

Peacebuilding and Resilience in an era of global health challenges: a bilateral research call to enhance understanding and support for mental health challenges in Colombia

Call specification

Summary

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the Science, Technology and Innovation Projects CTel of national affairs (Minciencias) are pleased to announce a bilateral call between researchers in the UK and Colombia. The scheme calls for internationally competitive and cross disciplinary research projects, that aim to enhance the evidence base on understanding and addressing the mental health challenges facing post-conflict societies in Colombia.

Where possible, research activities should be co-designed with people with lived experiences, community and health practitioners and other social actors in order to gain a deeper understanding from differing perspectives.

The call is structured around four overarching themes:

- Mental health conditions, including; post-traumatic stress disorder and co-morbid conditions such as depression and anxiety
- Substance misuse and dependence
- Gender and interpersonal violence
- Mental health care systems and services

Funding will be available to support up to 9 joint research projects, for up to 36 months. UKRI will support a UK contribution of £3m to this call, with an equivalent level of match resource (COP \$4.5b) being made by the Colombian funder, Minciencias. UK applications can request up to £333,000 (80% FEC). The Colombian component of each project may receive up to COP \$483,000,000.

The UKRI component of this call will be funded through the Newton Fund. UKRI funding for this call will be awarded to proposals that fit within Official [ODA Guidelines](#); research outcomes and impacts that clearly demonstrate a primary purpose to improve Colombia's economic development and the welfare of its most vulnerable.

Key commissioning dates:

- Deadline for the Notification of [Intent to Submit](#)- 12.00 GMT (midday) 3rd August 2020
- Deadline for UUKi partnership service- 3rd August 2020
- Deadline for proposals – 16.00h GMT on 27th August 2020
- Panel meeting – 23/24th September 2020
- Funding decision – November 2020

- UK grant start date – before February 2021
- Colombian grant start date- from December 2020

Background

UKRI and Minciencias jointly organized a workshop, held in Colombia October 2019, to explore the potential for further collaboration in understanding and supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the population of Colombia as part of the [peace consolidation](#). This continues a successful history of collaboration between the UK and Colombian research communities. UKRI and Minciencias invited 24 delegates to participate in a workshop consisting of presentations, structured discussion, facilitated exercises, and open networking across 1.5-days. Cross-disciplinary discussions were possible thanks to the diverse disciplinary backgrounds represented by the social and medical sciences and the arts and humanities.

Input from academics and practitioners demonstrated that there is a diverse range of issues that warrant further investigation and innovative approaches. The outcomes of the workshop developed this research call to gain a better understanding of the complexities surrounding mental health challenges within the context of a post conflict-society. Colombia has suffered nearly 60 years of violence, resulting in 7 million internally displaced citizens. Like many other post-conflict nations, citizens require urgent healthcare programs to protect and improve mental health and psychological well-being. Prolonged periods of armed conflict and violence disrupt social support structures and expose civilian populations to high levels of mental health distress. The [2015 Global Burden of Disease study](#) found a positive association between conflict and mental health problems and substance misuse. While most of those exposed to trauma suffer some form of psychological distress, accumulated evidence shows that 15-20% of crisis-affected populations develop mild-to-moderate mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, and (PTSD), and around 3-4% develop severe mental disorders, such as psychosis or debilitating depression and anxiety. In Colombia, laws have been established to provide priority mental health treatment for victims of the conflict, with recent mental health surveys indicating that PTSD, anxiety, mood disorders, and substance abuse as the most prevalent mental health problems experienced. Evidence also shows that post-conflict communities consistently experience high rates of domestic and family violence against women and children, with a decline in public violence as widely seen to precipitate the escalation of violence in the private sphere.

Health care professionals and policy makers require more research from evidence to characterize needs and guide prevention, interventions, diagnosis and treatments.

This call will support research aimed at addressing key gaps in our understanding of the dynamic and complex interaction of factors impacting Colombian citizen's mental health and wellbeing following years of conflict.

