

Call for Expressions of Interest SACRU International Doctoral Webinar Collaboration 'Vulnerability and Healthcare'

Eligibility: Current doctoral student at a SACRU member
Dates: Five times in 2024 (Once a month, March to July, dates to be confirmed)
Location: Online Webinars
Deadline for submissions: 15 November 2023

About the Collaborative Webinars

Vulnerability is an important theme in contemporary healthcare. The Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU) recognizes that addressing vulnerability and vulnerabilities in healthcare is central to the mission of Catholic universities. Consequently, it has established a Working Group comprising representatives of each of the member universities to facilitate research into the broad question of 'Vulnerability in Healthcare', which is relevant to a variety of disciplines, ranging from medicine and health sciences to bioethics, theology, philosophy, sociology, law, bioengineering, economics, communication, psychology, and so on.

To facilitate this research, the SACRU Working Group on 'Vulnerability and Healthcare' is establishing an international doctoral webinar collaboration. One doctoral student from each of the member universities will be selected by the SACRU Working Group to participate in a series of 5 online webinars. During these webinars, doctoral students will be able to present their own work to fellow doctoral students and academics at partner universities. This will provide an opportunity for a unique interdisciplinary exchange of ideas shaped by the multiple contexts in which the Catholic Universities that make up SACRU operate: Australia, Brazil, Chile, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Spain, and the USA. The aim is to enrich the doctoral work of the individual students, to provide opportunities for collaboration, and to foster research networks on the theme of vulnerability and healthcare.

Four of these webinars will be dedicated to this collaborative exchange of ideas on vulnerability and healthcare in relation to the work of each of the doctoral students and serve to help the students to prepare for the fifth webinar. The fifth webinar will be an opportunity for the students to present their work to a broader audience of scholars from the partner universities and elsewhere. There may be possibilities for collaborative scholarly or popular publications emerging from the project.

Doctoral students at any of the SACRU members are invited to submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) to be part of these international collaborative webinars. The EOIs will be evaluated by the members of the Working Group and one candidate from each university selected.

Who should apply?

The theme of 'Vulnerability and Healthcare' is a broad one. Candidates from any field of study (discipline) who feel that their doctoral research has a strong connection to this theme can apply. Candidates working in any of the following areas, for example, may be suitable:

- Bioethics and Medical Ethics
- Health Sciences
- Catholic Social Thought
- Theology
- Philosophy
- Medical Sociology and Anthropology

- Medical Law
- Communication in Healthcare
- Psychology and Neuroscience
- Health Policy and Economics
- Social Welfare

The Theme: Vulnerability and Healthcare

The relationship between Vulnerability and Healthcare is strong: healthcare is a sector in which COVID-19 exposed many vulnerabilities in new ways, whether one is talking about the level of personal doctor-patient relationships, the impacts of public health interventions, the allocation of scarce medical resources, vaccine rollouts and administration, health workforce problems, health policy and economics, or communication in healthcare. Often it was people who were already vulnerable in various ways who were either worst affected by COVID-19, the most important targets of social concern, or both. Consider, for example, how older people were paradoxically denied treatment in some contexts due to age and, in other contexts, confined to aged care facilities to protect them.

Our SACRU Working Group is addressing vulnerabilities in healthcare at all levels, determining ways in which new conceptions of vulnerability—as a unifying and empowering notion that points to the fundamental capacity of all human beings to be responsive to the relational reality of the other and to the common good—can help to rethink some of the ethical and practical problems that emerge in contemporary healthcare, not only in times of pandemics, but also now as we move forward in the shadow of one.

In 2021, the Working Group published a discussion paper on the role of Catholic Universities titled, “Vulnerability in the Time of Covid-19” (February 2021), published in English, Italian and Spanish. The full paper is available in English on the SACRU website. <https://www.sacru-alliance.net/working-group-1-vulnerability-healthcare/> This should be read by potential applicants to inform their expressions of interest.

Examples of research that might be relevant

What follows are examples of the kinds of both conceptual and applied research questions those applying for the webinar may be addressing. This is not an exhaustive list; any applicant who feels that their research is relevant to the topic may apply.

Conceptual Research

- How is vulnerability related to other key anthropological and ethical concepts such as dignity, autonomy, justice, and solidarity?
- What emergent Catholic concepts, such as Pope Francis’s idea of the “Magisterium of Fragility” can help to enrich our understanding of vulnerability and its relevance for human flourishing?
- How can recent feminist reflections on vulnerability and relationality improve our theological and philosophical anthropologies that underpin ethical reflection in healthcare?
- In which relationships or interactions in healthcare do people experience vulnerability as a flourishing-limiting feature of their existence?

Applied Research

- How do reconceived notions of vulnerability empower people to engage more productively in healthcare either as providers or consumers?
- How does the emergence of new medical technologies expose or create new vulnerabilities?
- In times of crisis, how should scarce medical resources be allocated? Do new understandings of vulnerability offer insights?
- How could vulnerability guide funding policy for medical research, including in global health research?

- With increasingly aging populations, how could vulnerability shape policy around aged and end of life care, including the upskilling and care for the aged care workforce, many of whom are themselves vulnerable in various ways?
- What is the relationship (if any) between vulnerability and belonging to minorities?
- Psychological help in vulnerability and healthcare?
- How do developments in neuroscience create opportunities for rethinking or addressing vulnerability in healthcare, for example through new assessment methods?

Submission Procedure

Please submit an expression of interest (500–1000 words) in which you articulate how your doctoral research relates to the theme of vulnerability and healthcare and the questions you aim to solve in light of the kinds of questions set out above. Please also explain what you would hope to gain from participating in the international doctoral webinar collaboration. Please include a short biography (approximately 100 words).

EOIs should be submitted to the SACRU working group member at your university by 15 November 2023. Please insert 'SACRU Vulnerability EOI' into the subject field.

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Australian Catholic University	Associate Professor David Kirchhoffer	david.kirchhoffer@acu.edu.au
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Supporting Material

David Kirchhoffer, James Keenan, Luca Valera, and Roberto Zoboli, "Recognising and responding to vulnerability in a time of COVID-19". *ABC Religion & Ethics*: <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/responding-to-vulnerability-in-a-time-of-covid-19/13559718>