The Consortium on Practices of Wellbeing and Resilience in BAME families and communities

Children, Young People and their Families
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Authors

Professor Anna Gupta, Royal Holloway University of London

Professor Claudia Bernard, Goldsmiths University of London

Professor Monica Lakhanpaul, University College London

Dr Anita Sharma, Royal Holloway University of London

Dr Teresa Peres, Royal Holloway University of London

Dr Laura Schack, Royal Holloway, University of London

Executive summary

Co-POWeR – Children, Young People and Families

Project summary

This study explored the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and racial discrimination on the lives of children, young people and families of Black, Asian and minority ethnic background (BAME). The study is part of a larger ESRC/UKRI funded project *Co-POWeR - Consortium on Practices of Wellbeing and Resilience in Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Families and Communities*. The consortium began from the premise that two viruses were afflicting this part of the population – not only the COVID-19 pandemic but also racial discrimination. The pandemic exposed and amplified deep-rooted structural inequalities and racial disparities in British society and there was significant evidence early on in the pandemic that Black, Asian and minority ethnic people were being impacted adversely by the pandemic compared to the rest of the population.

The overall aim of this study was to examine the factors that impacted the health, well-being and resilience of Black and Asian children, young people and families during the pandemic, and the coping strategies and support people were able to draw upon to overcome challenges.

The objectives were to:

- Engage with Black and Asian children, young people and their families, as well as professionals/practitioners within statutory and community services who supported Black and Asian children/ young people, and families during the pandemic to gain a further insight into their experiences.

- Work in partnership with young people and parents to co-develop creative outputs and formulate strategies for building resilience and promoting the health and well-being of Black, Asian and minority ethnic children, young people, and families during and beyond the pandemic.

- Provide recommendations for policymakers and service providers that outline how to 'build back better' in a culturally responsive way that meets the needs of Black, Asian and minority ethnic families.

Methods

Starting from a Critical Race Theory perspective, the qualitative research design and interview schedules used the WARM (wellbeing and resilience measure) framework (Bacon and Mguni, 2010) and socioecological approach to connect micro-meso-macro social interactions. The research methodology was framed by a collaborative approach, seeking to work creatively and in partnership with different groups.

We worked throughout in partnership with a youth panel made up of 10 young people, aged 16-20, representing different racially minoritised groups. The panel were invited to provide advice and feedback on the research (for example interview questions) and creative outputs, such as the photobook, at various points during the project.

This qualitative study involved semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with children (12 years+), young people, parents and other family members, and professionals from community and statutory organisations. In total there were 140 participants, 57% (n 80) were focus group participants and 43% (n 60) were individual interview participants.

% Participant group (n)	% Sub-group (n)
47% Children and young people (66)	21% aged 12 to 15 (29) 26% aged 16 to 19 (37)
39% Parents (55)	Five of these were also grandparents
4% Professionals (19)	Representation from youth groups, schools, charities, non-governmental organisations, pressure groups, social workers, academia who have supported children, young people and families

We chose Black and Asian and Black/Asian dual heritage families and communities for our sample as they are two of the largest visibly racially minoritised groupings in the UK. The category Black encompasses people from the Caribbean and African diasporas. Asian refers to people originally from the Indian subcontinent (Indian, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka). We also included Black or Asian participants with dual heritage. Due to the recruitment of participants via community groups, we also had a small number participants from Arab and Roma communities. Approximately two thirds (n 88) preferred the pronoun 'she', with the remainder preferring 'he' (n 48) and one person preferring the pronoun 'they' (no data was collected from 3 participants). Our sample of participants were selected from several regions across England and Wales, including London, Yorkshire, the Midlands, Essex and south Wales.

Focus groups and interviews were conducted either online or in person. Illustrators from one of the other Co-POWeR work packages co-facilitated two focus group discussions in London, one with parents at a refugee network and one with young people at a youth centre, helping participants draw pictures while they talked about their experiences of the pandemic. Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed, with the data analysed using stages outlined in the thematic approach of Braun and Clark (2006). Anonymised transcripts were also shared with artists from Co-POWeR

work package 5 to produce creative outputs, including a documentary film and graphic narrative. We also worked with a photographer, Karthik Sharma, who used themes and quotes from the young people to create a photobook and a virtual photographic exhibition (**www.pahus.org/co-power**)

Findings

The findings highlight the multi-dimensional impact of the pandemic within the context of racism and intersecting inequalities and how these exacerbated the psychosocial adversity for Black and Asian children and their families. Children and young people spoke of the effects, many negative, but some positive on their emotional well-being, educational development and relationships with family, peers, and professionals. Many of their experiences were universal across all young people, but others highlighted how their race or ethnicity had an impact on the support received, and in turn they spoke of the strategies they utilised to cope with racism, bias and stereotyping. Young people also told us of the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement on racially minoritised young people and their friendships. Black Lives Matter gained much attention during the first lockdown and had considerable impact on the young people interviewed in our study.

