

PhD Opportunity

Exploring the Challenges to Dementia Diagnosis in Rural Areas

Supervisory team:

Director of Studies: Dr Ruby Swift, Association for Dementia Studies, School of Health and Wellbeing, University of Worcester

Supervisors: Dr Peter Unwin, School of Health and Wellbeing, University of Worcester

External Advisor - Dr Michael Clark, Associate Professorial Research Fellow, London School of Economics

Research Centre: [Association for Dementia Studies](#)

The PhD Opportunity:

Rural areas face distinct healthcare challenges, including an aging population, vast distances to cover, and inadequate transport and telecommunications infrastructure. These factors underscore the necessity for targeted research and interventions¹.

Living in rural communities often makes it challenging to access a clinical diagnosis, as well as subsequent support services. Despite numerous barriers and inequalities in receiving timely dementia care, obtaining an early diagnosis is crucial. Addressing these barriers is essential to ensure individuals receive the necessary support and services².

Currently, there is a lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the specific challenges rural populations face in accessing dementia diagnosis services. Research indicates that diagnosis rates are lower in rural areas compared to urban ones, yet the underlying reasons for this disparity remain unclear³. Therefore, it is imperative to conduct focused research to uncover these challenges and develop effective solutions.

Potential areas of investigation are:

1. Investigating the specific barriers such as limited access to healthcare facilities, lack of awareness, and social stigma.
2. Exploring the role of primary care providers and their connection with community teams responsible for dementia diagnosis.
3. Assessing the impact of infrastructure limitations like transport and digital connectivity on diagnosis rates.

4. Examining the severity and timing of diagnosis to understand health-system delays and avoidable delays.
5. Proposing targeted interventions to improve diagnosis rates, such as mobile clinics, telemedicine, and community outreach programs.

References:

1. Coleman C. Health care in rural areas - House of Lords Library. <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/health-care-in-rural-areas/>. Published February 17, 2023. Accessed November 20, 2024.
2. Giebel C. "current dementia care: What are the difficulties and how can we advance care globally?" BMC Health Serv Res. 2020;20(1):1-3. doi:10.1186/S12913-020-05307-1/METRICS
3. Hodgson, S., Hayes, H., Cubi-Molla, P., and Garau, M., (2024) Inequalities in Dementia: Unveiling the Evidence and Forging a Path Towards Greater Understanding. Office of Health Economics. Available at: <https://www.ohe.org/publications/inequalities-in-dementia> [Accessed 4 February 2025].

A project in this area will incur some additional costs that will be met by the student, for fieldwork and consultation with experts by experience. The exact costs will depend on the specific project and will be discussed both at interview and kept under review throughout the duration of the project.

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 2023 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 about this project, please contact Dr Ruby Swift: r.swift@worc.ac.uk