



Project Title: Intersecting vulnerabilities and suicide risks of construction workers

Principal Supervisor: Professor Alexandra Pitman, UCL Division of Psychiatry

Subsidiary Supervisor: Dr Jing (Jean) Xu, UCL Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction

Department & Institution: UCL Division of Psychiatry, University College London; UCL Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction, University College London

Collaborative Organisation: BAM UK & Ireland <https://ukandireland.bam.com/>

Funder: Funding is provided jointly by BAM UK & Ireland and the ESRC UCL, Bloomsbury and East London Doctoral Training Partnership (UBEL DTP) ESRC Co-funded Studentships (ubel-dtp.ac.uk)

Project Description:

This is an exciting opportunity to undertake a PhD in public mental health using qualitative and evidence synthesis research methods supported by an academic and industry partnership. This doctoral project represents a unique collaboration between the UCL Division of Psychiatry and the UCL Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction, partnered with BAM UK & Ireland; a leading construction company.

The project seeks to understand why people working in the construction industry represent the occupational group at highest risk of suicide. This doctoral project will involve applying and developing skills in evidence synthesis and qualitative analysis whilst collecting insights into the pressures experienced by construction industry workers during a placement with BAM. This placement will help the student gain the necessary understanding of the vulnerabilities of this specific group.

The student will synthesise health/mortality data to identify the socio-demographic characteristics of high-risk individuals within the construction industry.

They will collect qualitative interview data from professionals working in the construction industry to understand their coping practices and help-seeking behaviour, and the impacts of these on suicidal thoughts. Participant observations on work practices, routines and conditions will further elucidate how workers' coping practices relate to construction work practices and routines.

Setting:

The student will be based between the Division of Psychiatry at UCL and the UCL Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction, where academic supervision, broader skills training and career development support will be provided.

Both departments offer a research-active, multidisciplinary environment with a strong community of PhD students.

For about 25% of the project, the student will be based at BAM, the collaborative organisation, to gain an understanding of the construction industry context.

Thesis committee:

The student will also be supported by a Thesis Committee of academic and policy experts throughout the PhD programme. The committee will include:

- 1) Dr Carla Toro, Associate Professor of Mental Health and Wellbeing, Warwick Medical School, University of Warwick and the deputy director for the Warwick Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing Research
- 2) Dr Simon Addyman, Associate Professor in Project Management and the Director of the Centre for Construction Project Organising (CCPO) at the UCL Bartlett School of Sustainable Construction
- 3) other experts with diverse methodological and topic-specific expertise across UCL and collaborating organisations.

Candidate Requirements:

A master's degree level qualification in mental health sciences or research, or another relevant social science are essential.

Knowledge and experience of quantitative and qualitative research methods is essential.

Excellent interpersonal skills and a demonstrable interest in research in this area are also essential requirements.

Invitations are welcomed from people with personal experience of working in the construction industry and/or of mental health problems, but these are not essential criteria.

Key references:

Hare, B, Lawani, K & McEwen, G (2023) Suicides among construction occupations in the UK *Journal of Engineering, Project, and Production Management*, vol. 14, no. 2, 0017. <https://doi.org/10.32738/JEPPM-2024- 0017>

Office for National Statistics (2017) Suicide by occupation, England: 2011-2015.

ONS, London

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/suicidebyoccupation/england2011to2015>

Xu et al 2024 Advocacy across boundaries: Co-creating a collaborative framework for organisational action to move from silos to system improvement for mental health and wellbeing in construction. *Report at this link:* https://www.ucl.ac.uk/grand-challenges/sites/grand_challenges/files/ucl_bartlett_event_summary.pdf

Further details about the project may be obtained from:

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Deadlines and how to apply:

To Apply: Applications should be submitted through the Survey Monkey Apply system here: https://ucl.smapply.io/prog/2025_student_application_co-funded_and_collaborative_studentship_

Guidance about the application process can be found here: <https://ubel-dtp.ac.uk/esrc-co-funded/>

Closing date: Monday 3 March 2025 23.59

Interview date: Tuesday 25 March 2025

Start date: September/October 2025