

**Faculty of Business, Law and Social Sciences**

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| **Proposed Title:** Investigating the impact of clinical ethical decision making in healthcare students and professionals to inform interventions in education, training, and professional practice to improve health and wellbeing. **Project Reference Number 9** |
| **School: Social Science/Psychology** |
| **Proposed Supervisory Team: Dr Kathrina Connabeer, Dr Helen Egan, Dr Deborah Wallis, Karen McGowan** |
| **Abstract:**Clinical decision-making is at the core of health professionals’ everyday clinical practice. Clinicians are required to make an informed judgment about the treatment necessary for patients, in which they need to balance personal experience and prevalent knowledge (Bhugra, 2008). Ethical decision-making refers to the process of assessing and subsequently selecting the next course of action among alternatives in a manner consistent with ethical principles. The term ‘moral dilemma’ is defined as decision where any possible choice conflicts with an existing moral principle (Blackburn, 1994). Ethical dilemmas have been found to cause negative psychological outcomes such as ‘moral distress’, which can arise from clinical situations, factors internal to the individual professional, and factors present in unit cultures, institution, and the larger health care environment. (Hamric, 2012). Hence all HCP’s experience the impact of moral dilemmas, even when they are not directly responsible for the decision. This is particularly salient for placement students and more junior staff who may feel that they have little power in contributing to such decisions. Moral distress manifests poor psychological and physical outcomes and contributes to burnout in HCPs. Moral distress has increased exponentially during the COVID-19 pandemic, with HCPs making complex and challenging decisions with limited access to resources (Burki, 2020; Karlsson et al., 2020) significantly increasing the risk of experiencing post-traumatic stress and psychological stress (Kisely et al., 2020, Egan et al., 2021). The role of coping mechanisms and health behaviours in reducing the prevalence and risk of developing moral distress is as yet unexplored. This research will include investigation of coping mechanisms, compassion and self-compassion and health behaviours and how these may impact on the prevalence and risk of developing adverse psychological outcomes. The findings from this project will build on previous research in this area to identify and inform interventions for health professionals with the aim to reduce the risk of workplace stress due to experiencing ethical dilemmas. |
| **Research Environment:**The applicant will be part of a thriving community of PhD students in the Psychology department and will be a member of the Health and Wellbeing Research Centre.  |
| **Applicant Requirements:****Essential requirements:*** Undergraduate degree in Psychology or cognate discipline (2.1 or above)
* Proficiency in the use of MS Word and SPSS
* Evidence of good written and oral communication skills
* Evidence of a genuine interest in the field and willingness to develop knowledge and understanding necessary to conduct the research

**Desirable requirements*** Relevant experience in conducting similar research at UG and/or PG levels
* Master’s degree in Psychology or cognate discipline (with evidence of advanced understanding of research methods)
* Experience in the use of data management software (e.g. Audacity and NVivo).
* Experience in designing and conducting qualitative research (e.g. one-to-one interviews)
* Evidence of ability to analyse data using qualitative and quantitative methods
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| **Contact: Name, e-mail and telephone number:**Dr Kathrina Connabeer, Kathrina.Connabeer@BCU.ac.uk, 0121 202 4645 |