



University of
Salford
MANCHESTER

IT TAKES A “VILLAGE:”

A Community-Based Approach to
Postgraduate Researcher (PGR) Parenting and Caring

LAUREN PEARL HOLMES (SHE/HER)

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) lead, School of Arts, Media and Creative Technology (SAMCT) | lp.holmes@edu.salford.ac.uk

Katherine Yates: Katherine.Yates@liverpool.ac.uk | Tania Goddard: T.L.H.Goddard@edu.salford.ac.uk | Ubongabasi Kingsley Omon: u.omon@salford.ac.uk

UNIVERSITY OF SALFORD PGR EDI LEADS

One-Year Bursary and Research Project

THE EDI LEAD ROLE

- EDI leads undertake research projects on some aspects of EDI within postgraduate research, with a primary focus on the experiences of the University of Salford's PGR community.
- Each EDI lead is responsible for a specific research project, but leads are expected to co-ordinate activities and work together.

PAST PROJECTS

- Decolonising the PhD.
- Widening Participation in Research.
- The Experiences of International PGRs.
- Neurodiverse PGR Thesis and Post-Viva Feedback.
- Empowering Neurodiverse Researchers.

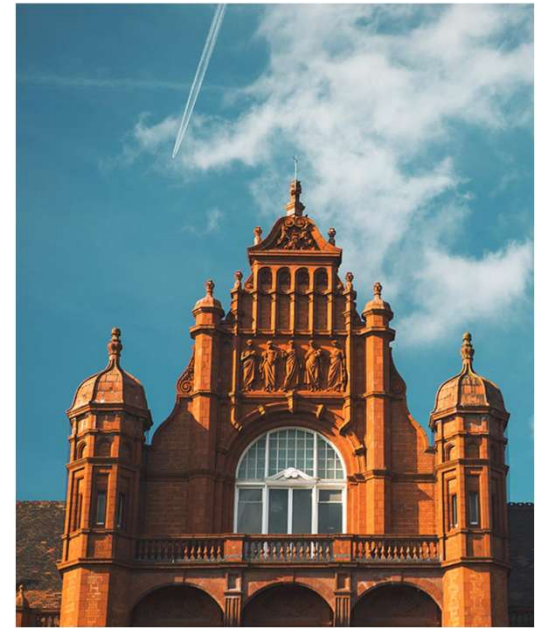


Figure 1: The University of Salford's Peel Building.

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PARENTING AND CARING

A Particular Barrier to Participation in Research Degrees

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE TO RESEARCH

- “Studies on PGR populations reveal high levels of psychological distress and mental health issues.” (Stead & Riva, 2025)
- “Maternal suicides were the leading cause of deaths occurring between six weeks and one year after” birth. (Felker et al., 2025)
- “1 in 3 mothers (35%) and 1 in 5 (18%) father figures” experience depression in the first 12 years of a child’s life. (NIHR, 2022)
- 35% of carers report “bad or very bad mental health” and 57% feel overwhelmed “‘often’ or ‘always.’” (Carers UK, 2025)
- Almost all PGRs feel isolated in their research journeys; many “fac[e] childcare costs equivalent to their monthly stipends” and encounter “‘barriers’ to diversity, with women and those from poorer backgrounds” most severely affected. (Rowsell, 2024)

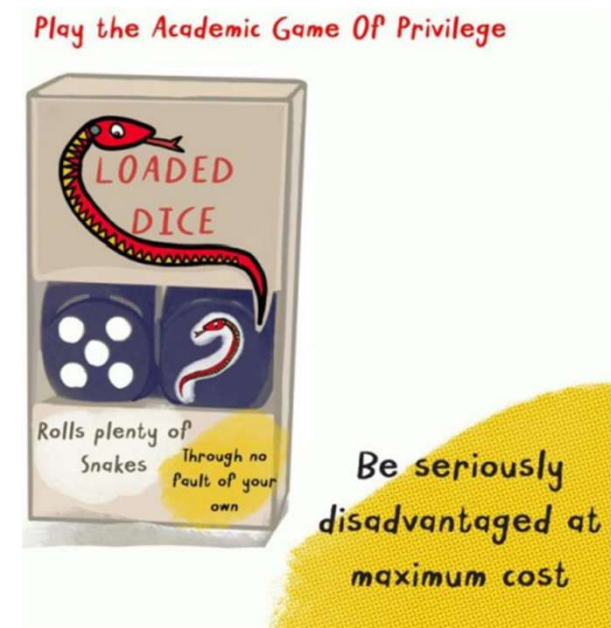


Figure 2: Illustration by Dr Holly Quinton [Image].