Scope

This call will support impactful, cross disciplinary awards across a range of interfaces, including disciplines from the arts and humanities, medicine and social sciences. Different disciplines should be involved in the conceptualization of the projects as well as delivering the research. It is important that

collaborations are meaningful, for example, if a discipline appears to have been added as a ‘bolt on’ to fulfil disciplinary requirements and is not integrated in any meaningful way, this would not be acceptable. Applicants are required to consider this carefully when assembling project teams, and the funders will consider this in the final assessment of proposals.

It is expected that the research supported will provide novel understandings of mental health in a post conflict society and generate evidence for impact in policy and practice for Colombia specifically. As such, applications must involve an intervention focused component. This includes the investigation of a broad range of novel or existing models of help, support, prevention or treatment that seek to address presenting problems / reduce recurrence or reduce risk exposure, enhance protective factors and reduce the likelihood of problems emerging in the first place. It is expected that prevention or intervention research will be evidence based. This component may focus on multiple aspects of intervention research, including for example, development of novel approaches, tailoring of existing approaches for understanding, evaluation, acceptability, implementation and integration.

Applicants should define the role of the social group(s) that will participate in the research. It is expected that as well as knowledge exchange which will take place with local stakeholders, applicants must ensure direct participation of social groups in the research and the development of the research methodology, if possible. Outputs should aim to improve quality of life and build local capacity, so that knowledge is not lost after the project has ended. This will require where appropriate, active collaboration or engagement with Colombian wider stakeholders (local actors) including but not limited to, people with lived experience of mental health problems, local communities, health care practitioners inside and outside of formal healthcare settings, educators, NGOs, policy makers and governors.

In the UK application, applicants should explain how their application meets the intervention requirement in their Case for Support and ODA compliance statement. In the Colombian application, applicants should explain how their application meets the intervention requirement in the ‘Componente de Intervención’ section. Please note that if you are planning to focus on specific indigenous or ethnic groups in Colombia you will need to follow the ‘consulta previa’ process, which is a Colombian legal requirement, in the event that your proposal is successful. If you are focusing on a more general population group this process is not required.

Call details

This research call will provide funding for internationally competitive and cross-disciplinary research projects which address a broad range of areas related to mental health challenges in post-conflict Colombian societies. Research activities should be co-designed with people with lived experience, community and health practitioners and other social actors (stakeholders) in order to learn from different perspectives.

The call is structured around four overarching themes.

- Mental health conditions, including; PTSD and co-morbid conditions such as depression and anxiety
- Substance misuse and dependence

- Gender and interpersonal violence
- Mental health care systems and services

We welcome applications that draw upon non-traditional mental health research disciplines, combine disciplines or subdisciplines that have not traditionally collaborated, in order to provide novel insights and approaches.

Projects will need to address one or more of the following themes. Below are exemplars within each theme of possible research areas and approaches. This list is not exhaustive and the funders welcome proposals that address other research questions within these four broad areas.

Theme 1 - Mental health conditions including PTSD and co-morbid conditions such as depression and anxiety

Throughout Colombia there is nearly universal exposure to trauma and loss related to the years of conflict. Exposure to traumatic events, such as armed insurgency and violence, is often related to a variety of psychiatric outcomes, in particular, PTSD and co-morbid conditions such as depression and anxiety.

Evidence based research is required to improve our understanding of PTSD and other connected mental or physical health problems. Further analysis of PTSD, socio-demographic patterns and risk factors are needed to develop better medical and psychological interventions in Colombian public policies. Our workshop highlighted the importance of early identification of mental health issues and understanding the social and cultural barriers that keep people from seeking help. It was highlighted that further research is needed to identify associated risk factors and to develop intervention strategies with local communities and lay providers to understand better and raise awareness of the effects of PTSD and co-morbid conditions. Research could also look at evidence based practices to reduce or prevent the development and reoccurrence mental health problems, as well as treatment methods such as psychotherapeutic approaches, pharmacotherapy and/or cultural and social interventions. Similarly, strategies to train and encourage community participation in pedagogical processes that can modify behaviors and attitudes, partially relating to stigma, are welcome under this theme.

