Social isolation & older adults

Fulham Good Neighbours & Ko Sum Yue

Dissertation Title
The impact of information communication technology (ICT) interventions on reducing social isolation in older adults: A mixed-methods systematic review update

The Problem
Population ageing, often labelled as a ‘global crisis’ and an ‘epidemic’, is a salient and rapidly growing social problem. In light of the inevitability of population ageing and related problems, it is paramount that governments and policies facilitate the functionality of older adults as integral members of society by ensuring that older adults remain socially participative, connected, and engaged. Cultivating a deeper understanding of how governments can reinforce social participation by preventing social isolation amongst elderly adults is thereby paramount.

What We Did
The project evaluates the impact of ICT interventions on alleviating social isolation in older adults. It aims to investigate how ICT, such as the use of digital devices (e.g., laptops) and online platforms, enables older adults to feel less socially isolated and experience a greater sense of participation and belonging within society.

Our Hopes for the Project
We hope that the findings from this dissertation will provide valuable insights that can shape and improve Fulham Good Neighbours’ ongoing digital inclusion project. The evidence from this project can support their efforts in applying for funds as well as their lobbying activities to enhance the digital inclusion of older adults.
Evaluating programmes for care-affected girls

Sister System & Louise Macaulay

Dissertation Title
Estimating the impact of Sister Systems initiatives on care-affected girls: A synthetic control analysis in Haringey, with implications for expansion to other London boroughs

The Problem
Sister System aims to bridge the gap between care-affected girls and mainstream society by providing early intervention programmes to young women aged 13-24. Based in Haringey, the borough has been saturated with referrals to their services. As part of their 3-year strategy they are aiming to expand into other London boroughs. By broadening the scope of their services to encompass additional boroughs, they are seeking to better understand the specific needs and experiences of care-affected young women across diverse areas of London.

What We Did
This project is providing insights into the overall characteristics and educational outcomes of care-affected girls across all London Boroughs. It also aims to provide an early evaluation of the impact of their programmes on care-affected girls in Haringey. The project will produce not only a dissertation but also a comprehensive summary of the project findings and an impact evaluation.

Our Hopes for the Project
As Sister System expands their reach beyond Haringey and into other London boroughs they hope to be able to use the evidence from this project informed decisions regarding resource allocation and program development. This combined with a better understanding of their impact in Haringey will allow them to direct and hone their services to the areas where they can have the greatest impact.
Age, digital inclusion & community-based services

Fulham Good Neighbours & Hongzhe Yan

Dissertation Title
Age, Digital Inclusion and Community-based Services: A Case Study on The Digital Inclusion Project of Fulham Good Neighbours.

The Problem
Fulham Good Neighbours is seeking to ensure that our Digital Inclusion project is as inclusive, accessible, and fit-for-purpose as possible for our older, disabled and disadvantaged neighbours in the post-Covid world.

What We Did
The project built on UCL insight via a Community Research Initiative collaboration from 2022. We sought to build on the project.

Our Hopes for the Project
That our findings increase understanding about the digital needs to best understand the digital needs of the FGN community so that they can feel included and supported in the digital world, and in turn feel less isolated, better able to access services (e.g. doctors, online bookings/shopping, online Exercise/Art at FGN etc), and better equipped to use digital opportunities to help their incomes go further!
Maternal and newborn health

Women & Children First UK & Elise Robinson

Dissertation Title
Community-based initiatives to improve maternal and newborn health in high-income settings - A Systematic Review

The Problem
Maternal and newborn health (MNH) outcomes varied globally, especially in low to middle-income countries, with successful community-based interventions addressing these issues. However, the effectiveness of such approaches and their relationship with Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methodology remained unexplored in high-income countries. This research aimed to fill this gap, investigating the potential of community-based initiatives and PLA methodology to improve MNH outcomes in high-income settings.

What We Did
Our project thoroughly examined community-based interventions targeting maternal and newborn health in high-income settings. Through a review of existing literature and data analysis from diverse contexts, we sought to understand the impact and viability of these initiatives. Our focus was on assessing their success and exploring their alignment with Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methodology. By conducting this review, we aimed to bridge the knowledge gap and offer insights into the potential application of community-based approaches, including PLA, in high-income countries.

