

Migrant Family Support - Supplementary Evidence (CPF0001)

Summary

The socio-economic effects of the Coronavirus pandemic on families have intersected their race, emotional wellbeing, capacity for bereavement, sense of national belonging and employment. The pandemic has suspended time and shifted productivity mindsets, hopefully for the better, amongst migrant communities who prioritise economic survival and civil presentability, while they still depend on institutional approval from the Home Office and wider British society. Categories of migrants are evolving and change within households so it can be difficult to present research on how those between visa-renewals or with long standing leave to remain have been personally affected by the pandemic. Hopefully, insights from this committee session can change that. The availability of mental health resources, digital devices and services, community response teams and shelters for the homeless and those escaping domestic abuse will alleviate the pressures built up during lockdown among families. Removing the barriers to accessing meals, banking support, discretionary housing payment, travel, counselling, healthcare, shelters and technology prevents families from falling apart.

Full Discussion

Following the UK's public health response of social distancing and national lockdown restrictions, many migrant families have been presented with unique challenges and disruption to their normal day-to-day life.

The coronavirus pandemic has had uneven distributional effects on the population, not just in infection rates, but in social, emotional and economic impact. The emotional and behavioural health effects and stress reactions across migrant families are context dependant, just as how the financial impacts across households have been unpredictable. For example, some families have seen large falls in household spending and 'have sizably increased their net lending position over the last year'(ONS,2021), but falls in household spending are more likely to be due to gross disposable incomes being sizably reduced.

The broad nature of these effects has been intersectional; estimates of the socio-economic effects taking place in other countries can benefit our understanding of what is happening in our own, through revised statistical data analysis and initial insights from this committee session. We know now that the US estimates that 40,000 children have lost a parent due to COVID-19: disproportionately black children. Health disparities in the UK too have been shown to underline socio-economic disparities in quality of life by the Office of National Statistics' report on Coronavirus related deaths by ethnic group, England and Wales: 2 March 2020 to April 2020.

Even as lockdown measures are enforced with regional similarity, and though migrant communities face similar narratives, there are many different policy-relevant subgroups of migrants with different lived experience such as: those with leave to remain, asylum seekers, refugees, labour migrants, undocumented

migrants and those with indefinite leave to remain. Families can contain children or adults who fall amongst any of these categories.

For example, the lockdown was at first assumed to provide enforced leisure benefits, time to find oneself and hone comfort practices, but, for example, it may not have granted those in a single-parent household, who need to renew their visa-applications for their two young children and themselves, the same permission to feel rested. Especially, since a recent ONS study found that 'In the early part of the pandemic (April, Wave 1 2020) homeworkers tended to keep hours close to typical office hours. However, by September (Wave 2 2020), homeworking schedules had shifted later, and homeworkers were more likely to work in the evenings compared with those who worked away from home' (ONS,2021).

In migrant families, regardless of the period of arrival, the reason for settlement varies around the same point of economic security, employability and training. Therefore, productivity practices validate existing in this country, they frame the family's actions, familial mindsets and inter-generational purposes of migrant families in the UK. Productivity failures and accomplishments are hinged on phrases like: "I brought you here to get good grades." "We came here to work, let's make the best of what we can do." "Your grandparents did not come here to mess around." "I came to this country with nothing to give my children everything." "We can't afford to behave in particular ways."

These subtle regulations on how migrant families display their feelings and emotions are hinged on productivity, and what a migrant can contribute financially by settling in the UK. This gives families rite of passage to the environment around them, the culture of the UK and its emotional liberties. How productive they are entitles them to self-expression, self-realisation until ultimately working more equals deserving more emotional recognition and respect. Not just in workplaces, or in public but in home dynamics as well. Similarly, this 'work more deserve more' mindset is seen amongst migrants from the sub-groups that do not have recourse to public funds; those who are not sure of their eligibility become too scared to use NHS services or even participate in the national Census.

'Access to GP services remains available and free to everyone regardless of immigration status, and lack of proof of address or ID should not prevent someone from registering with the GP.' (Yule, 2021) Yet, 'many undocumented immigrants are "too afraid" to access healthcare and the message has been very clearly from the government that access to health care is something that leads to information being passed about them to the immigration authorities.' (Valdez-Symonds, Amnesty UK, BBC, 2021)

This 'work more deserve more' mindset puts the representational value of essential goods, objects, appliances, housing, schooling, amenities *above* how good that object-its actual value- is, because of how hard that migrant family has worked to achieve or consume it. Gratitude, satisfaction, 'deserving to be here' is complex that all families experience, but for migrant families it has more emotional consequences when settling in this country, no matter the period of arrival as the 2018 Windrush scandal proved, when deportation threats were

made to migrants who had been established in the UK since before 1973(JCWI,2020).

This is important to note because the 'work more deserve more' mindset or 'earn-first-deserve-later' frame of mind impacts and regulates the emotional dynamics of migrant families during the coronavirus pandemic and how they cope in a period of history that has extended out of just being a discrete interruption and shifted from a global event to a dis-embedded childhoods and personal dis-articulation.

In a time where families across the UK, regardless of demographic, have had to halt productivity or loose work or suspend milestone opportunities the 'work more deserve more' mindset has left migrant families vulnerable when considering their place in the UK alongside the collective uncertainty and grief of coronavirus related deaths and social unrest. Families have had to consider new challenges such as homelessness, unemployment, risks that come from pay-day-loans or direct lenders, insufficient funds for visa renewal deadlines, school milestones being postponed alongside this fatal disease. Social consciousness and emotional wellbeing are given a backseat to survival just at a time where vulnerable families -- who frame their economic worth on surviving fitting in and coding as British -- need it the most.