Theme 2 - Substance misuse and dependence

There is an underdeveloped evidence base on the correlation between substance use and conflict situation. Although increasing use of substances are reported among combatants and ex-combatants, changes in the patterns of use needs to be further understood. Periods of instability and inadequate rule of law can lead to increased access to drugs, which in times of stress, displacement and high unemployment can lead to a greater risk of substance abuse. Further research is needed on the risk factors for developing substance misuse and drug use patterns in post conflict societies and particularly amongst those with preexisting mental health problems. Research is desirable on effective intervention measures, assessment of substance misuse and strategies to train nonspecialized health care professionals. There is evidence that substance misuse can increase the burden on already stretched mental health systems in post conflict societies. Research in this area could include advocacy for policy and decision makers to consider substance misuse alongside other mental health conditions.

Theme 3 - Gender and interpersonal violence

Both victims and perpetrators of violence are affected by armed conflicts, with patterns of violence lingering in the post-conflict communities, including gender-based violence. Post conflict violence and

abuse is a global phenomenon, but it takes on specific modalities in each cultural and geo-political setting. Discussions at our workshop highlighted that post-conflict communities in Colombia see a distorted gender dynamic and re-emergence of patriarchal power structures that can condone and perpetuate violence thus highlighting the need for further research to understand the connections between these dynamics and mental health.

Research should consider the connections between mental health, the perpetrators or victims of domestic abuse, violence and associated attitudes. Research could also look at ways to process change within wider environments, such as investigating and understanding cultural norms and attitudes that foster violence and challenge support for male authority and control over women, as well as breaking down stigmas around reporting violence and building up trust in policing and justice.

Theme 4 - Mental health care systems and services

Robust mental health care systems and services are essential for the treatment and care of those with mental health problems. Healthcare systems and services need to be localized and structured in a way that allows for efficient and optimized coverage for everyone. Discussions at our workshop highlighted that therapeutic and medical healthcare programs working together can be highly effective in post-conflict communities, often delivered outside of centralized hospital settings. Colombia has a two-tier health care service, but provision is uneven with poorer levels of care for those on the government-subsidized system and limited access to services for those living outside of urban areas.

Research is encouraged to investigate inequalities within care provision and access across Colombia; options for the decentralization of Colombia's healthcare system; the economic costs of delivering care and services, capacity building and training of non-specialized health care practitioners to recognize symptoms, and ways to access the most vulnerable and dispersed populations. Evidence from other post conflict societies suggests care systems and services are more successful when they consider community contexts, address local needs, incorporate cultural elements and work with existing groups and structures within communities. Research and engagement should therefore consider the value of alternative and complimentary treatments and the role of community agents, volunteers and teachers in psychosocial, therapeutic, and culturally appropriate treatment methods.

Can I consider the effects of COVID-19 within my research proposal?

As this call has evolved, the COVID-19 pandemic has developed into an international public health emergency. The pandemic is generating multiple stressors and may increase mental vulnerability for those with existing mental health problems. Acknowledging the current global situation, applicants are encouraged to consider the impact of COVID-19 as a secondary focus to their research that primarily addresses one or more of the call themes.

Eligibility

Proposals must meet the criteria listed below:

- Proposals must have both a UK and a Colombian principal investigator (PI), as well as co-investigators from both countries, as appropriate to the research proposed and input should be balanced across the two countries.
- Applicants can only be PI on one proposal.
- Colombian PIs cannot be involved in any other grants currently funded by Minciencias.
- Any principal investigators and co-Investigators must be from an [organisation eligible for UKRI](#) or Minciencias funding.
- Applicants can be named on more than one proposal as a Co-Investigator, providing they have sufficient time available to work on all relevant proposals if they were all to be successful.
- The UK funding for this initiative comes from the Newton fund. This means that the funding will be awarded in a manner that fits with Official Development Assistance (ODA) requirements. All proposals under this call must therefore be compliant with these guidelines. See [FAQ document](#) for further information.

Assessment process

The [Notification of Intent](#) is to help the funders plan the panel composition and is NOT for any assessment purpose.

The full proposal will be assessed by a joint UK-Colombian panel and they will make funding recommendations. Only applications that receive strong competitive assessments from both UK and Colombian panels members will be recommended for funding.

Identical copies of the UK Je-S attachments must be submitted to Minciencias as they will form part of the joint panel assessment.

