For sexual and reproductive health to be attained and maintained, the sexual and reproductive rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.  

Adapted from WHO, 2006

Our research in sexual and reproductive health is recognised as internationally excellent and world-leading

Challenging and improving practice in reproduction and sexual health

Our research in this area is broad in scope and includes projects on the experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and early motherhood, reproductive control, and sexualities. Areas of academic expertise encompass understandings and perceptions of reproductive and sexual health across the life course. We also focus on lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender health, HIV, the impacts of disability on consent, and coercion in sexual relationships. All of our research in this theme is underpinned by our commitment to challenge and improve understanding and practice in reproductive and sexual health care.

Making a difference – we work with a variety of institutions and funders, from research councils to third sector organisations, including the Economic and Social Research Council, the National Institute for Health Research, Marie Stopes International and Bayer Plc. Our research includes investigations into pre-conception care for women with pre-existing diabetes, the acceptability of intrauterine contraceptive devices and a project that investigates different aspects of young women’s experiences of one or more unintended pregnancies and abortion.

We are internationally recognised for our ability to investigate sensitive subjects and engage hard to reach groups. The success of the Contraception for Women with intellectual disabilities: Who decides? survey was followed by an Open Society Foundations funded project, exploring the issue of contraceptive decision-making for women with learning disabilities. The results of some of this work are freely available as an audio catalogue on iTunesU, entitled The Secret History of Sterilisation.

The Open University and the charity Together for Short Lives lead a ground-breaking collaboration, researching and developing a Sexuality Care Guidance for people with life-limiting conditions. It is envisaged that this research will influence policy and practice development on the sensitive issue of sexual identity in disabled patients.

We also have considerable academic expertise in the theoretical and empirical connections between the beginning and end of life, with a particular emphasis on reproductive loss, and are proud to host the British Sociological Association’s Human Reproduction Study Group.

Our postgraduate studies include research into the sexuality of women with learning disabilities, abortion in Northern Ireland, relationships and reproductive choices for young adults with life-limiting conditions and an investigation on health promotion and risk, for men who have sex with men.

The Open University and the BBC: bringing learning to life – our unique partnership with the BBC ensures public dissemination of academic expertise and research excellence in this field. Co-productions include Desperate Midwives and accompanying free educational resources are available on OpenLearn.

Find out more or want to work with us – email: WELS-Research-Admin@open.ac.uk
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