Research Webinar: Maternal & Infant Health Equity Research Centre (MIHERC)

Wednesday 4th November 2026, Time: 10:00 -11:00 Hrs (UK Time)

Join:https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/327784385422197?p=O8AoCF9ySEE2E9mmBX

Meeting ID: 327 784 385 422 197
Passcode: 2Rs9HP9w

Welcome to the MIHERC Webinar Series

We are delighted to re-launch our new webinar series under the **MIHERC** banner. Held on the **first Wednesday of each month**, the series provides a forum for sharing research and innovation in maternal and infant health, with a particular focus on advancing health equity.

The annual programme including speakers, topics, and abstracts are outlined below. **Details of the next webinar, including the title, speaker biography, and abstract, are highlighted in green.**

*Interested in presenting? Contact **Professor Hora Soltani (Chair)** at **h.soltani@shu.ac.uk**.*

Date 2026	*Title*	Speaker
4th Feb	***Re-Launch of the Wednesday Webinars 2026*** *Welcome, reflection on last year and introduction to the new series + Introduction & briefly discuss all's research interests*	Hora Soltani-Chair Professor of Maternal and Infant Health, Sheffield Hallam University
4th March	Title: The Open Door Project: Increasing access to psychological interventions through primary care for those experiencing perinatal obsessive-compulsive disorder: a co-produced project	Dr Alice Tunks; University of Surrey, UK A.Tunks@surrey.ac.uk
1st April	Title: Optimising physical activity after gestational diabetes: a realist-inspired study	Dr Elysa Ioannou; Researcher on ENHANCE project, Sheffield Hallam University. e.ioannou@shu.ac.uk
6thMay	Title: Three-dimensional surface imaging of the pregnant abdomen as a method of fetal growth screening.	Hayley Billings: Senior Midwifery Lecturer; Sheffield Hallam University
3rd June	Title: Investigating Disparities In Access to the Northwest Ambulance Service during the Perinatal Period (DIAAS) - Initial Insights into Maternal and Neonatal Demographics, Outcomes and Drivers to Accessing Ambulance Services.	Dr Stephanie Heys - Consultant Midwife, NWAS

1st July	Maternal Nutritional Health at the Intersection of Climate Change, Gender, and Culture: Evidence from LMICs	**Dr Corinna Thellmann**: Corinna Thellmann is a Researcher in Global Health and Medical Anthropology at Sheffield Hallam University & **Dr Fizza Ansar:** Public Health Researcher and Epidemiologist, Aga Khan University, Pakistan
Aug-Sept	**No meetings**	**None**
7th Oct	"From Understanding to Action: A Participatory Approach to Improving Antenatal Care Access for Afghan Women in France."	**Dr Saha Naseri:** PhD in Epidemiology, University of Toulouse-France
4th Nov	**Supporting parents' ability to recognise symptoms of neonatal illness in Kenya: A grounded theory study leading to a consensus-based approach to determine intervention components.**	**Sarah Farrell**: Midwifery researcher at Sheffield Hallam University.
2rd Dec	**Linked data and health research: personal experiences, reflections and future directions**	**Dr Ifeoma Onyeka-** Senior Research Fellow Sheffield Hallam University

Sheffield Hallam University

Speakers' Biography & Abstract

4th of Feb 2026: Professor Hora Soltani (Chair-Lead for Maternal and Infant Health Research)

Hora is the Director of Maternal and Infant Health Equity Research Centre (MIHERC) at Sheffield Hallam University and the Lead for the Perinatal Mental Health theme within the Maternity Disparity Consortium (MDC). including interdisciplinary researchers and PhD students in Sheffield Hallam University.

4th March 2026: Dr Alice Tunks PhD, Research Fellow.

Abstract: It is estimated perinatal obsessive-compulsive disorder (PNOCD) impacts 22% of individuals during or after pregnancy. Effective evidence-based treatments, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, do exist. However, often PNOCD is under-recognised and under-diagnosed, and there are issues of inequity in access to support.

