



Adapting the home for health, care and wellbeing

Faculty of Wellbeing Education
and Language Studies (WELS)

Call for PhD projects starting in October 2024

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Project description

School

Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

Members

Dr Manik Gopinath	https://www.open.ac.uk/people/jl23226	manik.gopinath@open.ac.uk
Dr Rachel Russell	https://wwwFOUNDATIONS.uk.com/people/rachel-russell/	rachelr@FOUNDATIONS.uk.com
Dr Mahera Ruby	https://www.open.ac.uk/people/mr596	mahera.ruby@open.ac.uk
Prof Sheila Peace	https://www.open.ac.uk/research/careers/academics/sheila-peace	sheila.peace@open.ac.uk

Aim

The proposed collaborative studentship with Foundations [National Body for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) in England] aims to explore with older people from minority ethnic communities their requirements for, and experiences of home adaptations for everyday living, health, and wellbeing.

Background

The United Kingdom (UK) has the oldest housing stock in the European Union (1). Additionally, the majority of older people are likely to continue living in ordinary housing of variable quality into their later years. They may do so without adapting the home for safety, accessibility, and usability needs that develop with changing age, health and care-related needs. 'Home adaptations' include (non) structural alterations and additions to the house, (e.g., walk-in showers), and provision of equipment (e.g., raised toilet seats) (2). Such adaptations enable older people to maintain continuity of place and relationships and 'age in place' at home - a popular and policy preference in the UK (1,2).

Literature on home and health identifies both the negative impact of poor-quality unsuitable housing (3) and the widespread benefits of adaptations for the health and wellbeing of older people, informal carers, and formal services (4, 5). Yet, older people from non-white ethnicities are less likely to use adaptations compared to their white counterparts (2), despite enduring health and housing inequalities (6). Issues facing minority ethnic communities in their need for and use of home adaptations, however, remain under-explored (7). This is despite growing ethnic diversity of older people in the UK and concerns about transferability of research across the groups since minority ethnic older people are not a homogeneous entity.

This qualitative study will explore minority ethnic older peoples' perspectives and experiences of home adaptations. Possible research questions:

- What are the home adaptation requirements of older people from minority ethnic communities?

- How do they adapt and modify their home space to facilitate health and wellbeing?
- What are their understandings and experiences of accessing and acquiring home adaptation services?

References

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4. Chandola T & Rouxel P. (2022) Home modifications and disability outcomes: A longitudinal study of older adults living in England. *Lancet Reg Health Eur.*; 18:100397.
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7. Mackintosh, S., Smith, P., Garrett, H., Morgan, G., & Russell, R. (2018). *Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) and other adaptations – External review (Main Report)*.

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Methodology

Focusing on experiences and perceptions of minority ethnic older adults, the study will adopt a qualitative research design. Methods are open to development in discussion with the candidate but are likely to include in-depth interviews, home observations and focus groups with men and women aged 55 years and over (given shorter life expectancies) from at least two minority ethnic communities in England, occupying a range of housing tenures (e.g., owner occupier, social and private housing tenants). Inclusion of minority groups and methods will be iteratively explored with the student and Foundations who will jointly supervise the collaborative studentship.

Fieldwork will take place in London and another major English city (e.g., Manchester) reflecting the spatial spread of minority populations in the UK. Recruitment will involve a combination of purposive and snowball sampling including through Foundations networks and other community groups (e.g., Age

UK). The studentship will appoint a bilingual candidate proficient in English and another language, for example, Bengali, to bridge linguistic and cultural barriers.

Contribution

Foundations recognises the severe ethnic inequalities that thrive within the UK. Importantly, the Disabled Facilities Grant review in 2018 (7) highlights the lack of understanding of the needs of different ethnic groups and consideration of how adaptations can be delivered in culturally sensitive ways. Foundations is therefore keen to contribute to the development of an evidence base to ensure that housing assistance policies at local and national levels reflect fairly the diverse communities in their home adaptations services. Specific contributions from Foundations will include:

1. Introducing the student to Foundations and their role as the National Body for home improvement agencies.
2. Helping the student to understand good practice, the roles of different stakeholders involved in adaptation work such as, occupational therapists, home improvement agencies, local authorities, handy person and caseworkers and different types of adaptations alongside arranging conversations with some of these stakeholders.
3. Contributing through collaborative supervisory meetings to research questions, methods, analysis, and interpretation.
4. Providing access to the Foundations online library, datasets from across England and relevant specialist training and seminars to help the student contextualise their project.

5. Brokering introductions and providing access to Foundations network of practitioners for recruiting participants.
6. Providing a hot desking space for the student in a relevant Home Improvement Agency in England during fieldwork.
7. Offering the student opportunities to present their work and facilitate dissemination of findings and learning to a wide range of appropriate audiences and through different media including monthly webinars, Bi-annual Roadshows, and the Foundations website.
8. Offering access to local regional and national practitioners and policy makers through the Regional Advisers Network and policy footprint of Foundations thereby offering them the opportunity to influence national and local housing assistance policies.

Impact

1. This research will contribute by providing much needed evidence in relation to knowledge gaps identified by the recent Disabled Facilities Grant review (2018). Namely, a better understanding of the needs of different ethnic groups and how adaptations can be delivered in culturally sensitive ways.
2. Findings will inform new and existing activities undertaken by the organisation to support professionals and other stakeholders to deliver timely and (culturally) appropriate home adaptations.
3. This studentship collaboration will contribute to and enhance Foundation's existing research capacity.

PhD candidate

The doctoral candidate will be required to be bilingual, i.e., fluent in a language other than English and have the ability to collaborate as part of a team as well as work independently. Applicant must have a disciplinary background in one or more of the following areas: gerontology, housing studies, health and social care, human geography, social policy, sociology, built environment, public health.

