North-east COVID-19 observatory: issue 10.

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North-East COVID-19 Observatory

Issue 10—21st September 2020

Welcome

Welcome to our tenth issue of the Observatory. This is available two-weekly and has a dedicated theme. We include news, professional matters, and relevant professional and light reading. Each issue has one or two guest contributors with a specialist interest in the chosen theme. We value any feedback and encourage people to request themes or to send in resources that others might find interesting.

Theme: Inequalities and COVID-19

The chaos, fear, disruption and despair caused by the global pandemic has shone a spotlight on the inequalities in our societies. In this issue we have **Dave Black**, General Manager at Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC) Ltd., as our guest writer.

COVID-19 and lockdown have in some ways had a unifying effect within society: everyone has been affected, our liberties and freedoms restricted. Is it therefore true to say that "we are all in this together"?

The pandemic has helped shine a light on inequality at a global and local level. Only a minority of countries have the buying power to secure adequate personal protective equipment, medicines and potential vaccines. A survey conducted during the lockdown showed that 40% of UK citizens were finding lockdown an opportunity to save money while 40% said their financial position was worsening. This phenomenon, alongside the upcoming employment crisis, will likely worsen inequality in Scotland and the rest of the UK.

At Grampian Regional Equality Council (GREC), much of our work focuses on engagement with ethnic minorities and tackling racism. The picture that has been building of the disproportionate impact of COVID on some ethnic minority communities - i.e. more chance of contracting and/or dying from COVID-19 - is deeply worrying. These trends are more clearly seen in English or UK-wide data (IFS Deaton Review, ONS COVID-19 related deaths by ethnicity, and ISARIC CCP-UK study). The picture in Scotland is less clear but suggests that some South Asian communities are being negatively impacted. As well as the disproportionate health impact, there are also other inequalities that are being amplified by the pandemic. Ethnic minorities are more likely to live in over-crowded homes and work in precarious employment. Some face barriers to home schooling because of language barriers and digital exclusion, and some are unable to access state support because they have "no recourse to public funds".

During lockdown we have also seen the killing of George Floyd by police in America, the huge growth of the

Black Lives Matter movement around the world, and an intensified focus on the legacy of slavery and colonialism in the UK. These events are having a dramatic impact on society. Raising consciousness of issues of inequality and institutional racism is hugely important, and we believe a key step in the long term project of eliminating racism. But inevitably, at an individual level, this is a very turbulent and challenging time for those most affected by racism.

Within GREC work with service users and community members we have seen a mixed picture of reactions to the pandemic. On the positive side, the feedback from some has been a sense of minority communities feeling like it has been a tough time, but a tough time for everyone in society, not one group more than another. But we have also seen employment discrimination cases that point to the fact that much of our economy relies on a significant migrant population working in precarious job conditions. There have also been some racist incidents recorded, targeting specific communities.

With Brexit around the corner, and an employment crisis seeming inevitable, it is a crucial time for work that promotes positive community relations, and which supports individuals from minority communities who are facing isolation, disconnection, prejudice and discrimination. It is also crucial that organisations, large and small, take the time to assess what they are doing to understand their role in recognising institutional discrimination and tacking inequalities. Whether we are "all in it together" will only be answered when we see what the medium and long term impact on those already most disadvantaged in our communities.

For further reading see [the Equality and Human Rights Commission selected readings on COVID-19 and inequality](#).

Resources

Over-Exposed and Under-Protected: The devastating impact of Covid-19 on black and minority ethnic communities in Great Britain is detailed in [the results of a survey](#) carried out by Runnymede. Runnymede is the UK's leading independent think tank on race equality and race relations report. There are five key findings centred on:

- Mental health, childcare worries home schooling and relationships
- Health and coronavirus infection
- Households and overcrowding
- Occupation and employment status during COVID-19
- Finances

Building Equal Foundations: Camden Council has a high proportion of Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups. They have published [a report to address the unequal impacts of Covid-19 on Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents](#) and ensure communities are protected from the immediate and long-term impacts of the pandemic. The report details the six focus areas the Council has examined to identify and better understand the issues Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities are facing during the pandemic. The areas are:

