PhD project title: Understanding the determinants of increased prevalence of obesity in females with intellectual disabilities.

PhD Fee waiver for PhD for up to four years: The School of Applied Social Studies is offering a number of fee waiver scholarships that will commence in September 2017. If successful this would mean that you could obtain your PhD in this subject area without having to pay any fees. Your only costs would be living expenses. Some teaching opportunities may also be available. The current call is restricted to Scottish domiciled students. Details of each proposal are available at: www.rgu.ac.uk/funded-studentship-opportunities

Brief background:

This is an interdisciplinary project focused on exploring the modifiable risk factors responsible for increased weight gain in females with intellectual disabilities.

The consequential impact of obesity on health is well documented. For example, obesity has been associated with increased incidences of Type 2 diabetes, hypertension, stroke, respiratory problems, arthritis, cardiovascular disease, and some cancers (Haslam & James, 2005; Sohler et al., 2009). Obesity has also been linked to poor psychological functioning (Garcia-Toro et al., 2016; Luppino et al., 2010). The risks associated with obesity are of particular concern for those with intellectual disabilities (ID) due to the increased prevalence of obesity in this population. Research has found that young adults with ID are three times more likely to develop obesity than the general population (Melville et al., 2008). This health inequality has the potential to exacerbate the recognised social exclusion faced by this population. Some of the explanations offered for the increased obesity prevalence within the ID population relate to modifiable risk factors including lifestyle behaviours. The ID population are said to have a poorer diet, increased physical inactivity and increased sedentary behaviour than the general population (Emerson, 2005; McGuire et al., 2007; Hsieh et al., 2014). Non-
modifiable risks of obesity include gender (Hsieh et al., 2014; Melville et al., 2007). In the general population, the prevalence of obesity is marginally higher in males than females (Melville et al., 2007). However, in the ID population the reverse is true, with females experiencing an increased prevalence of obesity than males. No research has explored the social and environmental factors which may be responsible for the increased obesity in females with ID. The limited body of literature exploring lifestyle behaviours in this population has included the recruitment of mostly male participants. In childhood and adolescence, boys experience increased prevalence of ID than girls (Maulik & Harbour, 2010). Since more males are diagnosed with ID than females, studies have tended to focus on the more readily accessible male experience. Males and females face many different pressures in society; therefore there is a real need to explore factors which contribute to lifestyle behaviors from the female perspective.

Aim:

To explore the social and environmental determinants of lifestyle behaviours linked to obesity of female adolescents with ID.

To achieve this aim, participants of the study are likely to include female adolescents with ID, parents/caregivers of young females with ID, and carers, teachers and community day centre leaders/workers who work with female adolescents with ID.

Method:

It is expected that the proposed study will utilise a mixed methods approach. The qualitative element of the project will possibly consist of interviews and focus groups and the quantitative element will likely consist of a comparative experimental design.

Eligibility criteria:

The successful candidate will be an enthusiastic and innovative individual. You will have a minimum of a 2:1 honours degree in a relevant social science or related subject. Research experience in either of the following disciplines would be desirable but not essential: psychology, sociology, health, sport and physical activity, nutrition. You will need to have strong written and oral communication skills, and be able to work in a team and independently. Since the project is likely to be mixed methods, you will need to have experience of using software for data analysis (e.g. SPSS). Experience of working with vulnerable groups would be advantageous.

Contact Details: If you have any queries about the project please contact the Lead Supervisor – Dr Gemma Stevens (g.d.stevens@rgu.ac.uk).
**Application process:** Please send your cv and an expression of interest, that explains both why the proposal appeals and why you are suitable to undertake the research, to Dr Gemma Stevens (g.d.stevens@rgu.ac.uk) by **noon on 12th June 2017**. Shortlisted candidates will then be invited for interview towards the end of June.

**References**


