



# **The Gender Pain Gap in Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Across the Life Course**

**Faculty of Wellbeing Education  
and Language Studies (WELS)**

Call for PhD projects starting in October 2025

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# Project description

## School

Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

## Members

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## Aim

By developing and implementing a collaborative, innovative research agenda, Gender Pain Gap project aims to address a notable inequality in health and wellbeing. Investigating how sexual and reproductive health (SRH) related pain is understood, experienced and managed, including unpicking its cultural acceptability. In the long term, this programme of work aims to support opportunities to live well, by informing policy and future research.

## Objectives

The overarching objective of the wider Gender Pain Gap project is to create a pivotal space from which to investigate the framings, lived experiences, and broad impacts of SRH-related pain across the UK's four nations. In doing so, we are working to bring together currently disparate areas of scholarship, to unpick the normalisation of SRH-related pain – particularly for women and other people with a uterus – with the long-term goal of supporting the wellbeing of an underserved population.

In this wider project we are drawing on our team's collective expertise to address areas including:

1. Examining the socio-political and cultural basis for the normalisation of SRH-related pain
2. Generating a coherent interdisciplinary evidence base on SRH-related pain
3. Developing an agenda for a large-scale, collaborative programme of research and engagement work around SRH-related pain

## Activities

Multiple interrelated activity streams are supporting the short, medium, and long-term impact of the Gender Pain Gap project, including:

1. Nationwide collaboration: we are developing four nations interdisciplinary collaboration around SRH-related pain, to facilitate an overall programme of co-production programme, knowledge exchange and impact.

2. Co-production: we are working to establish inclusive stakeholder and lived experience groups to guide development of priorities for an SRH-related pain research agenda.

## Impact

The long-term change which this programme of work intends to support is a society in which the sexual and reproductive health-related pain of women and other people with a uterus is recognised and appropriately addressed across the lifecourse. Tackling this issue, which is grounded in deeply entrenched gender and cultural norms, is extremely complex and challenging, and needs a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach.

We aim to generate significant impact, building upon the extensive expertise of the team in informing the sexual and reproductive health research agenda and influencing policy. Our knowledge exchange and impact activities include working with key national and international partners and collaborative networks. Through partnering with [PolicyWISE](#), we aim to produce outputs with clear, evidence-based courses of action, drawing out comparative learning from the respective four nations' approaches.

## Website

<https://societal-challenges.open.ac.uk/challenges/the-gender-pain-gap-in-womens-sexual-and-reproductive-health-across-the-lifecycle-/255>

# PhD project

## Developing a pain scale for abortion

Pain is a highly subjective experience, and its effective management is an ongoing challenge in the context of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care. A recent Cochrane systematic review was unable to make strong recommendations on pain management in medication abortion because of the heterogeneity of ways in which pain is measured. To improve research and practice, a reliable, validated tool is urgently needed. Developing this tool would contribute to Standardizing Abortion Research Outcomes (STAR), as recommended by the World Health Organization.

The proposed project would take a mixed-method approach to developing and validating a pain measurement tool specific to abortion care. Via extensive qualitative secondary analysis of an existing body of UK interview data on experiences of medication abortion, and reviewing existing scales, the student would seek to identify candidate items to constitute a quantitative pain scale. The tool would then be tested, refined, and validated through an iterative process including psychometric testing.

Outputs from this PhD project, co-supervised with University of Edinburgh, would have application in research (including as an outcome measure in RCTs) and clinical practice, and would thus have potential to positively impact abortion care outcomes in the UK and globally.

