

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM



institute  
for mental  
health



focussing on  
**understanding, preventing  
and responding**

**Annual report  
2020**

# introduction



**Professor Matthew Broome,**  
Director of the Institute for Mental Health,  
University of Birmingham

The Institute for Mental Health (IMH) was established in 2017 as an interdisciplinary research Institute at the University of Birmingham, with a focus on youth mental health. Since then, the IMH has brought together academics across campus working in the field of mental health, and NHS colleagues.

The psychological and social impacts of COVID-19 have been felt by everyone, and it has had a particular impact on the mental health of children and young people, and many of these are going to be felt in the future with the economic consequences of the pandemic. The team at the IMH have been working to support frontline NHS staff during the crisis, and ensure the longer-term impacts are addressed.

As we have all adapted to new ways of working, we have also had a lot to celebrate – with expansion of our team, grant success (>£10 million in capture), important publications, changes to services and policy, and the development and launch of our MSc and interdisciplinary PhD programme. We are grateful for the ongoing support of the University, the NHS and wider partners and look forward to strengthening these partnerships further.



## our research areas

### Self-Harm and Suicide Prevention

We are working to transform the understanding and response to self-harm and suicide prevention in research, clinical practice, policy-making and community practices. Our aim is to understand how social, environmental, political, psychological, cultural and biological factors make someone more vulnerable to suicidal behaviour or self-harm. Our comment is to develop support and treatments across healthcare and non-healthcare settings to help vulnerable young people and their families.

### Early Intervention and Prevention

Our goal is to extend the breadth of early intervention in psychosis, to address common mental health disorders, such as depression, bipolar disorder and anxiety disorders. We are taking a preventative approach, focusing on potential causes including bullying, deprivation, substance misuse and childhood trauma.

### Innovation in Policy, Systems and Services

We are bringing together experts from different disciplines, people with lived experience of distress and care-providers to help inform research. We are developing, promoting and evaluating current innovations in policy, systems and services – to reduce both the occurrence and impact of mental health difficulties. The goal of our research is to maximise people's chances of regaining a satisfying and productive life following an adverse experience.

### Justice, Equalities and Capabilities

Young people are not always offered the resources that they need in order to understand their situations and process their own experiences; in particular experiences of distress. The aim of our research is to find effective strategies to help empower young people, giving them a voice and enabling them to achieve greater social justice.

## our work through COVID

The IMH has also been involved in developing research projects in response to COVID-19. This includes the post-hospitalisation COVID-19 study and COVID clinical neuroscience studies.

A Policy Brief (available via our website) from Dr Karen Newbigging, Deputy Director of IMH, highlighted the inequalities in mental health relating to COVID-19 and suggested immediate recommendations to help the most vulnerable and marginalised.

Clinical academics from the IMH have supported NHS mental health services across Birmingham by taking on additional clinical duties and covering for colleagues unable to work through being unwell or shielding. A number also worked with University Hospitals Birmingham to develop and provide a psychological support service to NHS staff working acutely with patients with COVID-19 and wider staff and student wellbeing across campus.

The Institute's ongoing work will help support a 'new normal' for mental health, as we all negotiate the consequences for mental health and equality that has been created by the pandemic.



## youth advisory group

Regular engagement with our Youth Advisory Group (YAG) is integral to the work conducted at the IMH. Comprised of young people aged 18–25 with lived experience of, or a strong interest in youth mental health, the YAG works to create, shape and challenge research into youth mental health. The YAG is supported by the IMH Youth Participation Lead, Niyah Campbell and Academic Lead Dr Sarah Carr.

Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, YAG members have continued to support the IMH's research activities. Since March 2020, all YAG-related activities have been conducted remotely; the commitment and adaptability of members has allowed for a smooth transition to online engagement, and the maintenance of regular virtual meetings has offered support and stability in uncertain times.

In the past 12 months, YAG members have contributed to a wide range of activities including:

- Attending monthly YAG meetings
- Delivering a lecture on public engagement in research to UoB Neuroscience students
- Co-presenting at dissemination events
- Contributing to discussions at a one-day research workshop with the Medical Research Council
- Recording teaching materials for the Mental Health MSc

**'Being involved in the IMH Youth Advisory Group means that I can advocate for change that allows youth mental health to be taken seriously.'**

*Beckye (21)*



# msc in mental health

The IMH MSc in Mental Health opened to take in its first cohort this **academic year (2019–20)**. We were delighted to receive 38 students to the programme in its inaugural year. The cohort encompasses a wide range of professional experience as we have welcomed students who have prior training in education, social care, psychology, humanities, the arts and medicine. The MSc remains the only interdisciplinary taught Masters in Mental Health in the UK, offering students the unique opportunity to study alongside other colleagues drawn from a range of professional sectors and educational backgrounds.

