

# PhD Studentship

Identifying Effective Ways to Deliver Rural Early Intervention Psychosis: The REiP study

## Supervisory team:

**Director of Studies:** Elizabeth Hughes, Professor of Mental Health Inequalities and Director for THRIVE Rural Mental Health Research Unit, School of Health and Well-being, University of Worcester, UK

**Supervisors:** Professor Dez Kyte, Professor of Physiotherapy, School of Health and Wellbeing, University of Worcester, UK. Associate member of the Centre for Patient-Reported Outcomes Research, University of Birmingham, UK

Dr Molly Miley, Research Fellow, THRIVE Rural Mental Health Unit University of Worcester, UK

**Research Unit:** The University of Worcester have been awarded a National Institute for Health and Social Care (NIHR) Mental Health Leaders Award to establish a programme of research designed to address mental health inequalities in rural settings. The programme of research will have 3 areas of focus: Earlier intervention and detection of serious mental illness (SMI); Suicide Prevention; and Digital Support. The THRIVE programme has been developed in partnership with colleagues at the Institute for Mental Health, University of Birmingham and there will be opportunities for collaborative working for doctoral candidates across both Worcester and Birmingham.

## The PhD Studentship:

Applications are invited for a full-time PhD studentship for the project: Identifying Effective Ways to Deliver Rural Early Intervention Psychosis: The REiP study.

## Context

Mental health inequalities remain a pressing concern in rural communities, where access to timely and appropriate care is often limited by geographic, socioeconomic, and systemic barriers [1]. Individuals living in these areas frequently experience elevated levels of psychological distress yet face challenges in accessing mental health services and sustaining engagement with care [2]. These challenges impact on those who are experiencing a first episode psychosis where evidence shows that timely intervention is critical and is associated with positive outcomes.

Early Intervention Psychosis teams are well-established globally and comprise of a multi-disciplinary team who offer a range of psychological, social and medical interventions. However less is known about how to deliver such services in rural settings. A recent review [3] identified only 9 papers that addressed the delivery of EIP in rural settings and found that whilst there was some promise in terms of a “hub and spoke” model, there were significant challenges in delivery in rural settings. Many of the papers were based in countries other than the UK, and there is a need to understand how the context of rurality impacts on EIP care.

## ***Aims and Objectives***

This PhD will aim to address the gap in the literature on rural EIP by examining how early intervention psychosis services are delivered across rural Herefordshire and Worcestershire.

The successful applicant will develop a co-produced programme of research that will include:

- A review of international literature on effective delivery of early intervention (and other community mental health services) in a rural context
- A mapping of EIP services and how they operate as well as skill mix.
- Qualitative interviews with people with lived experience, their carers and staff in EIP.

## ***Indicative methodology***

### **Phase 1: Scoping Review**

A systematic scoping review will be conducted to identify existing good practice in rural EIP services and may draw upon literature on how more general community mental health. This will enable a specific focus on identifying what factors associated with rurality impact on mental health service delivery and access to care. This review would also aim to extract how specific intersecting inequalities in rural contexts (socio-economic, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, experience of trauma) impact on access to care.

### **Phase 2: Mapping**

In this phase, the EIP services will be mapped in terms of how care is delivered across different localities as well as understanding the nature and importance of “place” in terms of access, and response to those with a first episode psychosis. This may include collecting data through a variety of methods including observation of practice and analysis of routine data.

### **Phase 3: Qualitative Exploration**

Semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups will be undertaken with purposively sampled service users, clinicians, and stakeholders across rural EIP mental health services to determine the challenges and solutions to care delivery, as well as exploring the influence of intersecting inequalities and rurality.

## References:

1. Cheng, C., Dewa, C.S., Langill, G., Fata, M. and Loong, D. (2014), Early intervention for rural populations. *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, 8: 396-405. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eip.12076>
2. Thirthalli J, Reddy KS, Kare M, Das S, Gangadhar B. Rural–urban differences in accessing mental health treatment in patients with psychosis. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*. 2017;63(8):694-698. doi:[10.1177/0020764017730849](https://doi.org/10.1177/0020764017730849)
3. Pipkin A. Evidence base for early intervention in psychosis services in rural areas: A critical review. *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*. 2021; 15: 762–774. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eip.13019>

## Details of the studentship:

The studentship is offered for a 4-year period on a full-time basis. During the period of your studentship you will receive the following:

- a tax-free bursary of £19,660 for 3 years
- a fee-waiver for 4 years
- a budget to support your project costs
- a laptop and other IT equipment or software as appropriate to the project
- use of the Doctoral School facilities

You will be expected to play an active role in the life of both the Doctoral School and of the School. You will be given opportunities to gain experience in learning and teaching within the School under the guidance of your Director of Studies.

## Application Process:

To begin the application process for this studentship please go to our [webpage](#) and click 'apply now' next to the project you wish to apply for.

It is expected that applicants will have the following qualifications:

- A Masters in the area of Health Care or equivalent professional experience.
- A First or Upper Second Honours Degree

It is also expected that applicants will be able to demonstrate the following:

- A sound understanding of and interest in both the project and the wider subject area
- Experience of relevant research methods and skills
- Ability to contribute to the research design of the project
- Proficiency in oral and written English
- Proficiency in IT relevant to the project
- Ability to organise and meet deadlines
- Good interpersonal skills
- Ability to work independently
- Ability to work as part of a team

## The Interview:

The closing date for applications is **Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2025**. The interview will provisionally be held in person on **Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2025**. Shortlisted candidates will be given 7 day's-notice of interview. As we receive a large volume of applications for our PhD studentships, we will only contact shortlisted candidates. In advance of interview, shortlisted candidates will be asked to submit a sample of their written work (e.g. a publication or a dissertation).

Alongside the interview, shortlisted candidates will be asked to deliver a brief presentation (10 minutes) on a topic related to the studentship. This will provide an opportunity to demonstrate understanding of the project context and potential research approaches. Candidates are invited to present on the following suggested topic: **What are the challenges and solutions in delivering Early Intervention Psychosis services in rural settings and how might co-produced research address this?** To support their presentation, candidates are encouraged to use a concise slide deck and reflect on how their background or interests align with the aims of the EMPOWER project.

## 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 2023 in which we ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 Professor Elizabeth Hughes by email [Elizabeth.hughes2@worc.ac.uk](mailto:Elizabeth.hughes2@worc.ac.uk)**