

Project Details	
Project Code	MRCNMH26Br Padmanathan
Title	Hope in the Darkness: Identifying Protective Factors to Prevent Self-Harm
Research Theme	NMH
Project Type	Dry lab
Summary	Self-harm is an important and growing public health concern. Previous research has focused mainly on risk factors and little is known about protective factors for self-harm. This is vital to inform the development of preventative strategies and to improve clinical assessment. In this mixed-methods PhD, the student will develop skills in study design, data collection and quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Students will have the opportunity to analyse data from three world-renowned cohorts, including Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children, and conduct interviews with people who have lived experience of self-harm.
Description	<p>Self-harm is an important and growing public health concern (Moran et al, 2024). Recent estimates suggest that around 24% of adolescents in the UK report having self-harmed during the past year (Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2021). Most existing studies have concentrated on risk factors for self-harm, including exposure to adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), leaving a critical need for more research focused on identifying and promoting protective factors. This work is vital to inform the development of preventative strategies and to improve clinical assessment. Research has also been limited by a lack of diversity within existing samples, and a lack of consideration of protective factors in later developmental periods such as adolescence and adulthood.</p> <p>This PhD will be guided by the Healthy Outcomes from Positive Experiences (HOPE) framework (Sege & Harper-Browne, 2017). This framework focuses on the need to actively promote positive experiences and emphasises relationships, environment, engagement and emotional growth as key domains for promoting healthy development and well-being.</p> <p>By shifting the focus from risk to protective factors, this mixed-methods PhD will fill an important knowledge gap and contribute to a more holistic and inclusive understanding of self-harm. The findings will contribute valuable insights for researchers, health practitioners, and policymakers, and will inform the development of interventions. This PhD aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of protective factors for self-harm across diverse populations and across developmental periods. The objectives are to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify protective factors: identify specific individual, familial, school, and community protective factors that contribute to reducing self-harm behaviours among adolescents and among adults. 2. Consider ethnic diversity: explore whether protective factors for self-harm differ among different ethnic groups. 3. Consider adversity: identify protective factors that can help to mitigate the impact of ACEs on later self-harm. 4. Learn from lived experience: conduct qualitative interviews with individuals who have self-harmed to gain deeper insights into the relationship between protective factors and self-harm.

	<p>5. Inform clinical assessment: conduct patient and public involvement (PPI) work to explore how the findings can inform clinical practice. These objectives will be achieved using a combination of advanced statistical analysis of longitudinal data with qualitative interviews to provide an in-depth understanding of protective factors for self-harm. This will provide a crucial first step for informing future intervention development.</p> <p>The student will be able to take ownership and steer the project by developing study protocols, selecting variables of interest within the cohort datasets, and constructing the topic guide for qualitative interviews. They will gain in-depth knowledge of the academic literature on self-harm as well as clinical and lived experiences perspectives. In addition, they will develop a broad set of skills essential for taking an evidence-based approach to understanding and addressing health challenges. These skills will be transferable to a range of future careers, including but not limited to academia and clinical psychology.</p> <p>References:</p> <p>Moran P et al. The Lancet Commission on self-harm. Lancet. 2024 Oct 12;404(10461):1445-1492. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(24)01121-8.</p> <p>Patalay P & Fitzsimons E. Psychological distress, self-harm and attempted suicide in UK 17-year olds: prevalence and sociodemographic inequalities. Br J Psychiatry. 2021 Aug;219(2):437-439. doi: 10.1192/bjp.2020.258.</p> <p>Sege RD & Harper Browne C. Responding to ACEs With HOPE: Health Outcomes From Positive Experiences. Acad Pediatr. 2017 Sep-Oct;17(7S):S79-S85. doi: 10.1016/j.acap.2017.03.007.</p>
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