This talk presents mixed-methods research focused on understanding the barriers and facilitators to accessing evidence-based psychological therapies (EBPT) for mental health problems, with a focus on PNOCD. Recommendations were generated for improving access to EBPT for PNOCD. A co-production group, comprising of five mothers who had experienced PNOCD contributed to the body of work presented, providing input into the design, data collection, and analysis of the studies. Research studies include an interviews study to identify the barriers and facilitators to accessing EBPT; a survey of healthcare professionals' prioritisation of barriers to accessing EBPT for PNOCD; and two deliberative workshops with a range of healthcare professionals in order to develop recommendations for how to improve access to EBPT for PNOCD.

Findings from the four components of the thesis demonstrate that there are attitudinal, knowledge, systemic and relational barriers and facilitators experienced when accessing EBPT for common mental health problems, including PNOCD. The key recommendations for improving access to EBPT for PNOCD include awareness-raising initiatives to increase knowledge of PNOCD in the perinatal and pre-conception population. Additionally, training packages are recommended for healthcare professionals to increase understanding, recognition of, and appropriate treatment referral for PNOCD.

Biography: Alice is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Surrey. She is involved in a pilot trial delivering a sleep intervention to adolescents, and research on improving the lives and care of those with long terms conditions, particularly autoimmune diseases. Alice completed her PhD in 2024 at Brighton and Sussex Medical School on barriers and facilitators to accessing support for perinatal obsessive-compulsive disorder.

Prof Hora Soltani, Professor of Maternal and Infant Health, College of Health, Wellbeing and Life Sciences|, Telephone +44 (0) 114 225 5555

1st April: Dr Elysa Ioannou ANutr AFHEA

Dr Elysa Ioannou is a Researcher on the ENHANCE project (evaluating complications of excess weight clinics in children and young people), which is a large NIHR funded project. She was previously a Graduate Teaching Assistant and PhD student at Sheffield Hallam University and is a registered Associate Nutritionist with the Association for Nutrition (AfN) in the UK.

She has a background in sport science and previously completed a Year in Industry experience at the Leicester Diabetes Research Centre. Dr Ioannou's research interests lie within women's health, health promotion and reducing risk and/or improved management of chronic diseases through physical activity. Dr Ioannou has a special interest in pragmatic and applied research, realist methodology, health equity and effective health promotion and disease prevention interventions, incorporating systems thinking and a whole-systems approach.

Talk title: Optimising physical activity after gestational diabetes: a realist-inspired study

"This talk will give an overview of the work contributing to her PhD, showcasing how the methods employed led to the development of theories and practical recommendations. She will present and discuss the realist-inspired approach taken, and the application of the socio-ecological model to this work, explaining how it was used to support presentation of recommendations and systems targets for these."

6th May:

Hayley Billings is a Senior Midwifery Lecturer; with a Master of Public Health (MPH), Registered Midwife (RM). Hayley has held roles as both a rotational and specialist midwife, with a primary focus on antenatal and newborn screening. Throughout her career, she has provided comprehensive care to women across the full continuum of pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period, including support for both hospital and home births. Prior to transitioning into academia, she served as a Regional Screening and Immunisation Coordinator for Public Health England. In her current academic role, she is drawing on her clinical and public health experience to support the development of future midwives

3rdJune: Dr Stephanie Heys - Consultant Midwife, NWAS, Mrs Daisy Pegler - Research Midwife, MFT

1st July: Abstract: Maternal undernutrition remains a major contributor to maternal and infant morbidity and mortality in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Climate change is intensifying these challenges by disrupting food systems, livelihoods, and access to healthcare. This systematic review synthesises evidence on how climatic conditions, cultural practices, and gendered social

dynamics shape maternal nutrition in LMICs and identifies interventions that support maternal nutritional health.

Methods: A systematic review was conducted using the PSALSAR framework and the PCC approach to guide study selection and eligibility criteria. Searches were conducted across Scopus, MEDLINE, Web of Science, CINAHL, WHO Global Index Medicus, World Bank databases, and grey literature sources.

