

Opportunity to join the Thesis Committee of a PhD in Mental Health Science as Lived Experience Advisor



About the PhD student:

Hi, I'm Giulia, I have a background in psychology, philosophy, and cognitive neuroscience. The focus of my PhD is mental health. I'm interested in depression, and specifically in what it is thought to be, how it is treated and how it is inherited (find out more about me [on Twitter](#) and [on our PhD blog](#)).

Summary of PhD project:

Depression is a common, and sometimes disabling condition. People experience depression in a variety of different ways. While many feel low in mood and no longer enjoy pleasurable activities, others feel restless, unable to sleep, and 'stuck' in a loop of negative thoughts. Yet, in research people usually think of depression as *one* disorder, even though people have many different symptoms. More recent research has tried to understand depression as not being a single entity, but rather as numerous different personal difficulties that might affect each other. From this way of thinking, one aspect of depression could influence others, in a 'vicious cycle' that can make things progressively harder. For example, frequent negative thoughts can make falling asleep harder. This causes tiredness and irritability, which in turn make everyday activities less enjoyable. This newer way of thinking could help us better understand the multiple complicated ways in which depression works, why it occurs in families, as well as helping us develop better treatments.

In my PhD, I plan to analyse depression as a series of symptoms connected to each other, which appear differently in each person. Using existing data, I will test whether thinking of depression this way can add to our current knowledge of the disorder. I will examine how antidepressant treatment affects each aspect of depression through time (for example, do antidepressants make us worry less first, which in turn makes us sleep or eat better?), as well as how antidepressant drugs affect people's perception of reality (for instance, do we stop focusing on negative aspects of life?). I will do this by using network analysis, a novel statistical approach, applied to data collected from individuals on a course of antidepressant drug treatment.

In addition, I will investigate if and how single features of depression relate to different, separate aspects of brain activity by analysing a large database of neuroimaging and mental health measures. Similarly, I will examine how genetic risk of depression is related to individual symptoms (for example, are certain aspects of depression more heritable than others?).

In summary, with this PhD project I aim to better understand how depression works, how it is currently treated, and how it is passed on through generations, by focusing on its individual parts and how they influence each other.

Thesis Committee – Roles and Responsibilities

PhD students enrolled at UCL are required to have a Thesis Committee who provide oversight of the student's research. For Students in the UCL-Wellcome PhD in Mental Health Science, the Thesis Committee includes academics with expertise in different mental health themes, a mental health practitioner and individuals with lived experience of mental illness.

The role of the Thesis Committee is to support the student and their supervisor during the 3-year PhD project. You will be asked to attend a minimum of six meetings organised by the student. At these

meetings, the student will deliver an oral presentation, and in some cases will produce a report to be read in advance. Please see the table below for information on timetable and format of the meetings.

The committee members have the following responsibilities:

- Meet with the student at the designated times (six to ten times) throughout the progress of the PhD. Note that additional meetings may be arranged on an ad hoc basis.
- Read Student reports prior to the Thesis Committee meeting (including an Upgrade report which is a formal report to show that the research to date matches the standards of a PhD).
- Approve the meeting reports that will be entered into the student's online Research Log.
- If required, provide additional support for the student e.g. additional Thesis Committee meetings outside of those scheduled to monitor progress.

Meeting	Time post start of Phd Project	Format
1. Research Proposal	3 months	Research Proposal (~1,000 words) and oral presentation
2. 9 months Report	9 months	9 months report (~1,000 words) and oral presentation
3. MPhil-PhD Upgrade Report	9-18 months	Upgrade report (~10,000 words) and viva
4. Progress meeting	18 months	Oral presentation only
5. Progress meeting	24 months	Oral presentation only
6. Thesis outline and writing plan	30 months	Written thesis outline and writing plan and oral presentation

If you have any questions or if there is anything that we can do to make this opportunity easier for you to apply for please let me know at **giulia.piazza.18@ucl.ac.uk**.

Payment of £25/hour is available for Lived Experienced Thesis Committee members should you wish to claim it. This will typically include 1hr preparation time for the meetings.

If you are interested in joining my Thesis Committee please send me a paragraph explaining why you are interested to: **giulia.piazza.18@ucl.ac.uk**, by **31st January 2022**, at the latest.