



SUNWAI project researchers from the UK, Vietnam, Thailand and India met at Northumbria University this week.

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New funding for research on advancing inclusion in healthcare systems across Asia

Researchers in Vietnam, Thailand, India and the UK have been awarded more than £4 million by the [National Institute for Health and Care Research](#) (NIHR) to identify and evaluate inclusive methods of healthcare provision.

Analysis of access to essential health services in these Asian countries, known as universal health coverage, is proposed in the SUNWAI project – [Social participation for Universal health coverage: evidence-informed NetWorks](#)

[Advancing Inclusion](#). This project is being jointly led by researchers from Northumbria University and India's George Institute for Global Health with the aim of improving equity of access and outcomes for all, particularly sexual and gender minority groups.

Over the next five years, academics at Northumbria University and the George Institute for Global Health will collaborate with a consortium of partners, including community-based collectives and organisations, working side by side with researchers at the Mahidol University in Thailand, Hanoi Medical University in Vietnam and the University of Essex.

[Dr Meghan Kumar](#), Principal Investigator and Associate Professor in the School of Healthcare and Nursing Sciences at Northumbria University, said: "For me this project is important because we'll be looking at the differences and similarities in social participation for health across the Asian nations involved. By that, I mean analysis of how citizens are involved in the healthcare system outside of being patients. How do each of the systems ensure all citizens are receiving the treatment and support they need, and how do they hold the systems accountable for this? This includes looking at communities who may often be under-represented and looking at different approaches to improve inclusion and equity of access."

The work will involve a focus on the LGBTQ+ community, including access to gender affirming services and treatment. This means looking at what is available to patients who feel their gender and physical sex do not match, and what happens when they seek medical and psychosocial support to bring those two things closer together.

Recent health policy and legal developments in Vietnam, Thailand, and India suggest varied pathways for these communities as members of society and as patients, which can provide important lessons on how social participation in health can impact on universal health coverage and availability.



Principal Investigators Dr Meghan Kumar and Dr Devaki Nambiar.

[Dr Devaki Nambiar](#), Principal Investigator and health and policy systems researcher at the George Institute for Global Health, added: “The SUNWAI consortium is a bold and ambitious effort to claim space for sexual and gender minority collectives and organisations to shape health systems and reform. For this to happen, our consortium will learn how to truly listen to each other – SUNWAI means being heard in a number of Asian languages – across disciplines, countries, health concerns and reform processes and see what ripples of listening and change we can create.”

Working with community organisations in each of the three countries and with funding for three doctoral students, researchers will gather and analyse data to understand prior and current structures that encourage social participation, accountability mechanisms, relevant legal and rights frameworks, and accessibility to gender-affirming care.

Qualitative research methods will include witness seminars from each country which will be shared through learning lab events to help the team understand and support the development of sustainable and inclusive health service delivery strategies for the future. The research will bring together realist and economic evaluation methods – this means establishing what works, for whom, and in which circumstances – whilst integrating better understanding of hidden costs and outcomes valued by each community.

SUNWAI consortium members travelled to Northumbria University this week, beginning Monday 8 September, for an inception meeting as the project begins its first year. The partners hosted a global health seminar – ***Social Participation for Health: Perspectives of Sexual and Gender Minority Groups in Asia*** – which was open to the public.

Northumbria University is dedicated to reducing health and social inequalities, contributing to the regional and national workforce and improving social, economic and health outcomes for the most marginalised in society. Through its new [Centre for Health and Social Equity](#), known as CHASE, researchers will be delivering world-leading health and social equity research and creating innovative, evidence-based policies and data-driven solutions to bring impactful change across the North East of England, the UK and globally.

Ends

Notes to editors

Image captions:

- 1) SUNWAI project researchers from the UK, Vietnam, Thailand and India met at Northumbria University this week.
- 2) Principal Investigators Dr Meghan Kumar and Dr Devaki Nambiar.

About the NIHR

The mission of the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) is to improve the health and wealth of the nation through research. We do this by:

- Funding high quality, timely research that benefits the NHS, public health and social care;
- Investing in world-class expertise, facilities and a skilled delivery workforce to translate discoveries into improved treatments and services;
- Partnering with patients, service users, carers and communities, improving the relevance, quality and impact of our research;

- Attracting, training and supporting the best researchers to tackle complex health and social care challenges;
- Collaborating with other public funders, charities and industry to help shape a cohesive and globally competitive research system;
- Funding applied global health research and training to meet the needs of people in low and middle income countries.

NIHR is funded by the Department of Health and Social Care. Its work in low and middle income countries is principally funded through UK international development funding from the UK government.

About the George Institute for Global Health

The George Institute for Global Health is a leading independent medical research institute established in India in 2007. The George Institute has a wide range of ongoing research projects in 21 states in India, and collaborative research across the region focusing on key areas such as primary health care, health equity, cardiometabolic diseases, and mental health conducted in collaboration with union and state governments and other academic institutions. The institute's projects focus on ways to enhance the health of individuals and communities, prevent and treat diseases, improve access to evidence-based care, eliminate inequities, shape policies, and scale up proven solutions to benefit millions of people.

About Northumbria University

Northumbria University is a research-intensive university that unlocks potential for all, changing lives regionally, nationally and internationally.

Northumbria is committed to delivering world-class education and conducting research that addresses real-world challenges. The university's health and care research portfolio spans multiple disciplines and focuses on improving outcomes for individuals and communities across the North East of England and beyond.

Find out more about us at www.northumbria.ac.uk

UNIVERSITY OF THE YEAR 2022 (Times Higher Education Awards)

Northumbria is a research-intensive university that unlocks potential for all, changing lives regionally, nationally and internationally.

Two thirds of Northumbria's undergraduate students come from the North East region and go into employment in the region when they graduate, demonstrating Northumbria's significant contribution to social mobility and levelling up in the North East of England.

Find out more about us at www.northumbria.ac.uk

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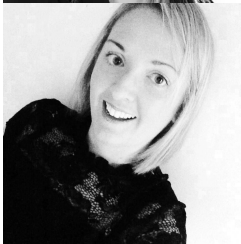


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