Our Hopes for the Project
Our project holds the aspiration of enriching the understanding of effective maternal and newborn health interventions. By uncovering the relationship between community-based initiatives and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methodology, we aim to provide valuable insights for improving healthcare outcomes. Furthermore, we anticipate that our findings will greatly benefit Women and Children First (WCF), our community partner specializing in PLA interventions for MNH in low-income rural areas. The project’s outcomes can guide WCF’s future strategies and extend their expertise to high-income settings, ultimately contributing to a broader comprehension of MNH interventions and promoting better healthcare practices across diverse contexts.
Unmet mental health needs to Afghan refugees in London

Helen Bamber Foundation & Uday Shrivastava

Dissertation Title

The Problem
The research project focused on the inadequate mental health support for Afghan refugees in London and their interaction with NHS policies. The influx of Afghan refugees due to geopolitical events revealed a gap in NHS services not meeting their specific mental health needs.

What We Did
In collaboration with the Helen Bamber Foundation, the project utilized qualitative research. It analyzed existing NHS policies on mental health, investigated barriers faced by Afghan refugees accessing care, and engaged healthcare professionals, volunteers, and policymakers through interviews. Thematic analysis of these interviews uncovered insights into challenges and opportunities.

Our Hopes for the Project
The project aims to identify gaps and barriers in NHS mental health services for Afghan refugees. It seeks to generate evidence-based recommendations and share findings through various channels, including academic journals and conferences. The goal is to raise awareness, influence policies, and contribute to the creation of a more inclusive and effective healthcare system for Afghan refugees' mental health needs.
The changing role of foodbanks

Uttlesford Foodbank & Callum Parris

Dissertation Title
How are foodbanks responding to their changing role in local welfare provision?

The Problem
The project’s focus was on the response of foodbanks to the rising demand from service users and their evolving role within local welfare assistance schemes. The study revolved around a case study of a local foodbank in Uttlesford, where the researcher had volunteered since 2022. This case study was informed by interviews conducted with foodbank staff, volunteers, local council officials, and individuals working in partnered community organizations. The primary objective was to examine whether foodbanks had become functionally integrated into the local welfare state infrastructure. Additionally, the project aimed to explore the internal tension within voluntary sector organizations between service delivery and advocacy.

What we did
The researcher has completed several crucial steps in the project. A total of 12 interviews were conducted with individuals associated with the foodbank and those collaborating with it. These interviews have been transcribed and initial analysis has commenced, focusing on a variety of themes. The Uttlesford foodbank played a pivotal role in facilitating these interviews. While the analysis of these interviews is an ongoing process, preliminary findings have highlighted intriguing insights into the collaboration between the voluntary sector and local authorities to provide crisis support. These findings also hint at potential changes in this relationship over recent years.

Our hopes for the project
The researcher aspires for the project to shed light on the commendable efforts undertaken by voluntary sector organizations, particularly foodbanks, in the realm of local crisis support. On a practical level, the research findings will inform a presentation to be delivered alongside the foodbank to its staff, local council officials, and other community organizations. The presentation aims to bring attention to the specific challenges faced by the foodbank within the local context and propose potential solutions. Furthermore, the researcher hopes that the project’s insights will contribute meaningfully to the expanding academic discourse concerning the integration of voluntary sector organizations into the welfare state. Additionally, the research might offer suggestions on how the advocacy work of these organizations could potentially counteract this trend.
**Fathers’ mental health**

**National Childbirth Trust & Rachael Leonard**

**Dissertation Title**
Understanding the role of volunteer-led, community-based peer support for fathers mental health in the perinatal period

**The Problem**
The Parents in Mind - Perinatal mental health peer support group provides emotional support for parents who are experiencing low mood, anxiety or poor mental health during pregnancy or within the first two years of birth. The program recently started to expand it’s support services specifically for fathers and non-birthng partners. In order to best support fathers with mild to moderate mental health difficulties there needs to be a better understanding of what makes an effective perinatal peer support program for fathers, including understanding what aspects are not supportive.

**What We Did**
This project sought to better understand how volunteer-led community-based peer support could contribute to the perinatal mental health of fathers. The study conducted an evaluation of existing services through the Parents In Mind Program as well as gathered evidence of the role of peer support for future funding. Information was produced for the programme to help provide evidence based support of perinatal mental health for fathers. (Note: the format of the community product has yet to be confirmed)

**Our Hopes for the Project**
We are hoping to gain valuable insight from those with direct experience to help us find out what is and isn’t working at our sites. We also hope that the work Rachael is doing we contribute to connecting our services to support the perinatal mental health of mothers and fathers. We also hope to gain a deeper understanding of what works for fathers by looking at the father’s journey – what their hopes for themselves were within the program and whether the program delivered on those goals.
Asylum-seekers in bridging hotels

