

**PI Helen Chatterjee:**

**Scheme: Forced Displacement**

**Project Title: [Co-developing a method for assessing the psychosocial impact of cultural interventions with displaced people: Towards an integrated care framework](#)**

**Case Study Title: Understanding how arts and cultural activities can mediate the challenges of displacement**

While it's widely acknowledged that exposure to the arts can lift your mood – and even be a transformative experience – there has been very little empirical study of precisely how and under what circumstances.

To get a better understanding of this phenomenon **Professor Helen Chatterjee from University College London** has been working with the [Helen Bamber Foundation](#), a group that supports refugees and asylum seekers who have experienced extreme human cruelty, such as torture and human trafficking.

Together they have been exploring the role of arts-based activities in supporting those with psychological and mental health problems caused by displacement.

These include Palestinians living in a Jordanian refugee camp who have access to the Women's Programme Centre, which runs mixed activities, including arts-based workshops. "There are many arts and cultural organisations that provide activities to support people," says Prof Chatterjee. "And we are looking at the impact of these activities to see if we do see health improvements, and if they actually work?"

This research will build on Prof Chatterjee's previous experience focusing on museums, heritage sites and galleries, exploring the objects and collections they contain and how interacting with that material can support psychological and mental health.

"We are trying to collect evidence of the impact these activities have," says Chatterjee.

"We're not saying they're a replacement, but if people are having standardised clinical interventions, if they're also engaging in arts and cultural activities, you do see much better outcomes."

Some at the Helen Bamber Foundation report that participating in the arts programme helps them better deal with some of the psychological challenges they are facing.

With this in mind, one of the project's main aims is to develop methods of evaluation to create more integrated healthcare frameworks through interviews, focus groups and video conversations with people who are going through the process of being regularly assessed in terms of psychological health.

Some are recruited as co-researchers, to help try and establish the best way for them to articulate their experience of the processes they are undergoing. "Many people find the clinical approach very challenging," says Chatterjee.

"They don't understand the words associated with mental health, partly because people from different cultures have different ways of expressing those issues. There's anxiety about articulating how they feel – people want to find more creative ways to express themselves, whether that's music, an artwork or singing.

"We're trying to establish how to pool the clinical evidence and the results of arts participation and what that methodology would look like."

Chatterjee hopes the project will help create more nuanced outcomes, looking at how the arts and cultural activities have impacted on the participants' confidence levels, skills acquisition, language skills and employability. Rather than existing methods, which tend to be very medical and focus on structured scales of depression and anxiety.

### **Intended outcomes and impact**

- Firstly to change perceptions of what it is to be a migrant or refugee and demonstrate the role that arts and cultural organisations can play in helping people, getting them jobs and offering opportunities to retain their identity. "There's a huge amount of arts and creative cultural activities going on to support refugees and asylum seekers, particularly in Europe and we're trying to raise their profile," she says.
- The second impact will be to create an evaluation framework that will help make sure that the benefits of arts and cultural activities can be clearly seen, which will help boost the profile of the work being done and create evidence that can stand alongside clinical findings in terms of validity and worth.