



The
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Professor David Locker Scholarship in Dental Public Health

Annual Report prepared for Martha Clarke

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Mariam Ahmad Khokhar

PhD Dentistry (Science)

MDPH, Dental Public Health, 2015

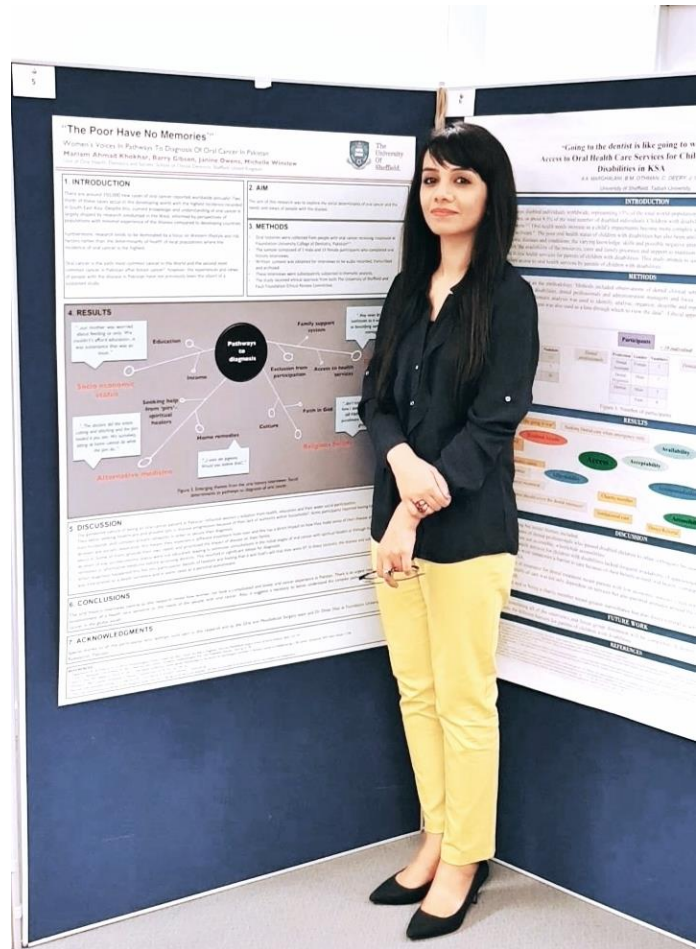
I am Mariam Ahmad Khokhar. My PhD is titled “The poor have no memories” – Oral histories of people with oral cancer in Pakistan. I applied for the David Locker scholarship in social science, oral health and dentistry in August 2018. I was awarded this scholarship in September 2018. I have now submitted my thesis end of April and awaiting defence.

I was born and raised in Lahore, Pakistan.

Being the youngest of four, I have always been pampered and looked after in the best possible ways. I graduated as a dentist from Pakistan in 2013 and later came to UK for Masters in Dental public Health from The University of

Sheffield. The interaction with fearful patients on occasional basis during Oral Surgery rotation in my dental school in Pakistan made me genuinely interested in knowing the experience of oral cancer and the general fear around its diagnosis. I would notice that most of them were anxious about oral cancer and were scared of the uncertain consequences of the diagnosis. Some could not afford treatment at all. Some presented very late in the disease process and were sent home. My Masters degree in Dental Public Health had also brought a change in shifting my focus from chair side techniques to having a broader population health perspective. Recognising that oral cancer was a major public health problem with one of the highest rates of oral cancer in South Asia; I was interested to know how social position impacted the experience of the disease in Pakistan. Nevertheless, the fear instilled in me during those years at my dental school and a disturbing silence about cancer in general in Pakistan was my main motivating factor for engaging in this research. It should be noted that I come from a country that is a nuclear power, but has the highest burden of oral and dental problems in the region. On the face of it, the two don't seem compatible. But it is a fact that less than 1% of Pakistan's GDP is devoted to the health sector. Only a fraction of it goes to the dental services.

My PhD study focussed on recording the oral histories of people with oral cancer by giving them a voice so they are better able to make sense of their disease. Oral history as a research method incorporated recording of unique experiences, captures voices and individuals are involved in the process of producing their own life histories and more often serves as a legacy for their families. My research focussed on women who are facing social exclusion so that they can speak about themselves and their experience with oral cancer. It was all about giving them



a voice. In Pakistan, gender discrimination is a major contributor towards health inequalities. It was interesting, however, to find that none of the participants in my study explicitly declared or recognised gender as a determinant of their disease. This was because of their internalized acceptance of how their culture and society worked. For these women, gender worked as a determinant throughout their lives in terms of access to basic necessities, education, health care, as well as wider social participation and in their pathway to the diagnosis of oral cancer. It was often hidden from view. Among many other novel contributions to the existing research, the potential for this research to be the first study to consider the importance of giving voice to women in healthcare in Pakistan felt really exciting to me. The interest of the women to take part in the study, share their stories with their real names and allowing them to be used for the research purposes says a lot about their potential but subtle changed status in the society. The more my participants opened up to me, the more sense of mutual satisfaction prevailed. My work speaks out for the inclusion of women in further research studies. Also, this data has the potential to contribute in building an inclusive health care that is more sensitive to the needs of the people with the disease. This research will also aid programmes in planning and evaluation plan based on attitudes of under privileged towards health and oral health.