PARENTING AND CARING

A Particular Barrier to Participation in Research Degrees

EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES

- From an epistemological perspective, much remains unknown about the specific challenges and everyday realities encountered by PGR parents and carers – intersectionality particularly hidden.
- The “motherhood penalty” is not isolated to employment spaces.
- PGR parents and carers face systemic indirect exclusion, forced non-participation in research spaces, communities, and cultures.

LIVED REALITIES OF PGR PARENTS AND CARERS

- Parents and carers “have less time to socially engage or study.”
- “[W]hen are [single parents] going to find the time to do this volunteering, which is good for society, and [...] for their CVs[?]”
- “So whenever, for example, my son is sick [...] I get this anxiety, you know [...] I can't work.” (Finn et. al, 2025)

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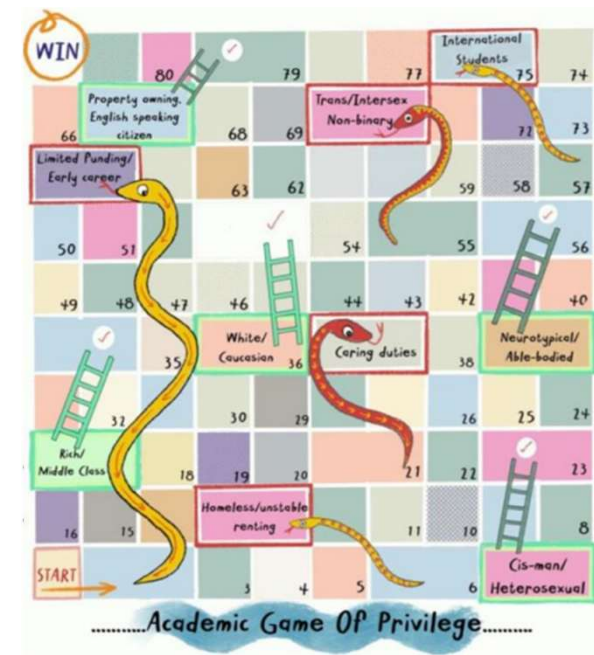


Figure 3: Illustration by Dr Holly Quinton [Image].

THE PROJECT

A Safe and Supportive Community of PGR Parents and Carers

THE PROJECT

- A community network open to all parents and carers currently registered for PGR study at the University of Salford.
- Emergent exploratory, ethnography-inspired methodology – researcher's voice positioned as an equal peer within the data.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How can equality and inclusion be increased for PGR parents and carers, while acknowledging the diversity of their experiences and challenges?
- Are there barriers to good working practices and feelings of belonging for PGR parents and carers?
- Can a community set up specifically for PGR parents and carers promote good wellbeing?



Figure 4: Call for Participants flyer.

THE PROJECT

Findings

ISSUES

- Generic institutional pastoral and support structures often fail for PGR parents and carers – too much overlap.
- Participants unanimously reported feelings of intense pressure and time poverty – **42%** active non-participants.
- Participants recounted numerous and harrowing experiences of feeling pressured towards conforming to the typical scholarly identity **and** the devoted and tireless mother **at the same time**.
- Project found that being a PGR parent and carer is to be in a constant and exhausting state of fragmented identity and hypervigilance, of being perpetually “on call” and “drowning in the mental load.”

A SPACE OF RADICAL COLLECTIVE RESISTANCE AND UNMASKING

- Participants used the space to explicitly dismantle archetypes of ideal scholarly and maternal identities, as well as engaging in acts of radical sympathetic engagement.
- The “Village” became a therapeutic buffer where researchers could drop their masks of professionalism, escape the crushing loop of “mum guilt,” and collectively declare that “academic perfectionism needs to do one.”

DISCUSSION

Parent Support Plan

RATIONALE

- [In a hushed tone] “I don’t want my supervisor to think that I talk about my kids all the d*mn time or that I can’t handle the load!” – Plan would mitigate student stressors in **bypassing continual forced disclosure**.

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT 1

- Mandate a **hybrid-by-default training and development provision** for PGRs with a Parent’s Support plan.

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT 2

- Implement **extended planning timelines and timeframes** to account for unexpected illnesses, exams, etc.

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT 3

- **Formalise care and caring milestones within extension request policies** to support flexible working.

REASONABLE ADJUSTMENT 4

- **Mandate supervisor training** on specific barriers to participation encountered by PGR parents and carers.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: The University of Salford's Peel Building [Photograph].

Figure 2: Illustration by Dr Holly Quinton [Image].

Figure 3: Illustration by Dr Holly Quinton [Image].

Figure 4: Call for Participants flyer [Advertisement].

REFERENCE LIST

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