- Understanding the lived experience of Black, Asian and minority ethnic people
- Health inequalities present in these communities
- Those who are clinically vulnerable and known to Adult Social Care

- Children and young people

- Housing supply and overcrowding

- Employment and the labour market

A Mid-Life Employment Crisis: How COVID-19 Will Affect the Job Prospects of Older Workers:

[This new report](#) from Ageing Better and the Learning and Work Institute highlights the impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on older workers, with those now claiming unemployment benefits doubling since before the lockdown. The report sets out three steps that the government can take to support older workers, to prevent long-term unemployment in the wake of COVID-19:

- New back-to-work support programmes must not repeat the mistakes of the Work Programme

- A programme of traineeship opportunities available to workers under 25 should be accompanied by support for all adults to retrain, including the over-50s

- There is a need for further work to understand financial wellbeing among older workers

The Centre for Ageing Better states that people in their 50s and 60s must be part of the government's road to recovery. The Chief Executive, Anna Dixon, suggests [five ways in which the government can ensure those in their 50s and 60s are not forgotten in COVID-19 recovery plans](#):

- Preventing ill-health and promoting physical activity

- Supporting over 50s to remain in work

- Taking action to improve the poor condition of homes

- Helping people maintain a better work-life balance

- Encouraging people to continue to help out in their communities

Helping to shed light on this, Ipsos MORI published [a large-scale study](#), perhaps the first of its kind, on how lockdown has affected the lives of people in their 50s and 60s across England - and how it might change their futures.

Policies Concerning Services

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control have published guidance on infection prevention and control of COVID-19 in migrant and refugee reception and detention centres in the EU/EEA and the UK. The main objective of this guidance is to provide scientific advice on public health principles and considerations for infection and prevention control of COVID-19 in migrant and refugee reception and detention centres in the European Union and European Economic Area (EU/EEA) and the United Kingdom (UK). The target audience for this guidance includes national, regional and international policymakers, public health and healthcare planners, staff working in migrant/refugee reception and detention centres, health researchers, health professionals, and civil society organisations working with migrant populations.

Educational Resources

Podcast: COVID-19, Racism and the Roots of Health Inequality: This King's Fund podcast discusses how Covid-19 is repeating patterns of existing health inequalities. It addresses the factors driving the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the health of ethnic minority populations. Helen McKenna talks to Natalie Creary from Black Thrive and James Nazroo from the University of Manchester. You can listen to it here.

Research Funding

NHSG Endowment Trust: The Trustees are very keen on supporting applications for funding. They state that "the emphasis should be on social research and particularly the effects of COVID-19, people with long-term conditions, prevention, inequalities and projects which informed improvements in care and support". The grants are up to £12,000.

The Rainbow Logo — NHS or LGBTQ+?

Did you know that the seven stripe rainbow, which has recently been used as a symbol of hope and gratitude for key workers during the coronavirus crisis, differs from the six stripe Rainbow Pride flag, which was created by activist Gilbert Baker as a rallying point for a community facing violence and oppression? **Kirsty Conway** (Assistant Psychologist) writes on the problem with using rainbow flags to support the NHS in a blog for The Psychologist Journal. In the blog post, she outlines the hurt some LGBTQ + people have felt about the use of the rainbow symbol to support front-line workers. She highlights the need for sensitivity and writes that:

> *As psychologists, awareness of issues of diversity and equality is essential to our practice. Evidence suggests that LGBTQ+ people are more likely than non-LGBTQ+ people to experience mental health difficulties, and rates of self-harm and suicidal ideation are considerably higher among LGBTQ+ people: 20-25% compared to 2.4% in the general population. However, LGBTQ+ people face widespread discrimination in healthcare settings, and one in seven LGBTQ+ people avoid seeking healthcare for fear of discrimination from staff. To begin to address these issues, we must make active efforts to educate ourselves and become aware of and sensitive to issues facing people who are part of minority groups, so that we can offer safe therapeutic spaces to clients from these groups. While I cannot speak for all LGBTQ+ people, as a queer person I can offer some insight into the importance of the rainbow flag for our community.*

