

My journey as a PhD researcher

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Motivated by personal experiences and a desire to reform children's social services, Samiat advocates for a radical, community-rooted model of social work. Her journey has been both rewarding and challenging, marked by global engagement and resilience through setbacks. Highlights include presenting her work at conferences and contributing to the British Journal of Social Work's 2026 Special Issue. Post PhD, she plans to continue researching cultural parenting and transformational social work practices.

Tell us about your research project

My research adopts ethnographically informed methods to critically examine cultural parenting and child-rearing practices within sub-Saharan Black African families, as well as the concerns that may arise from these practices. It also explores the interactions and relationships between these families and social services, with a focus on highlighting potential disparities in assessment processes and service delivery.

What inspired you to undertake a PhD?

I have always seen myself as a child who was missed by the system, and I often wonder how different life might have been had my family and I encountered social service intervention. Over the years, I've grown increasingly uncomfortable and concerned with the current state of children's social services and how it operates. I believe that a more radical, depoliticised model of social work, one rooted in neighbourhood councils, could foster greater transparency and genuine community engagement. The research will take approximately 3-4 years to complete.

How would you describe your journey so far as a PhD student? The highs? The challenges?

The journey has been both rewarding and challenging. One of the highs has been the opportunity to take an idea and set of questions and pursue them on a global scale, contributing to an existing body of research in a meaningful way. It has been deeply fulfilling to see how my work can add to wider conversations and knowledge. At the same time, the process has not been without challenges. Staying motivated and keeping the research alive, especially during periods where things did not go as planned has tested my resilience. Obstacles such as delays in data collection have been particularly difficult, but they have also been part of the learning process, shaping my growth as a researcher.

What are the highlights of your PhD project?

The highlights so far have included presenting my research through both oral and poster presentations, as well as having my abstract accepted to contribute a reflective piece for the British Journal of Social Work 2026 Special Issue.

What advice / tips would you give someone thinking about undertaking taking a PhD?

Start with your idea and your questions, and then go for it, don't wait for everything to be perfect at the outset. Your research will naturally evolve as you progress. At every stage, find something that keeps you motivated, because challenges will arise that test your resolve. Most importantly, do your PhD around your life, not your life around your PhD.

What's next? What are your plans for the future?

After completing my PhD, I aim to continue researching cultural parenting and social work practice, while also pursuing further work on transformational approaches to social work.