Based on the literature review and findings of my PhD study, as a co-investigator, I have received funding from the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) of £7000 to help establish a cross-country collaboration between the UK and Pakistan to develop a network and priority setting for oral cancer research in Pakistan. We are now moving towards second round of funding to start the practical work and have already established goals that have the potential to influence policy change regarding oral health and also towards the development of diagnostic and referral pathways. This is a step towards prevention and improved oral cancer diagnosis in Pakistan.

On a personal level, the value of education is something that I have understood since a very young age. Neither of my parents had an opportunity to attend university, and faced many struggles in their personal and professional lives because of this. They made a commitment early in my life to do everything within their capacity and power to instill in me a love of learning and an understanding of the importance of hard work and dedication. They passed away when I was in college. My brother funded my dental school fees and other expenses. It was through his hard earned money and dedication that I graduated from a respectable institution in Pakistan as a dentist. He also funded my Masters at the University of Sheffield along with supporting his own family of two school going children and a wife. Although he has funded my PhD studies for two years, I thought it was best if I could contribute financially to secure the funding for third year as well as living/sustenance costs. He could then direct his efforts and money towards other equally important tasks. My brother had already spent extra money on travel and living expenses on my visits to Pakistan for data collection in order for the project to commence smoothly. I was facing huge difficulties in securing funds to complete my third year of study.

There was just one thing dominant in my mind that by achieving this doctorate degree, I will be fulfilling my late father's dream of seeing one of his children getting the highest accolade for any serious researcher. All of his other children have been educated to Masters level in

Medicine and Education and are published authors but have not treaded on the path of getting a serious research related degree like a PhD.

The David Locker Scholarship represented to me as an opportunity to fully focus my attention on the main objective of achieving the best I can in the social science, oral health and dentistry field and to promote the cause of Dental Public Health in my country. I could spearhead the movement of improving dental public health in Pakistan by training future researchers in the field.

By receiving this scholarship I was able to finish my PhD well within time without having to think about hardship funds or opting for a part time or distance learning PhD for which I would have had to go back to Pakistan and continue from there. This would have wasted much of the crucial time period, which I could otherwise spend towards understanding and analysing my data properly. In worse case, I had to discontinue my PhD study programme until I secured some funding in the future. I believed with such a rich data in hand, it would be a shame not having to complete the project and not making a valuable contribution to the research world and the University of Sheffield. The scholarship money was received when I was in the process of analysing the data so securing this funding strengthened my opportunity to complete my study and helped me go through the analysing and writing stage peacefully while working on a couple of publications as well. I was more than satisfied that I was bringing all the required skills necessary to engage for an excellent researcher that is adding value to the research culture at the oral health and society at Sheffield.

I have already started to publish parts of my research. I presented (oral presentation) at the Dangerous Oral Histories conference in Belfast this year and received great feedback from people from all parts of the world interested in knowing the role of oral histories in dentistry. Also, I gave a poster presentation in London this year explaining my research finding. Again, researchers from various fields of dentistry wanted to know about my project and also suggested me different ways I could disseminate my research further so it reaches a wider audience. Within the School of Clinical Dentistry, I have won a poster competition based on my research.

I am eternally grateful and feel proud that the David Locker Scholarship helped me on this journey. My initial goal of spearheading the awareness movement in Pakistan has been made possible because of this PhD - which has been completed because of the scholarship. I only dreamt of genuinely doing something for the people back home, you made it possible for me. Thank you once again!

Rebecca Knapp

PhD Dentistry (Science)

PG Dip Public Health, 2015

BDS Dentistry, 2008

Rebecca Knapp – Oral health related quality of life of children undergoing a general anaesthetic

After completing my dental degree and working in practice for a few years I unexpectedly had a significant back injury, meaning I was unable to work in practice for a year. What I did not realise at the time was that this would be a major turning point in my career path! To keep busy, I enrolled on the Masters in Public Health course at The University of Sheffield, which rekindled my love of learning and deepened my appreciation for the need of Public Health initiatives to really combat oral diseases. Wanting to continue my education, I was delighted to be accepted to study for a PhD at the Academic Unit of Dental Public Health at Sheffield.



The aim of my PhD is to explore the oral health-related quality of life (OHRQoL) of children who have high rates of dental caries, before and after treatment under general anaesthetic, as well as the impact on the everyday lives of their families. Dental caries, as a largely preventable disease, is a major Public Health issue in the UK. Last year, in England alone, 43240 children received a general anaesthetic for treatment of caries. This is at huge economic cost the health services but has wider impacts on individuals and society. My PhD will explore those impacts, as well as whether there is any difference between treatment types under GA; which could have implications for service delivery. Another important aspect of this research is that it is giving a voice to those that are often excluded from dental research: children. Much research in dentistry is 'on' children rather than with them. By applying child-centred methods to oral health-related research I am aiming to elicit the views of children themselves rather than relying on proxy-reports.

When I was told I had been awarded to the David Locker Scholarship I was stunned. I knew there would many excellent applicants, so it was both a surprise and hugely exciting to receive the award. This Scholarship will give me the time to collect further data, which will allow me to carry out additional analyses to add depth to the work I have completed so far. To date, there has been very little theory applied to, and underpinning, research in this area. These additional analyses will allow me to test our current conceptual model and explore the relationship between variables in more detail. I hope this will help to build (or at least start a discussion on) a more specific conceptual model of oral health-related quality of life in children. This generous award will also allow me to attend further training courses in Public Health research methods. It is such a huge honour to be selected, and I'm immensely grateful for the legacy left by Professor Locker, and to the awarding committee for this opportunity.

For more information, please contact David Meadows, d.meadows@sheffield.ac.uk, 0114 222 1073