenges more effectively. Final recommendations are addressed to the government and all institutions working with children and families in the UK.

**Keywords:** Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), Violation, Rights, Mental, Health, Post-Traumatic, Trauma, Stress, Wellbeing, Anxiety, Depression, Protection, Media, Family, Support, Prevention



# Martyna Salbut

A qualitative study exploring educators' awareness and strategies for supporting neurodiversity among students at LJMU

This study investigated neurodiversity in higher education (HE), with a primary focus on lecturers' understanding and strategies for identifying the support that neurodiverse students require and receive. Neurodiversity is a topic that includes conditions such as autism, attention-deficit / hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia which are recognised as a natural variation in cognitive functioning. The research explored how policies and teaching practices influence the educational experiences of neurodiverse students. The main research questions addressed are based on what level of understanding educators have about neurodiversity in HE and what strategies and barriers exist when aiming to create an inclusive environment in support of neurodiversity. A qualitative approach was used which involved interviewing five educators in various academic job roles that are employed by LJMU. Ethical considerations were prioritised with participants providing informed consent. The interviews encouraged the participants to define neurodiversity and describe the strategies used for inclusion, to identify the recurring themes and challenges within the institution.

The study found that fostering a neurodiverse academic environment in HE necessitated policy use, as well as an understanding and acceptance of neurodiverse students. It advised that training programmes should be created, flexible teaching methods should be implied with suitable feedback mechanisms to successfully facilitate the promotion of and commitment to neurodiversity in HE. The study highlighted the critical role for tailored support strategies when accommodating neurodiverse students in HE. It identified the barriers effectively, which included stigma and lack of awareness in education that can affect practice. Promoting collaborative feedback and allocation of resources allows institutions to create an inclusive environment and to enhance educational experiences, ensuring equitable access to learning for all students and offering a continuous professional development for enhanced access.

**Keywords:** Neurodiversity, Inclusion, Accessible Accommodations, Autism, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Dyslexia, Policies



# Jessica Stewart

## Digital influence: the effects of social media on anxiety and depression in UK adolescents and young adults

This dissertation explores the impact of social media on anxiety and depression among adolescents and young adults in the United Kingdom. As digital social media platforms have become an integral part of everyday life for young people, growing concerns have emerged regarding their influence on psychological wellbeing and emotional development. With social media usage becoming almost ubiquitous among individuals aged 12 to 24, understanding its potential effects on mental health has become increasingly important for parents, educators, policymakers and healthcare professionals. This literature review analyses a wide range of existing peer reviewed academic research to evaluate the relationship between social media usage patterns and mental health outcomes. Sources were primarily gathered using Google Scholar and other academic databases, with search terms such as “social media,” “anxiety and depression,” and “youth.” The review focused on studies published within the last decade to ensure both accuracy and relevance to the current digital landscape. Findings from the literature indicate a significant and consistent correlation between frequent or excessive social media use and increased levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms, particularly among adolescents. Key recurring themes identified through thematic analysis include the influence of upward social comparison, fear of missing out (FOMO), cyberbullying, disrupted sleep patterns and the pressure to maintain a curated online persona. Gender based differences were also explored, with adolescent girls showing higher levels of emotional impact and problematic use. While some literature also highlighted the potential positive aspects of social media, such as increased social connectivity, opportunities for peer support and improved access to mental health information and resources, the overall findings suggest that the negative psychological effects of unregulated or passive use are more widespread and impactful. The study concludes that while social media is not inherently harmful, its effects on mental health largely depend on how it is used. Excessive screen time, passive browsing and unhealthy comparison appear to contribute to poor mental health outcomes in young people. Recommendations are made for further research, policy intervention and the promotion of healthier digital habits, including educational initiatives focused on digital literacy and emotional resilience.

**Keywords:** Social Media, Digital Influence, Anxiety, Depression



# Jaime Thompson

A survey study exploring mental health stigma and service utilisation amongst young adults in the UK



Mental health stigma remains a significant barrier preventing young people from accessing the support and services they need. Although public awareness and understanding of mental health have improved in recent years, stigma continues to be a critical issue, particularly among individuals aged 18 to 30. This study aimed to explore the experiences and attitudes of young people toward mental health stigma and examine how these perceptions influence their willingness to seek professional support. A quantitative research design was employed, using an online questionnaire to collect data. The survey was distributed via social media platforms and targeted individuals aged 18 to 30 living in the United Kingdom. Participants were recruited through self-selection and snowball sampling, resulting in 100 valid responses. Data were analysed using Microsoft Excel, with attention to key demographic variables, especially gender. Descriptive statistics were used to interpret the results, and findings are presented using bar graphs to highlight key trends. The results suggest that both perceived public stigma and internalised self-stigma continue to hinder service utilisation among young people. Many participants expressed concerns about being judged, misunderstood, or perceived as weak for seeking mental health support. These concerns were particularly evident among male respondents, who were more likely to associate help-seeking with shame and embarrassment. Despite these challenges, most participants acknowledged the importance of mental health services and expressed support for increased education, awareness, and more open dialogue around mental wellbeing.

**Keywords:** Mental Health, Stigma, Help-seeking Behaviours, Internalised Stigma, Public Stigma, Barriers, Young Adults, United Kingdom, Young People



# Fiona Wyse

## The problem of defencelessness among children in low-income families

Defencelessness among children is a global health and social care issue, with millions affected by poverty, violence, neglect and limited access to essential services. With a primary focus on vulnerable children from low-income families in the UK, this dissertation investigates the complex relationship between socioeconomic status (SES), Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the structural inequalities that contribute to defencelessness. The study begins by defining key concepts and applying theoretical frameworks to explain how financial hardships can increase children's exposure to stress and trauma. It then examines the short and long-term consequences of ACEs; including poor physical and mental health, educational difficulties, social exclusion and intergenerational transmission of disadvantage. The role of stigma and intersecting factors in compounding the marginalization of children, such as race, gender and SES are focused on, with the consequences of these factors hindering future opportunities. This study also assesses the influence of healthcare, education and child protection policies in revealing how under-resourced systems can perpetuate inequality, hindering a child's development. This dissertation concludes with recommendations, emphasising the urgent need for systemic reform to address these inequalities and ensure that all children, regardless of background have access to safety, support and opportunity.

**Keywords:** Socioeconomic Status (SES), Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), Neglect, Abuse, Vulnerable, Defencelessness, Mental Health, Low Socioeconomic Status (LSES), High Socioeconomic Status (HSES)



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One of the greatest gifts university gives us (aside from the education!) is friendship. If you are lucky, you can find friendships at LJMU that will last the rest of your lives. And so the editors Jane and Jen would like to dedicate this edition of the PHI Journal in memory of our dear friend Elaine Sykes, who passed away suddenly in June 2025. Elaine began her career as a Research Support Officer at the Public Health Institute before moving on to the LJMU library and eventually becoming Head of Open Research at the University of Lancaster.

Elaine was kind, empathetic, fiercely intelligent, strong, forthright, loyal and witty. Everyday she brought warmth and laughter to the people around her. If we could give one bit of advice to our graduating students it would be to try and do the same, because they are the qualities that no one will ever forget. We will certainly never forget Elaine.

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