

Project 7: Understanding and addressing socioeconomic inequalities in child mental health services.

Proposed Supervisory Team

- Dr Tessa Reardon
- Second supervisor to be selected depending on student's proposal

Background and rationale

In a typical UK class of 30 children, there are 10 children living in poverty. These children are more likely than their peers to experience mental health problems *and* are more likely to experience difficulties accessing mental health services. Targeted action to reduce inequalities in access to child mental health services is a key priority for the NHS.

This DPhil proposal initially sets out to provide an improved understanding of the nature and extent of socioeconomic inequalities in child mental health service utilisation. Studies reporting service use vary in design (e.g. use administrative data, retrospective surveys, prospective longitudinal studies) and measure socioeconomic circumstances and mental health need in various ways. Identifying and synthesising existing evidence, exploring patterns (e.g. differences between countries within different healthcare systems, income/wealth distribution, country income level) and gaps could inform priorities for targeted action.

Innovative approaches to improve access to mental health care in low and middle income countries (e.g. strengthening existing community assets, near-peer task sharing, mobile 'pop-up' community care) provide valuable learning opportunities for low-resource contexts globally, including in the UK. This DPhil therefore seeks to map this existing evidence from low and middle income countries and work with front-line staff and parents/carers in the UK to consider potential application and adaptation for local UK contexts.

Proposed Research Aims

- Systematically review and synthesise global evidence on socioeconomic inequalities in utilisation of child mental health services.
- Map evidence from low and middle income countries on strategies and approaches to increase access to child mental health services.
- Codesign strategies to address socioeconomic inequalities in access to community-based child mental health services in England and test the feasibility of implementing these strategies in routine practice.

Potential Methodologies

- Systematic review and evidence synthesis
- Co-design with child mental service providers, practitioners, and families
- Implementation feasibility testing