



A Public Health Approach to Digital Exposure and Youth Mental Health: Cross-National Evidence to Inform Policy and Prevention

We invite applications for a funded doctoral degree (DPhil) studentship in the **Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford**, supported by the **Clair Chilvers PhD Scholarship from Mental Health Research UK (MHRUK)**, commencing **October 2026**.

Adolescence is a critical period for mental health, and young people today are growing up in increasingly complex digital environments. While online spaces can offer connection and creativity, they may also expose young people to harmful content, disrupted sleep, social comparison, and online harassment. Much existing research has focused on broad measures such as screen time, limiting understanding of how specific digital experiences influence mental health and wellbeing.

This DPhil will take a **population-level, public health approach** to examining how digital exposure relates to adolescent mental health. Moving beyond time spent online, the project will focus on the **nature, amount, and engagement with digital content**, and how these relate to mental health outcomes across individual, social, family, and school contexts.

The successful candidate will work with **large-scale UK datasets**, including the **OxWell Student Survey**, which provide rich information on mental health, digital engagement, and contextual factors. There will also be opportunities for **cross-national collaboration** to explore how different regulatory environments shape young people's digital experiences.

The project emphasises **methodological rigour, youth involvement**, and careful consideration of **policy and prevention implications**. The precise focus of the DPhil will be refined with the successful candidate to ensure feasibility within the doctoral timeframe.

The DPhil will be supervised by Professor Mina Fazel, Dr Holly Bear, and Dr Mirela Zaneva, whose expertise spans adolescent mental health, epidemiology, and digital health.

Funding

The scholarship will fund **course fees up to the value of UK (home) fees*** and a **tax-free stipend at the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) rate** (currently £20,780 per annum, subject to annual increases). The **fourth year is regarded as a writing-up year**, during which the scholarship covers the stipend and thesis fee only. MHRUK may also consider **limited additional support** for conferences, training, or public involvement activities, subject to approval.

Details of course fees are available here:

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/admissions/graduate/courses/dphil-psychiatry>

** Students with overseas fee status will be required to fund the remainder of their fees from alternative sources.*

Eligibility

Applicants should have, or expect to obtain, **at least a strong upper second-class undergraduate degree**, and/or a **relevant Master's degree**, in psychology, psychiatry, public health, epidemiology, child development, or a related field. Applicants should demonstrate **experience of independent research**, for example through a dissertation or substantial research project.

Applicants should be motivated to undertake doctoral research in **adolescent mental health and digital health** and have an interest in **population-level or quantitative research**. Experience with statistical analysis or large datasets is desirable. We particularly welcome applicants interested in **interdisciplinary research**, **policy-relevant evidence**, and **working collaboratively with young people and stakeholders**.

MHRUK and the University of Oxford are committed to equality, diversity and inclusion and welcome applications from candidates of all backgrounds.

Applications must be submitted via the University of Oxford Graduate Admissions portal: www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/apply

Informal enquiries are strongly encouraged and should be directed to **Dr Holly Bear** (holly.bear@psych.ox.ac.uk).

Application deadline: 12:00 midday (UK time), Friday 6th February 2026

Interview date: w/c 23rd February 2026

Studentship code: 26PSYCH03WEB