Assessment Criteria

Proposals to this call will be assessed in accordance with the following criteria:

Research importance and quality (50 marks/primary criterion):

- Importance of the research question(s) and/or overall challenge
- Appropriateness and viability of the proposed approach, objectives, and methods, including addressing any ethical issues
- Are the costs included in the proposal 'appropriate' (i.e. are they focused on and necessary for building sustainable partnerships) and good value for money?
- Relevance of the activities and methods proposed to the stakeholders and situations targeted in the intervention
- Effectiveness and sustainability of the proposed intervention

Fit to Call (20 marks):

- An effective and meaningful integration of a range of different disciplines and skills that can be shown to deliver added value
- Expertise assembled is appropriate and sufficient to address the research questions posed
- Relevance of the proposal to addressing the call challenges - how appropriate and developed is the collaboration between the UK and Colombian research in addressing the call challenges?
- Is the distribution of work between the UK and Colombian partners appropriate? I.e. is it a true and fair partnership?

Engagement and Impact within Colombia (20 marks):

- Effective engagement, co-design / co-production, and knowledge exchange with relevant stakeholders (social actors) and research users including those with lived experience of armed conflict, mental health, local communities, health care practitioners inside and outside of formal healthcare settings, educators, policy makers and governors.
- Evidence that the research will have real-world relevance, and the role of non-academic partners, where included, to facilitate this.
- Meaningful plans for patient and public involvement throughout the award
- Quality of plans for knowledge exchange and mobilization and how these will accelerate implementation of research evidence into socially appropriate policy and practice.
- Potential for economic and societal impact, including how underrepresented groups and those most at risk of mental health problems are likely to benefit.

Expected outputs and publications (10 marks):

- Potential for delivering new and timely knowledge through quality research outputs and publications

How to apply

For UK applications, please refer to the following additional documents in preparation for submission:

- [Je-S guidance](#)
- [FAQ for Newton Funding](#)
- [Ethics addendum](#)
- [MRC Ethics Template and Human Participation Form](#)
- [International funding agencies resources form](#)

UUKi partnership service available until 3rd August

To help with partnership development, the funders are using Universities UK international (UUKi) to help match researchers in Colombia and the UK. UUKi maintains a database of UK researchers who are interested in being contacted by UUKi, should a relevant Newton partner request be received.

Any UK academics interested in being contacted by UUKi in the event that a relevant partnership opportunity arises should [complete this form](#).

UK researchers may also wish to consult UUKi's [Opportunities for Collaboration](#) webpage for details of proposed Newton projects seeking a UK partner.

Notification of Intent deadline 3rd August

[Notification of Intent form](#).

Full Proposal

The UK application should be submitted through the Research Councils' Joint electronic [Submission \(Je-S\) System](#).

The Colombian application should be submitted through [Minciencias grants system](#), following the instructions in their call document.

A **UK-based lead Principle Investigator** and a **Colombian-based Principle Investigator** should be identified– each of whom will lead on interaction with the funding agency in their respective countries.

The **UK based PI** should ensure the application is submitted via the Je-S system. If the UK application comes from multiple institutions, then the application should be made on a single Je-S form from the UK-based PI's host institution.

The **Colombia based PI** will apply through Minciencias system and follow their guidelines.

The following Je-S attachments should also be included as an identical copy in your Colombian application; case for support, justification of resources, CVs, workplan, international funding agencies resources form.

Commissioning timetable

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- Funding decision – November 2020
- UK start date – before February 2021
- Colombian start date – from December 2020

Contacts

- UKRI Case officer: Alexa Mills
Email: ColombiaNewton2020@esrc.ukri.org
- UUKi partnership service for UK academic looking a Colombian partner
<https://eu.123formbuilder.com/form-34761/UK-Academics-Interested-In-A-Newt>
- UUKi partnership service for Colombian academic looking for a UK partner
<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/International/funding-and-opportunities/newton/Pages/collaboration-opportunities.aspx>



- Minciencias: <http://www.minciencias.gov.co/ciudadano/canal-pqrds>
Please put the call title in the subject line of the enquiry box