The parents and other family members spoke of how they personally coped, how their children and families managed, their relationships with friends and wider family, the support services needed, and the type of support received. Many faced huge challenges linked to poverty and precarious incomes, systemic racism and cultural insensitivity, and restrictive immigration controls. Multiple bereavements here in the UK and abroad featured in many of the participants' lives. The professionals we spoke to were also from Black and Asian backgrounds, and many provided perspectives as both parents and workers. They highlighted the importance of intersectionality when deciding on policy and practice and provided insiders' perspectives on the need for nuanced understanding of cultural and religious beliefs and to move beyond Western Eurocentric ways of thinking and doing.

Five key themes that emerged from the analysis of the data were: Coping Strategies and Resilience; Young People's Support and Wellbeing; Parenting in a Pandemic; Social Support Networks; and Building Trust and Safe Spaces.

Coping Strategies and 'Resilience'

The narratives revealed the additional challenges and burdens that came about with the pandemic, further exacerbated by pre-existing racial and other structural inequalities, but also an array of coping strategies. These strategies were possible with wider support from families, friends and community groups. This 'cultural wealth' (Yosso, 2005) around many provided the much-needed safe and culturally sensitive support, often missing in wider systems and structures in society. These different ways of coping challenge perspecives of resilience that are rooted in a set of assumptions about individual agency placing the onus on individuals to adapt to their situation rather than placing emphasis on the role of structures and systems within society.

Young People, Support and Wellbeing

Young people told many stories of feeling disproportionately impacted by the pandemic which exacerbated vulnerabilities and negatively impacted their mental wellbeing. These included isolation and heightened anxiety about parents' employment and income, as well as dealing with bereavement and grief, separation from school and friends and conducting their lives online. For some living in cramped housing, no free school meals and lack of access to the internet and digital devices had an impact on their ability to stay engaged in education. Many expressed their concerns about inconsistencies in the policing of 'lockdown' rules, education and mental health support, within the context of being young and from Black or Asian backgrounds. The prominence of the Black Lives Matter movement and amplification of racial injustices during the first lockdown, encouraged many young participants to speak candidly about racial identity and belonging and their engagement in local, national and global activism aimed at tackling systemic racial discrimination.

Parenting in a Pandemic: Combating Structural and Societal Inequalities

This research has illustrated how the COVID-19 pandemic affected parenting on many different levels. Many of the issues families had to confront, such as housing conditions and low-paid, precarious jobs, are longstanding and rooted in systemic structural inequalities but were exacerbated during the pandemic. Many families subject to immigration controls were not able to access any financial support. Multi-generational homes could offer parents additional support, but also presented challenges of social distancing especially in overcrowded housing with home-working and home schooling. The parent participants, mainly mothers, spoke of experiences of racism and stereotyping when engaging with support services. Anxieties about their children's education were exacerbated by the digital divide and unfamiliarity with the education system. Unemployment and financial pressures led to tension in relationships on occasions resulting in domestic abuse. The findings highlight the critical importance of understanding the contexts and circumstances of families' lives and specifically, the ways in which multiple oppressions negatively impact experiences of parenting.

Executive summary

Social Networks and Community Support

Crucial support for children, young people and families came from within the community – extended family networks, community workers, youth groups, religious and community organisations, and local support services. These networks were a vital lifeline during the pandemic and in general provided empathetic, non-judgmental aid and guidance that was often lacking in the responses from health and social care services. Many families relied on practical help (for example food parcels and digital devices), and culturally appropriate advice and emotional support from community workers and religious organisations, mitigating the impact of the pandemic. Many of the participants were keen to highlight the assistance these groups provided despite being short on staff and resources. The findings demonstrated the importance of building community assets and strengths.

