



My journey as a researcher

Salmaan Ansari is a National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) PhD student, based at the University of Kent, below he explains what inspired him to become a researcher and outlines his research journey so far.



Since my time at college, I have always had a passion for data analysis. While in India, I completed my undergraduate degree (BSc Hons) in statistics at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) in India. During this degree, I did data analysis training using different statistical tools. These training experiences significantly elevated my proficiency and inclination towards the applied aspects of statistical tools studied in my undergraduate degree.

I had already started a MSc in Statistics at AMU, but then, after a year, decided to drop out of this course and pursue my Masters in Biostatistics & Demography at the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS) in Mumbai India. This shift allowed me to align my studies more closely with my passion for applied statistics. It was here, where I studied research methodologies using quantitative tools in population studies and my passion for research started. For my MSc project, I worked on the mapping and classification of household poverty in India using supervised learning algorithms.

During my MSc, I undertook an internship as a data analyst at the National Law University in Delhi, working with research experts on a project to find a common solution. This project was funded by Indian government and aimed at gathering micro-level evidence on Intellectual Property (IP) behaviour and priorities of Indian start-ups, and with their help steps up to policy analysis. Working closely with experts from diverse backgrounds, I gained valuable insights into the intricacies of policy analysis and the real-world applications of data-driven research.

After completing MSc, I then decided to do a Masters of Philosophy (MPhil) Degree at IIPS. During this degree, I focused my research on looking at how multiple long-term chronic conditions contribute to poor mental health among older people in India and delved into understanding the underlying mechanisms in this association. The findings of my thesis were



significant enough to be published in two reputable journals, reflecting the depth and impact of my research.

I then worked for one year as a Senior Research Officer on a project to assess and project the cancer burden in Maharashtra, India, funded by the IIPS in collaboration with the Centre for Cancer Epidemiology. In this project, I got extensive research exposure including data collection from cancer registries, thorough analysis of the data, presentation of findings, and initiation of the research report preparation process. It was a rewarding experience that enriched my knowledge and equipped me with research expertise in the field of public health.

During this period, I also contributed to several published articles in the area of public health such as non-communicable diseases, multimorbidity, mental health, reproductive health, poverty and nutrition. My contributions to these articles underscored my commitment to advancing research and addressing key health challenges facing communities.

Following these, my plan was always to undertake a PhD, but had decided I wanted to go abroad to do it and started looking at options in my research interest. My enquiries led me to find and accept to a great PhD opportunity in England, funded by National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration Kent, Surrey and Sussex (ARC KSS) and hosted by the University of Kent.

As part of my three-year, full time PhD course, I am working on a project entitled: *Investigating the utilisation of health and social care services among people with clusters of long-term conditions, with a focus on coastal towns*. This project aims to identify ways of understanding the pattern of long-term conditions and needs for services in coastal towns compared with other areas, using data collected routinely by health and social care services across England.

This April, I have been invited to present at the 2024 annual meeting of the Population Association of America in Columbus, Ohio, USA. This great opportunity serves as a significant milestone in my journey as a researcher. In this conference, I will be presenting my research findings on how different multimorbidity clusters impact healthcare utilisation among older people and how they report their health following healthcare use.

I am due to finish my PhD in 2026, by which time, I hope the results of my research will help draw attention to the challenges faced by people living with clusters of long-term health condition and highlight the significant strength that coastal communities should have in terms of good wellbeing. This will be useful for future monitoring of health according to geography and will provide important clues about how best to tackle the major health problems in these towns.