

PhD Opportunity

Vaccine hesitancy among adults living with allergy

Supervisory Team

Director of Studies: Dr Béré Mahoney, School of Health and Wellbeing and Three Counties Medical School, University of Worcester

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Research Group: [Living Well with Long-Term Conditions](#)

The PhD Opportunity:

The global spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) brought the impact of vaccine-related hesitancy on healthcare planning and delivery into sharp focus (Clark et al, 2025). Concern is growing about mRNA vaccine-related hesitancy beyond COVID-19 vaccines (Xu et al, 2024) given their wide-ranging application including disease prevention, and curative therapies for cancers (Li et al, 2023; Rzymski et al, 2023).

Vaccine hesitancy is studied widely but the role of allergies in shaping vaccine concerns is less explored, particularly in the context of mRNA vaccines (Larson, 2024). Hesitancy may be heightened among adults living with allergy given perceived or actual risks associated with vaccination can appear greater to these individuals than the risks posed by the disease (Li et al, 2021). This dynamic reflects the known interplay of risk perception, cognitive biases (e.g. omission bias, availability heuristic, confirmation bias), and attitudinal drivers of vaccine hesitancy that could be heightened among individuals with allergies, amplifying fears and distorting risk perceptions (Brown et al, 2010; DiBonaventura et al, 2008; Soni et al, 2021). Addressing these psychological drivers is essential for reducing vaccine hesitancy, particularly in populations with heightened concerns about allergic reactions.

Aims

We seek to recruit several PhD students to investigate vaccine-related hesitancy among adults who are living with allergy that is either clinically or self, diagnosed. Projects should explore these adults' vaccine-related experiences and decision-making, and the impact of their allergy on how they access healthcare and their health-related help-seeking. Students are encouraged to consider these issues in the context of primary health care but may choose to focus on a sub-set of adults living with allergy or a specific vaccination programmes.

Methods

Quantitative methods, qualitative methodologies or a mixed research approach with primary and/or secondary data may be used. Approaches that enable capture of the role of allergy in adults' engagement with healthcare (e.g. help-seeking, uptake of health checks and routine surveillance programmes) are encouraged.

References

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- DiBonaventura, M. D., & Chapman, G. B. (2008). Do decision biases predict bad decisions? Omission bias, naturalness bias, and influenza vaccination. *Medical Decision Making*, 28(4), 532-539.
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Application Process:

To begin the application process please go to

<https://www.worc.ac.uk/research/research-degrees/applying-for-a-phd/>.

The Interview:

All successful applicants will be offered an interview with the proposed Supervisory Team. You will be contacted by a member of the Doctoral School Team to find a suitable date. Interviews can be conducted in person or over Microsoft Teams.

Funding your PhD

For information about Doctoral Loans please visit: <https://www.worc.ac.uk/study/fees-and-finance/doctoral-loans.aspx>

During your PhD you can access the Research Conference Support Scheme to support the costs of presenting your research at an external conference.

Research at the University of Worcester

Research is central to the University's mission to make a difference in everything that we do. We are committed to delivering excellent research which extends the boundaries of human knowledge but which also improves people's lives by enabling better health outcomes, improving food security, developing environmentally sustainable solutions for crop production and socially sustainable solutions to our ageing population, enhancing public knowledge and understanding of the past and present.

The University hence focuses its research around five high-level challenges facing society, locally, nationally and globally:

- [Human Health and Wellbeing](#)
- [Sustainable Futures](#)
- [Digital Innovation](#)
- [Culture, Identity and Social Exclusion](#)
- [Professional Education](#)

The success of our research is reflected in our continuous improvement in external research assessment processes. In the most recent Research Excellence Framework, REF 2021, the University saw a near 50% increase in the scale of its research and 12% increase in quality, building on its performance in REF 2014 when it was the UK's most improved university in terms of Research Power, a combination of scale and quality.

Research Degrees at Worcester

Our research students are central to our overall mission for research. They are working at the cutting edge of their disciplines and driving forward the quality of our research whilst enriching our research culture. We are looking to increase our research student numbers as a strategic imperative.

Our commitment to our students is reflected in the results of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2025 in which we ranked 3rd for overall research student satisfaction nationally. Key to our success in this area is the Doctoral School, a focal point for all our research students.

It provides:

- day-to-day support for our students, both administrative and practical, through our dedicated team
- a Research Student Study Space with both PCs and laptop docking station
- a comprehensive Researcher Development Programme for students and their supervisors
- a programme of student-led conferences and seminars

Widening Participation

As part of its mission statement the University is committed to widening participation for its higher degrees. Although most candidates will have an undergraduate and/or a Masters degree, the University is happy to accept applications from candidates with relevant professional qualifications and work related experience.

For further information or an informal discussion on this project, please contact Dr Bere Mahoney b.mahoney@worc.ac.uk