Building Trust and Safe Spaces

The need for safe spaces to support mental health and wellbeing was a consistent theme running through the young participants' accounts and was reinforced by the youth and

community workers. Many young people spoke of a deep mistrust of public services, including the police and children's social care, but also schools were not necessarily experienced as safe spaces. Lack of trust and fears of racist responses led to reluctance to engage with more formal support services. On the other hand, many young people described local youth services and sporting clubs as spaces of safety and belonging. A key message from this research is that creating environments where Black, Asian and minority ethnic children can feel valued and thrive will contribute to improving their mental health beyond the pandemic.

Recommendations for Policymakers and Service Providers

The legacy of the pandemic on the emotional, educational, and physical well-being of many Black, Asian and minority ethnic children continues as does the on-going impact of deeply entrenched structural inequalities. We make the following recommendations arising from the research for policy makers and service providers to address harm and promote resilience and well-being for children, young people and families:

a. Children's services providers must adopt an intersectional approach for understanding and addressing how their policies and practices impact Black, Asian and minority ethnic children, young people, families and communities adversely.

b. National and local government must ensure long-term and sustained investment in place-based community services, that offer early help, culturally appropriate support tailored to meet the needs of local Black, Asian and minority ethnic population groups.

c. Youth services should be co-produced with young people, and include provision of safe spaces and community-based youth and mental health workers accessible to local Black, Asian and minority ethnic children and young people.

d. Children and youth service providers should recognise the importance of and support grassroots level 'insider' workers with shared knowledge and lived experiences of the community that they serve.

e. The police, as a key statutory safeguarding partner, should find innovative ways to actively engage with Black, Asian and minority ethnic children, young people and families to understand and address issues of racism for building trust in those communities.

f. Children's social care, education and health services must engage with Black, Asian and minority ethnic children, young people and families to address racial discrimination and lack of trust experienced by many who use their services.
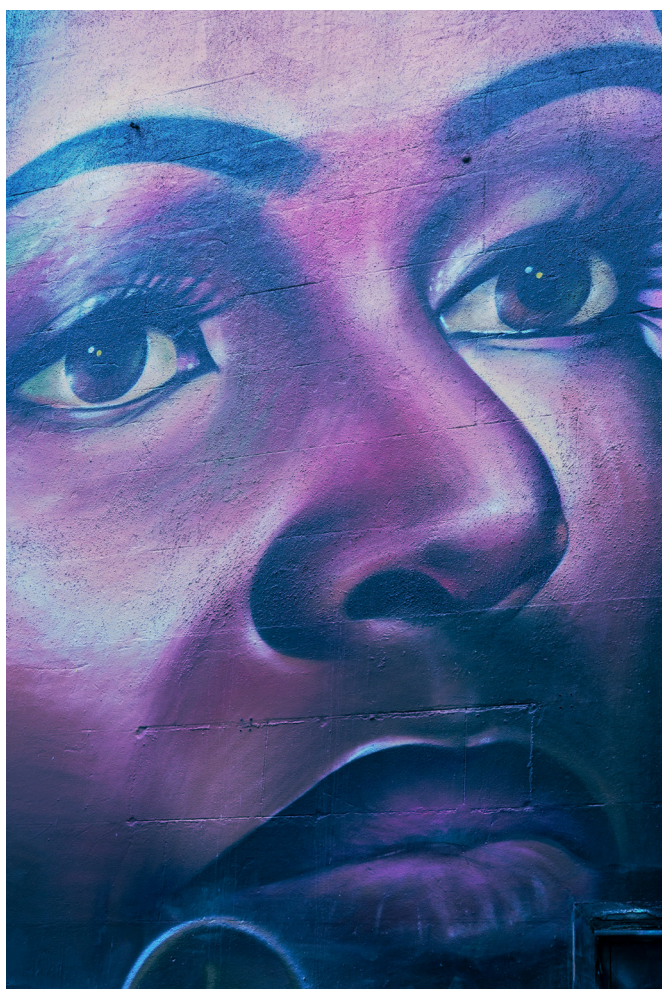
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Acknowledgements

Terminology

We sometimes use the acronym **BAME** to refer to people of Black, Asian and minority ethnic origin. We recognise that this term is not the preferred option of many, but it was the term used in the funding call and project proposal to UKRI/ESRC.

All the photographs were taken by Kartik Sharma (kartik@pahus.org).
The Photobook and virtual exhibition can be accessed at: **co-power.leeds.ac.uk/outputs/**