Results: Eighty-two studies from LMICS were included. Several themes emerged from the review, including climate-related stressors, particularly droughts and floods, and reduced food availability and dietary diversity, which adversely affected maternal nutrition. Another recurring theme was that cultural norms and food beliefs shaped dietary practices, while gendered household dynamics shaped women's access to food and healthcare. Evidence from several countries showed that economic insecurity and dependence on subsistence agriculture further heightened vulnerability, particularly in rural settings. In addition, weak health systems and limited antenatal nutrition support compounded these challenges. Evidence indicates that interventions tailored to local cultural contexts, including community-based approaches and engagement with household decision-makers, have the potential to improve maternal nutrition practices.

Conclusions: Maternal nutrition in LMICs is shaped by the intersection of climate change, culture, gender relations, socioeconomic inequalities, and health system constraints. The review evidence suggests that addressing these challenges requires integrated, contextually grounded interventions that strengthen food security, support equitable access to care, and respond to climate-related risks affecting maternal and infant health.

Brief bios

Dr Corinna Thellmann: Corinna Thellmann is a Researcher in Global Health and Medical Anthropology at Sheffield Hallam University. Her work focuses on the intersection of maternal nutritional health, cultural practices, and climate change in LMICs. She holds a PhD from Brighton and Sussex Medical School and is currently working on the Wellcome Trust-funded Birthing at Burning Places project.

Dr Fizza Ansar: Fizza Ansar is a Public Health Researcher and Epidemiologist based at the Department of Community Health Sciences, Aga Khan University, Pakistan. She holds an MSc in Epidemiology and Biostatistics. Her research focuses on reproductive, maternal, newborn, and child health (RMNCH), climate change, maternal nutrition, immunisation systems, and global public health. She is currently working on the Wellcome Trust-funded Birthing at Burning Places project.

7th October: Biography/Synopsis: Dr Saha Naseri holds a PhD in Epidemiology and works with the Equity team at the Center for Epidemiology and Population Health Research (CERPOP), University of Toulouse. This talk is about her doctoral research which explored Afghan women's access to antenatal care (ANC) services in Afghanistan and in high-income countries, with a particular focus on France. She currently leads the NAFIS project, which aims to develop interventions to improve access to ANC services for migrant and refugee women in France. Saha also holds a Master's degree in Public Health from the American University of Beirut and has several years of experience with the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health and the World Health Organization, where she contributed to research and programs on maternal and reproductive health, adolescent health, infectious diseases, and COVID-19.

4th Nov: Sarah is a Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University within the Midwifery team as part of Maternal and Infant Health Equity Research Centre (MIHERC). She is completing her PhD on the Liverpool-Wellcome Health Priorities in the Global South programme. Sarah joined the Maternity Disparity Consortium (MDC) research programme funded by the NIHR-Maternity Challenge supporting reducing health inequities for mothers and babies particularly around perinatal mental health.

2nd December: Biography/Synopsis: Dr Ifeoma Onyeka is currently a Senior Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University and works with the Perinatal Mental Health team within NIHR-Maternity Disparity Consortium (PMH-MDC). Ifeoma has backgrounds in medicine (MBBS) and in public health (MSc and PhD in Public Health). She has research expertise in mental health, comorbidity and general public health. Her current research work focuses on perinatal mental health.

Abstract: Advancements in technology have given risen to innovative ways of collecting and storing health and other data that can be utilised in various ways for public good. Linkage of data from various sources provides valuable opportunities for health researchers to answer real-world questions. Through granting access to large-scale good-quality data, researchers can conduct investigations that will help to identify or predict persons at risk of having various health problems, and drive decision-making and formulation of effective preventive measures. Although challenges or concerns exist, using linked data for health research remains extremely important as it offers unique insights into population health, and good progress has been made in relation to data security and management. Having worked in different countries, I have had the opportunity of conducting health research using data linked from various sources. In this presentation, I will talk about my personal experiences of using linked data to conduct epidemiological research in Finland using data linked to the nationwide hospital discharge register and cause of death register, and in Northern Ireland using linked dataset from census record, nationwide prescription database and death registrations. I will share my reflections and future directions, connecting these and previous maternal health-related work to my current research on perinatal mental health.