Afghanistan & Central Asian Association & Scarlett O’Malley

Dissertation Title
A Hotel not a Holiday: How community relations are experienced and utilised by Asylum Seekers in Bridging Hotels

The Problem
Many asylum seekers from Afghanistan and Central Asia are faced with incredible difficulty living away from their homeland, having lack of support, and adjusting to life in the United Kingdom. The Afghanistan and Central Asian Association runs a series of integration workshops that provide valuable skills and a sense of community to these asylum seekers. To maintain current programming and to expand in the future, the effectiveness of this programme and the ACCAAs efforts needs to be evaluated shared with the local council.

What We Did
Scarlett participated in the programme by leading several integration workshops for asylum seekers. The project will build on her involvement by interviewing 5 individuals who took part in these workshops and writing up their experience in the form of an evaluation.

Our Hopes for the Project
We are hoping that the project will provide evidence of the impact of our new integration workshops on asylum seekers within our program. Further, the evaluation will show more widely the impact of the wider work done by the ACAA and how that work is necessary to provide this community with support, skills and knowledge to live and prosper in the UK.
Relationships and maintaining green spaces

National Federation of Parks & Green Spaces & Yi Huang

Dissertation Title
The role of good relations between voluntary community-based groups and local authorities in sustaining Greenspace: Practices of UK Friends Groups

The Problem
Local authorities manage more than 28,000 parks and greenspaces in the UK. However, local authority funding has been significantly reduced since 2010 whilst the popularity of parks has never been greater. For many authorities, the budget doesn’t allow for much more than cutting the grass, emptying the bins and trying to ensure that parks are safe to use. Friends groups can add value to what the authority does. They can look after areas as volunteers, provide events and activities and act as local champions and spokespeople in support of their park. However relationships between the two parties, local authority and Friends group, vary enormously with some Friends reporting very positive relationships and others not. The National Federation of Parks and Greenspaces (NFPGS) asked UCL for student support to investigate this further to try and find out more about the ingredients and tools required for good relationships with a view to sharing the results with both local authorities and Friends groups.

What we did
Interviews using a semi structured interview format have been held with three senior local authority parks officers and three Friends groups representatives based within the local authority area. These are currently being reviewed and analysed within the context of a co-production framework as this was felt to be the most appropriate model.

Our hopes for the project
We are hoping that the main findings together with any relevant tools can be published on our website natfedparks.org.uk as a resource to help inform both Friends and local authorities about how to maximise the benefits from a relationship. Depending upon how much progress we are able to make with the current study, we may seek to undertake a phase 2 which could be to produce a co-production guide for Friends and authorities.
Framing policy on deep fakes

We and AI & Medina Bakayeva

Dissertation Title
Framing policy on deepfakes in the EU, UK and US

The Problem
The central concern addressed by this project revolves around the exploration of how policy relating to deepfake media (AI-generated audio and visual materials) is framed within the EU, US, and UK. The project seeks to uncover the way policy documents from these jurisdictions portray the potential threats posed by deepfakes to both society and individuals. This involves a comprehensive examination of how deepfakes are framed in the context of issues such as national security, democratic resilience, cybercrime, and more. Understanding how these policy debates are shaped is essential, as the framing of such discussions often influences subsequent policy actions. The project’s focus gains even more significance due to the impending challenge of deepfakes in the context of the 2024 elections in the EU, US, and UK.

What we did
Significant progress has been made in advancing this research project. To start, relevant policy documents from the EU, US, and UK have been meticulously identified. These documents have undergone a systematic coding process, which involves using specialized content analysis software called NVivo. This method facilitates the identification of recurring themes and frames within the policy documents. The ongoing process of coding and analysis will allow for the emergence of patterns and trends in how deepfake-related issues are presented and understood within these jurisdictions.

Our hopes for the project
The envisioned outcomes of this project carry substantial potential for real-world impact. One of the primary aspirations is that the research findings can serve as valuable insights for organizations like “We and AI” to design and develop workshops on deepfakes. These workshops can play a crucial role in educating the public about the complexities and risks associated with deepfake media. By fostering a better understanding of these issues, the project’s outcomes have the potential to enhance digital literacy and critical thinking skills, equipping individuals with the tools to discern and navigate the evolving landscape of AI-generated media. This, in turn, contributes to the broader goals of countering disinformation, ensuring digital security, and fostering a well-informed and resilient society.