

Tackling health inequalities in Reading

The impact of Covid-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities

Community Participatory Action Research 2021–2022

Recommendations for Reading Health and Wellbeing Board
14 July 2023



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Collaboration and partnership key to success

- **Five partners:** Alliance for Cohesion and Racial Equality (ACRE), Reading Community Learning Centre (RCLC), Reading Voluntary Action (RVA), University of Reading and Reading Borough Council.
- **Five community researchers:** Evangeline Karanja, Tariq Gomma, Donna Ma, Hemamalini Sundhararajan and Krishna Neupane.
- **Focus of research:** The impact of Covid-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in Reading.
- **Learning shared in South East England and beyond:** The five community researchers in Reading were among 41 community researchers recruited by Health Education England and Public Health England in February 2021.

Where CPAR has led so far...

- Action on some recommendations
- New opportunities, projects and jobs for community researchers
- Development of [Participatory Action Research: A Toolkit](#) and training
- CPAR 2



Dr Esther Oenga

Community Participatory Action Research (CPAR) Fellow, University of Reading

Access to maternal healthcare services for ethnic minority communities

Research focus

- Studied the lived experiences of English-speaking ethnic minority women during pregnancy, childbirth, antenatal and postnatal access, and the healthcare professionals' (midwives') viewpoints.
- Explored the barriers to maternal access, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the effect of digitalisation on maternity services.

Key findings

- Barriers identified included women seeing different midwives at every antenatal appointment, feeling that they were not listened to by healthcare professionals, and the cost and availability of antenatal and postnatal classes.
- Additional barriers were caused by the digitisation of services during the pandemic – these included internet connectivity and affordability, and digital literacy.
- Midwives reported that staff shortages and language barriers were key challenges when providing maternity care for ethnic minority women.



Evangeline Karanja
Community Researcher

Access to maternal healthcare services for ethnic minority communities

Recommendations

- Streamline information and communication for better understanding.
- Ensure antenatal and postnatal classes are more accessible.
- Offer face-to-face services where possible and provide support with digital literacy when services are online.
- Provide better resources for translation and interpretation.
- Prioritise pregnant women's health, empowering them to make more individualised birth plans.
- Address staff shortages, ensuring more consistent care with the same midwife.
- Increase diversity in senior management and provide cultural awareness training to all staff working in maternal services.



Evangelina Karanja
Community Researcher

Access to maternal healthcare services for ethnic minority communities

Where CPAR has led so far...

- Reading Maternity Voices with Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust. Inequalities Project awarded £15,000 by Local Maternity and Neonatal Systems (LMNS) for a two-year pilot project to focus on:
 - Listening to feedback from Black and Asian women, and women from minority ethnic groups, or considered to be living in deprived areas
 - Working with the hospital to improve outcomes for women in these communities and their babies.
- Work on Participatory Action Research: A Toolkit
- Peer mentor for CPAR 2
- Work with Utulivu Women's Group



Evangelina Karanja
Community Researcher

Impact of Covid-19 on the mental health of ethnic minority men

Research focus

- The impact of Covid-19 on the mental health of men from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in Reading.
- Surveyed 63 men of varying ages and from backgrounds including Sudanese, Nigerian, Bangladeshi, Sierra Leonean, Libyan, Eritrean Ghanaian and Kenyan.

Key findings

- 86% of participants reported being affected negatively by the pandemic, either financially or psychologically.
- The research highlighted barriers to accessing mental health services including:
 - lack of translation and interpretation
 - difficulties being referred to or seen by mental health practitioners during the pandemic
 - lack of knowledge about what services are available
 - institutional racism and lack of cultural sensitivity
 - cultural stigma around mental health issues.



Tariq Gomma
Community Researcher

Impact of Covid-19 on the mental health of ethnic minority men

Recommendations

- Increase government funding for mental health services and make them easier to access.
- Ensure mental health issues are identified at the earliest possible stage, by increased training and awareness among all staff in public services.
- Recognise and support the role of the voluntary and community sector in providing awareness, understanding, advocacy and education around mental health issues, and responding to changing needs in communities.
- Promote mental health awareness in schools, colleges and universities.
- Develop conversation hubs offering professional and peer support.
- Support members of the community to conduct their own research and help improve services.

Where CPAR has led so far...

- Work on Participatory Action Research: A Toolkit
- Peer mentor for CPAR 2
- New job with Healthwatch Wokingham



Tariq Gomma
Community Researcher

Impact of Covid-19 on the Nepalese Community in Reading

Research focus

- Factors which contributed to the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, specifically among Nepalese community groups residing at East and South Reading locations.
- Surveys, interviews and focus groups were conducted in Nepali and then translated into English.

Key findings

- The research identified three major factors contributing to the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Nepalese communities in Reading:
 - living conditions, including shared housing and financial pressures
 - communication difficulties such as language barriers and lack of digital skills or access to the internet
 - fear, mistrust and vaccine hesitancy.
- Participants tended to have negative perceptions of local NHS services during the pandemic as well as sense of a delayed government response, and for some, the mistrust and fear extended to the Covid-19 vaccination programme.



Krishna Neupane
Community Researcher

Impact of Covid-19 on the Nepalese Community in Reading

Recommendations

- Provide outreach services for high-risk vulnerable households, including single parent families and those living in overcrowded conditions.
- Engage local community groups as partners in culturally-sensitive service design and delivery.
- Engage and train local community leaders and champions to mobilise for current and future public health issues, represent their communities in service design and help identify and support vulnerable households.
- Improve the availability and quality of translation and interpretation services for Nepalese and wider BAME communities.
- Identify communities experiencing language barriers and ensure ESOL classes, internet training and other support is available in community settings.
- Train public sector staff, including health care workers, in cultural, religious and ethnic diversity. Design and deliver this training in partnership with voluntary and community organisations who represent minority communities



Krishna Neupane
Community Researcher

Impact of Covid-19 on the Nepalese Community in Reading

Recommendations (continued)

- Provide culturally-appropriate mental health support, going beyond medicalised treatment and fostering social interaction, physical activity and community organisations.
- Recognise and support the importance of voluntary and community organisations in building community health and wellbeing, including mental health, in the longer term

Where CPAR has led so far...

- Work on Participatory Action Research: A Toolkit
- Health awareness event for the Nepalese community and translated leaflets about Type 2 Diabetes
- Community Researcher for British Science Association Community-led Research Pilot in Reading and Slough



Krishna Neupane
Community Researcher

Download the report

Find a **summary of recommendations on page 4** of the full report, including recommendations on **access to healthcare services for ethnic minority women** from the researchers working with Reading Community Learning Centre.



Rachel Spencer
Chief Executive,
Reading Voluntary Action