COVID-19 Library

Academic Reading

Social inequalities and collateral damages of the COVID-19 pandemic: when basic needs challenge mental health care. Cenat, J. et al. (2020). This article highlights concerns that arose about mental health care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of these measures solely target mental health symptoms (emotional and behavioural), rather than the overall well-being of individuals, families and communities. Typically aimed at high-income countries (HIC), these programmes often assume that basic needs are met, and operate under

the assumption that survival is not threatened. However, programmes that address social inequalities and the non-fulfilment of basic needs are urgently needed, both in HIC and in low and middle income countries (LMICs). Indeed, beyond the fear of the virus or the isolation of confinement, an increasing number of people go to bed hungry and worried about what their family will eat the next day. Others are preoccupied by their unpaid rent and the risk of being thrown out of their homes.

Inequalities in home learning and schools' provision of distance teaching during school closure of COVID-19 lockdown in the UK. Bayrakdar, S., Guveli, A. (2020). This report from the Institute for Social and Economic Research have published this report. The main thrust of the report is the inequalities brought about by school closures. Home and school environments are now intertwined, and most schools were caught unprepared. Since schools have a key role in creating equal opportunities, transferring schooling to families is likely to increase learning inequalities generated by family backgrounds. In this article, the authors examine the time pupils spend on learning at home and explore the differences across parental education, social class, ethnicity and single parenthood.

Caring by silence: how (un)documented Brazilian migrants enact silence as care practice for aging parents. Sampaio, D. (2020). This article argues that, while existing work on transnational aging and care has largely focused on the substance of transnational communication and what is being said, it is important to note what is being 'silenced' during transnational exchange. To better understand aging and intergenerational caregiving there is a need to pay careful attention to what is not being said during transnational contacts, suggesting that silence and 'communication voids' are often formulated and enacted as a care practice.

Light Reading

Emerging evidence on health inequalities and COVID-19: July 2020: This resource-filled blogpost by Cara Leavey, Isabel Abbs and Louise Marshall highlights:

- The unequal impact of COVID-19 in different parts of the country
- The unequal impact of COVID-19 on employment
- The unequal impact of COVID-19 on finances
- The unequal impact of COVID-19 on mental health

The authors state that, while the further lifting of lockdown has meant a return to many aspects of pre-pandemic life for many people across the UK, local lockdowns and increased caution nationally at the end of July serve as a reminder that the pandemic is far from over, and some areas and groups are being affected more than others. They point out that the impacts of COVID-19 will be long lasting – for some groups more than others. Throughout the crisis, health inequalities could widen without concerted government efforts to address their causes. Restarting the economy is now the government's priority. An inclusive recovery is needed that provides everyone with the opportunity of a healthy future.

Surviving in the present, thriving in the future? Gialama, M., McGilloway, S. (2020). In summer 2018, two health psychologists – one a practising psychologist, PhD student and native Greek, and the other a senior academic from Ireland – embarked on two separate but related journeys to the island of Lesvos in Greece,

to gain some experience of, and insights into, working with child refugees. Their experience raises important questions about the psychosocial needs of this vulnerable group within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. You can access the article here.

Ensuring equal opportunities: This blogpost is by Debbie Weekes-Bernard, whose remit is to ensure equal opportunities for people in London. However, her message has resonance for all localities, as she emphasises the need for data that reflects the real nature of our communities - and why she sees hope for change after COVID-19. Weekes-Bernard says that one obvious lesson of the pandemic is the value of relevant data: "Data has been incredibly important, where we can get it. But we need much more detailed, consistently and appropriately collected data". She anticipates a wave of research and initiatives after COVID-19, and hopes that these will be more community-led. "I think communities want to understand what's happened, so there might be a real willingness to be part of the process," she says, "but people need to feel they've got a proper say in it - and get something out of it. I know how communities, certainly in London, feel over-researched and never see the outcome."

The Editorial Team

We are a small team from the School of Nursing, Midwifery and Paramedic Practice at Robert Gordon University (RGU). Angela Kydd (Clinical Professor in Nursing RGU / NHSG) is the editor, Colin MacLean is the librarian and Rahul Oza provides technical support.

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