

**Information on Postgraduate Research Studentship:**

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| **Faculty:** Education, Health and Human Sciences and Institute for Lifecourse Development |
| **Lead Supervisor: Professor Lesley Dibley** |
| **Project Title: Anticipating and experiencing pregnancy and childbirth in women with Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis: expectations and experiences** |

**About the Project:** Adolescent Idiopathic Scoliosis (AIS) is a three-dimensional structural disorder of the spine. The cause is unknown, but increased incidence at puberty is thought to be linked to rising hormone levels and irregular development of muscles around the spine. AIS affects 1-5% of the global population, with girls three times more likely to develop the condition than boys (Konieczny et al. 2013). Surgery, involving insertion of titanium rods and pedicle screws to create a supportive ‘ladder’ that also straightens the curves and rotations, is usually offered when curves exceed 50◦. Inserted metalwork is overlaid with bone grafts, leading to resolution of curves, but inflexibility in the fused spine. Fusion may affect the natural increases of lordosis and kyphosis that occur in pregnancy, and low fusion of the lumbar spine precludes use of epidural pain relief in labour since the intrathecal space cannot be accessed. Women with AIS may have increased concerns about carrying a pregnancy, their options during labour and delivery, and whether any pre-pregnancy compromises in mobility due to the fusion might affect post-partum activities such as caring for, feeding, and bonding with the infant. The minimal research on pregnancy in women with AIS focuses on clinical outcomes, complications, and anaesthesia options (Cao et al., 2020; Chan et al., 2017; Falick-Michaeli 2015). One systematic review (Dewan et al., 2017) supports earlier conclusions that more research is needed to inform prenatal education and counselling for pregnant women with AIS. Although many women with AIS do deliver naturally, without complications, the frequent posting of questions on the Scoliosis UK Facebook page indicates that pregnancy and delivery are a concern for many. There is currently minimal advice for obstetricians or midwives on the care needs of this patient group. The main Scoliosis Support charity, SAUK provides generic public information on scoliosis and pregnancy. We could find no qualitative evidence reporting the experiences of pregnancy in women with AIS. Understanding these experiences could usefully add to the preconceptual and perinatal counselling and support of these women.

**Aim:** To explore the lived experiences of anticipating and experiencing pregnancy and childbirth amongst women with spinal fusion for AIS, using hermeneutic phenomenology.

If you would like to discuss this opportunity and the PhD project before applying, please contact Professor Lesley Dibley, L.B.Dibley@Greenwich.ac.uk or Dr Liz Gale, E.A.Gale@Greenwich.ac.uk.

**Duration: 3 years Full-Time Study or 6 years Part-Time Study. Type: Self-Funded**

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| ***Person Specification of Essential (E) or Desirable (D) requirements:*** | |
| ***Criteria:*** | ***E or D*** |
| ***Education and Training:*** | |
| • 1st Class or 2nd class, First Division (Upper Second Class) Honours Degree or a taught Master’s degree with a minimum average of 60% in all areas of assessment (UK or UK equivalent) in a relevant area to the proposed research project (e.g., midwifery, chronic illness, orthopaedics) | **E**  page2image12104page2image13008 |
| • For those whose first language is not English and/or if from a country where English is not the majority spoken language (as recognised by the UKBA), a language proficiency score of at least IELTS 6.5 (in all elements of the test) or an equivalent UK VISA and Immigration secure English Language Test is required, unless the degree above was taught in English **and** obtained in a majority English speaking country, e.g., UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, etc, as recognised by the UKBA. | **E** |
| ***Experience & Skills:*** | |
| • Previous experience of undertaking qualitative research in a health-related subject (e.g., undergraduate or taught Master’s dissertation) | **E** |
| • Basic knowledge of the philosophy of phenomenology | **D** |
| • Good writing skills | **E** |
| • Good qualitative skills, with prior experience of data collection and analysis | **E** |
| ***Personal Attributes:*** | |
| • Understands the fundamental differences between a taught degree and a research degree in terms of approach and personal discipline/motivation | **E** |
| • Able to, under guidance, complete independent work successfully | **E** |
| ***Other Requirements:*** | |
| • A PhD project research proposal that is related to the research area and proposes an appropriate study design to include methodology, and methods for recruitment and sampling, ethical considerations, data collection, and data analysis; please also include a brief section on the potential outputs, benefits and impact the study could realise | **E** |

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| **Closing date for applications:** applications are accepted all year round |
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| **For further information contact: Professor Lesley Dibley**  ***E-mail: L.B.Dibley@Greenwich.ac.uk*** |

**How to Apply:**

Please read this information before making an application. Information on the application process is available at: https://www.gre.ac.uk/research/study/apply/application-process. Applications need to be made online via this link. **No other form of application will be considered**.

All applications **must include** the following information. Applications not containing these documents will not be considered.

1. Personal statement outlining the motivation for a PhD and this particular project
2. Research proposal (about 1500 words) related to the subject topic \*
3. A CV including 2 referees \* (one ideally being from a dissertation supervisor)
4. Academic qualification certificates/transcripts and IELTs/English Language certificate if you are an international applicant or if English is not your first language or you are from a country where English is not the majority spoken language as defined by the UK Border Agency \*

\**upload to the qualification section of the application form. Attachments must be a PDF format.*

Before submitting your application, you are encouraged to liaise with the Lead Supervisor on the details above.