



**DEMENTIA RESEARCH
NETWORK IRELAND**

Prevention, Cure & Care for
Neurodegenerative Diseases

Researcher In Focus Series – November 2020

This month's Researcher in Focus is Niamh Hennelly, a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre for Economic and Social Research on Dementia in NUI Galway.



What is your area of research?

I am a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Centre for Economic and Social Research on Dementia in NUI Galway. The Centre focuses on developing and facilitating new thinking on dementia in Ireland, especially on the relationship between personhood in dementia and resource allocation for people with dementia.

My own research interests lie in social research in dementia and health and social care provision. I completed my PhD this year which focused on the meaning of personhood in dementia in relation to formal care provision. It sought to answer questions around what matters for the personhood of the person with dementia and in particular how formal care services and supports can be structured around this concept. This is not solely about personalising individual care but more broadly about structuring the system of health and social care supports so that the person is at the centre of decision-making in all aspects of their life. This means more autonomy, better choice and greater flexibility for people with dementia living at home in the community and in nursing homes. Recently, I have also completed work on the impact of COVID-19 on people with dementia and their families in Ireland. I think that further research is required to understand the long-term impact of the pandemic and what it means for the type of and provision of services and supports to people with dementia along the broad continuum of care.



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What sparked your interest in this area?

Prior to commencing the PhD, I worked for Age Action Ireland on a digital inclusion programme which educated older people on how to use computers and smartphones. I gained first-hand experience of advocating for older people living in the community. This experience really highlighted to me the impact of ageing policy on the lives of older people and in particular vulnerable older people. When the opportunity came up to pursue a PhD in dementia research I jumped at the possibility of conducting research in this area.

What stage are you at in your career and are there any achievements you are particularly proud of?

I completed my PhD earlier this year, so I am very much at the start of my research career. In conducting my research, the most important part of it for me was that I could ensure that the voices of people with dementia and family carers were included and adequately represented in the work. I think that I achieved this and that this is reflected in the different outputs of the PhD, which, so far, includes the thesis and three peer-reviewed journal articles.

What impact would you like your research to have?

The main goal of my research is to have a positive impact on the lived experience of people with dementia, their families and communities. I think progressing research and policy for people with dementia nationally and internationally requires a strong collective approach. I hope that my research can add to the burgeoning research community in dementia in Ireland. In particular, I would like my research to contribute to further development and refinement of dementia and ageing policy in Ireland.

Who has helped or inspired you in your area of research?

The connections I made with people during the PhD is something which has inspired me to continue working in this area. For me, meeting with other researchers, with people with dementia, their families and formal carers was the most enriching part of the experience. It provided me with insight into their experiences and allowed me to understand their motivation and passion for this area of work. I am also very grateful for the support and guidance of my PhD supervisor, Prof. Eamon O'Shea and my colleagues at the CESRD who are a pleasure to work with.

Contact Details (optional):

Email: niamh.n.hennelly@nuigalway.ie

Website: <https://cesrd.ie/>

Research Gate: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Niamh_Hennelly

Twitter: [@NiamhHennelly](https://twitter.com/NiamhHennelly)