



# Not everything is a PhD:

The pragmatics of undertaking  
health data research and analysis in  
Local Authority settings

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case study



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## INTRODUCTION

Nottingham City is ethnically diverse, in addition to being the 20<sup>th</sup> most deprived Local Authority (LA) in the UK (out of 296). Nottingham City Council (NCC) introduces its Women's Health Needs Assessment (WHNA) as a case study, to illustrate opportunities and challenges in conducting rigorous research and analysis within LA. Key learnings are shared, to inform future pragmatic research opportunities and foster collaboration between LA, academic, and other research partners.

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## OBJECTIVES

1. To identify challenges associated with undertaking rigorous, ethical and unbiased research in LA settings.
2. To explore key differences between undertaking rigorous, ethical and unbiased research in academic and LA settings
3. To share key learnings gained from undertaking NCC's WHNA in respect of undertaking research
4. To provide recommendations that might better enhance the collaborative opportunities between academia and LA.

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## NOTTINGHAM CITY WHNA METHODOLOGY

Here, NCC's WHNA is used as a case study, to achieve the outlined objectives. The WHNA combined 'epidemiological' and 'corporate' approaches. It was ambitious, comprehensive and mixed methods, consisting of:

1. **Comprehensive literature review** (to identify pertinent women's health issues)
2. **Secondary quantitative analysis** (to identify leading causes of morbidity/mortality and demographic contributors to inequality)
3. **Online survey** (of 216 local women, to identify initial themes and respondent demographics)
4. **Brief engagement activity** (using post-it notes, to identify pertinent barriers and health promotion strategies)
5. **Focus groups/interviews** (with 49 local women experiencing inequality – e.g. sex workers, survivors of DSVA, women seeking asylum, ethnic minorities – to identify healthy behaviours, barriers/ facilitators and generate actionable solutions).

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## 10 KEY LEARNINGS

1. **Pragmatism** is essential
2. Timescales should be agreed **in advance**
3. Collaboration should be **mutually beneficial**
4. **Clear** ownership, roles, and responsibilities must be established early
5. **Skilful project management** enhances collaboration and efficiency
6. LA budgeting and decision-making are shaped by **shifting political contexts**
7. **Absence of formal ethics** processes in LA may pose challenges for academic publication opportunities
8. **Ethical considerations** around Council staff collecting data from residents must be addressed
9. Participant recruitment requires early, **careful planning**
10. **Consider in initial stages** how to keep participants informed whilst maintaining anonymity

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## CONCLUSION

Conducting rigorous, ethical, and unbiased research in LA presents unique challenges due to limited time and resources, political influences, and the real-world impact of findings. Local Authority colleagues wish to collaborate with academics and other partners to get the best outcomes for residents. Careful planning and consideration with clearly laid out roles and responsibilities can support mutually beneficial collaboration opportunities between different sectors, working towards common goals.

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## QUESTION FOR COLLEAGUES

What would help your organisation/sector feel better able to collaborate with LA colleagues to produce:

- Better partnership working
- High quality, rigorous evidence
- Decision making based on the best available evidence