## our impact

The IMH led impactful activities in the areas of NHS patient care, the mental health of the Midlands workforce, discovering new ways to fight psychosis, and the frontline fight against COVID-19. The National Institute for Health Research PARTNERS2 study throughout the pandemic has continued to help individuals with bipolar disorder and psychosis to reduce social isolation, improve motivation and feelings of self-worth.

The Midlands Mental Health Productivity Pilot has been developing interventions to reduce sickness absence and improve workplace mental health, engaging with organisations and businesses of all sizes, and helping to safeguard mental health and the regional economy.

Patient outcomes have been transformed by reducing delays in the treatment of psychotic disorders. Based on our research, new NHS standards on 'Access and Waiting Times' for early intervention in psychosis services have greatly reduced the mean duration of untreated psychosis by over 150 days.

We are exploring the medium term mental health and neurological impacts of hospitalised and community patients with COVID-19.

The Medical Research Council funded Psychosis Immune Mechanism Stratified Medicine Study (PIMS), led by Professor Rachel Upthegrove, has begun the work of validating new treatment targets in the fight against psychosis.

Our work on self-harm has improved clinical practice across primary care. In consultations with young people, we have developed good practice guidelines and educational resources in managing suicide risk. These guidelines have been adopted by the Royal College of GPs.

**'I enjoyed the course modules and learned so much about theories behind topics.'**

*Diva, MSc Mental Health Student*



# partnerships and acknowledgements

## Our work on tackling bullying

In 2019, we launched a partnership with Birmingham Children's Hospital and HSBC UK to take action on childhood bullying, a preventable root cause of mental ill health. Throughout 2020, we have continued this partnership, adapting the work to include supporting teachers concerned about the trauma children will have experienced during lockdown, and are planning to re-launch the intervention in schools in the new academic year.



## Working nationally with the third sector, charities and corporate philanthropy.

We have developed strong partnerships with local and national charities and third sector organisations that allow us to develop research that addresses real-world problems, thus maximising opportunities for impact and reach. We are working with The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children to explore the best way to provide effective help and support to children who contact the charity through its Childline service.

We are working with the Samaritans to explore the impact of COVID-19 on online self-harm and suicide discussions.

We are collaborating with charities such as St Basils, Homeless Link and Street Soccer to support young people who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk.

We have joined forces with the charity the Centre for Mental Health, as part of a wider initiative involving various third sector organisations and mental health NHS Trusts to review the evidence on mental health and inequalities (Commission for Equality in Mental Health, Centre for Mental Health, November 2020).



## International collaboration

The IMH has established a number of important global partnerships and strong international collaborations that enable our research to create transformational change in mental health policy and practice around the world. Such collaborations include the World Psychiatric Association, the International Association for Suicide Prevention, the International Association for Youth Mental Health; and industry partners such as Facebook and Instagram, advising them on their response to eating disorders, self-harm and suicide content.

Pavan Mallikarjun and Hareth Al Janabi from Institute for Mental Health are co-investigators on the SAMA Project - A UK Medical Research Council (MRC) funded International India – United Kingdom research consortium looking to reduce the prevalence of anxiety and depression among Indian adolescents by improving individual and school well-being.

We are the UK’s leading site of the International Collaboration on the Social and Moral Psychology of COVID-19; a large-scale international collaboration bringing together

scholars from around the globe to examine psychological factors underlying the attitudes and behavioural intentions related to COVID-19.

We have a longstanding partnership with the University of Melbourne and Orygen, Australia’s National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health. The University of Melbourne and the University of Birmingham are founder members of the Universitas 21 network and in recent years, we have strengthened our research and education collaborations, culminating in the signing of a partnership agreement in 2016. We have joint posts and enjoy the shared Priestley PhD Scholarship in Youth Mental Health between the IMH and Orygen.

Orygen/University of Melbourne secured a \$33 million award from the US NIMH and we’re delighted that the IMH is the only UK site in this important international collaboration examining the early course of psychosis.

## Working with the NHS and social care to improve the outcomes and care for young people with mental health problems

The IMH has a strong partnership with NHS Foundation Trusts – University Hospitals Birmingham, Birmingham Women’s and Children’s, who manage the dedicated Forward Thinking Birmingham 0–25 youth mental health service; and, Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health. These NHS partners have allowed us to create joint clinical academic appointments, shared research goals and strategy, ensuring our work has demonstrable impact on clinical practice.

# acknowledgements

With special thanks to our partners



# Connect with us

[www.birmingham.ac.uk/imh](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/imh)

 [imh@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:imh@contacts.bham.ac.uk)

 @IMH\_UoB

**Institute for Mental Health,**  
University of Birmingham,  
Edgbaston, Birmingham,  
B15 2TT, United Kingdom



UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

Edgbaston, Birmingham,  
B15 2TT, United Kingdom  
[www.birmingham.ac.uk](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk)

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