Project Details	
Project Code	MRC21PHBr Howe
Title	Mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions: bidirectional relationships with participation in higher education
Research Theme	Population Health
Summary	This PhD, which sits at the interface of medical and social sciences, will use detailed life course data to explore the complex and bidirectional associations of mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions with decisions about participation in higher education - a topic with strong policy relevance. You will gain experience in mental health research, education research, and analysis of longitudinal and genetic data.
Description	People with mental health disorders (e.g. depression, anxiety) or neurodevelopmental conditions (e.g. attention deficit hyperactivity disorder [ADHD], autism spectrum disorder [ASD]) do not always meet their educational potential. These conditions can affect a child's ability to concentrate, their relationships with peers and teachers, and their confidence. Associations can also be bidirectional, with educational attainment and other measures of socioeconomic position affecting the risk of mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions. Most studies on relationships of mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions with educational attainment focus on performance in educational tests or years of completed education and cannot interrogate the role of decisions about participation in higher education (HE). The transition to HE is a key point in a person's life course; decisions at this time can have lifelong influence on access to jobs and earnings. The experience of living with a mental health or neurodevelopmental condition could in some people lead them to make decisions that undermine their academic potential. E.g. they may choose not to participate in HE despite receiving sufficient qualifications to do so, choose a less prestigious university than their grades would make them eligible for, or choose to attend a local university and live at home, potentially accepting a place on a lower ranked course in order to do so. These differences may further be exacerbated by parental mental health. As such, mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions may entrench intergenerational patterns of socioeconomic (dis)advantage. This PhD sits at the interface between medical and social sciences, offering strong training opportunities for a student with a background in either discipline. Objectives: 1. Assess the bidirectional associations of mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions with decisions about participation in HE 2. Assess the associations of parental mental health with decisions about participation in HE 3. Assess the role of mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions in the intergenerational transmission of socioeconomic (dis)advantage 4. Evaluate whether parental SEP modifies the effect of a genetic risk score for ADHD on educational outcomes (gene-environment interaction) The project uses data from the Avon Longitudinal Cohort of Parents and Children (ALSPAC), including measures of depression, anxiety, ADHD and ASD assessed repeatedly across childhood through to adulthood; a detailed questionnaire on reasons for (not) participating in HE, reasons for choices of university and course, and details of university attended; linked data on educational test performance across childhood and

	adolescence; genetics. We will draw on additional studies for genetic analyses to maximise statistical power. Formal training will be available through the University of Bristol's short courses, including longitudinal data analysis, statistical software and genetics. Reflecting the interdisciplinary nature of the project, this PhD involves collaborations across the MRC Integrative Epidemiology Unit at the University of Bristol, the Institute for Policy Research at the University of Bath, and the Division of Psychological Medicine and Clinical Neurosciences at Cardiff University. The student will be based in Bristol but will have the opportunity to spend time in all centres. Tackling barriers to HE participation may represent a key intervention target to reduce the inequalities in life chances associated with mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions. Dissemination will be supported by the strong policy links of the Institute of Policy Research at the University of Bath, as well as through the MRC IEU's Policy Engagement officer. Impact will be maximised by convening an advisory group, who will help shape and prioritise research questions
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