Another important context that intersects the migrant family experience when considering what it takes to deserve to be here is institutional racism, micro-aggressions and racial profiling. The Black Lives Matter anti-racism protests that took place in more than 260 towns and cities in the UK in June and July (Mohdin and Campbell, Guardian, 2020) following the death of George Floyd and an examination of Britain's own racism towards ethnic minorities and migrants. Additionally, COVID-19 has contributed to increased racism and xenophobia against those from an Asian, Chinese, South-East Asian background.

Migrants often do their best to avoid falling into stereotypes of emotional displays that are associated with being ungrateful or un-civil to show that they can adapt or in the words of the recent Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, 'transform themselves into a re-modelled African/Britain' (Sewell et al, 2021). To be stereotypically emotional as a migrant- loud, confused, passionate- risks being misunderstood, dismissed or reduced to that display of emotion both in wider society and within migrant homes that try hardest to assimilate to settled UK life. Certain emotions are out of reach or can only be accessed once a family is settled properly because status or earnings have to be established first. In this sense presentability and respectability is hard to integrate into emotional wellbeing in migrant families. It's hard to reconcile emotional wellbeing values with the value of stable employment and making sure members of the family have essential goods, food, heat, electricity etc. This makes it harder to discuss and have language for the trauma of the past year, or demanding that emotions take precedent before conquering employability. For children and adolescents in migrant family's peer interconnectedness may bring understanding of emotional dimensions when parents or older relatives are more focused on being financial survival during the pandemic.

Just as fear of the virus and passing it on to others, especially vulnerable people, motivated compliance with the COVID-19 guidelines, fear of being too emotional or honest about grief, uncertainty, disappointment and anxiety motivates children and adults in migrant households to suffer in silence. Children from households with separated parents or nuclear families' children and adolescents serve as "emotional barometers" for their family and often reflect the level of stress of parents and caregivers. From infancy through adolescence, children will pick up on cues (both overt and implicit) displayed by caregivers and other family members (AAP, 2021).

We predict the long-term and immediate consequences of the coronavirus pandemic include:

- Social and emotional development being stunted for children and adolescents due to lack of real-world social contact.
- Families may now face homelessness, eviction or cannot afford to pay for bill services, or may forfeit paying broadband, Wi-Fi, telephone, mobile phone or entertainment package bills.
- Closed access to parenting support may have forced some parents into an ultimatum of choosing between child welfare or employment, while working at home or on the frontline.
- Sleep disruption, changes in sleep patterns, overlap of scheduled sleep time and work time may get blurred especially in households with young children, or those employed in informal sectors, night-shift work.
- A regress in skills taught in schools.
- Children may become more irritable, withdrawn, fearful and overtly anxious or aggressive in the context of school, grade- outcomes or when they try to stay focussed. It is harder balance priority working and disinterest when in home environments.
- Adults or adolescents in distress, boredom, fear, feeling loss, and even guilt may turn to substance use. In fact, some categories of offence in England and Wales saw an increase. There was a 32% rise in possession of drugs offences recorded in April to June 2020 compared with the same three months of 2019 and a 24% rise in trafficking of drugs (Office for National Statistics, 2021).
- psycho-somatic conditions of burn out and over responsibility may increase, externalised as stomach pain, change in appetite, headaches, confusion, nauseousness, tiredness and lethargy.
- The rates of suicide ideation and attempts increasing. It was reported by Eva Bartlett, RT.com, on the 1st of April this year that "500,000 children under 18 in England, with no previous problems, will need mental health care due to the devastating economic, health and family pressures caused by the ongoing coronavirus crisis. This has manifested itself in children as young as five reporting self-harm and suicidal thoughts to counsellors and a tripling in the number of eating disorders reported by adolescents." And a citation from a UK doctor's diary, revealed: "Children in mental health crisis used to be brought to A&E about twice a week. Since the summer it's been more like once or twice a day. Some as young as 10 have cut themselves, taken overdoses, or tried to asphyxiate themselves." The rise

in children committing suicide, having suicidal thoughts and self-harming is happening around the world. (Eva Bartlett, 2021)

- A personal sense of loss, disarticulation and grief when milestone transitions or traditions have been interrupted or upended.
- There may be a worry that once children or adolescents are out of lockdown home boundaries they may go 'off the walls.
- Eviction or not being able to make their rent payments. This is particularly more of a risk for migrant families because those still await leave to remain confirmation or with visas that do not allow them recourse to public funds cannot apply for discretionary housing payment (DHP) to help pay rent because they must already be receiving a house benefit or Universal Credit to qualify.
- Increased incidences of intimate partner violence and domestic abuse.
- Formal or informal services can no longer be accessed such as gyms, community game centres or hairdressers and hair management particularly, in the black migrant has just as much to do with migrants navigating presentability politics and assimilation than just individual style.
- Overcrowded housing may have made it difficult for teenagers to decompress on their own or find private time, especially when facing bereavement. Guilt of infecting family members, when an individual is employed as a key worker/ in a people-facing role that has higher risk of contracting coronavirus, but not being able to afford to isolate or maintain hygiene in the home adequately. This is all the truer for asylum seekers or an undocumented migrant who can't afford to stay at home 'as you have to survive because you are not entitled to Universal Credit or to be furloughed from your job. If you are displaying symptoms of Covid, you cannot isolate as you have to work to provide for basic essential needs.'(Yule,2021)
- Indirect deaths from at home accidents from appliances or stairs or furniture.
- Lack of access to free school meals or regular balanced diets, because of the cost of food or time needed to prepare food, can lead to malnutrition. It was reported that more than 300,000 children in England became eligible for free school meals since the first lockdown (DoE, 2021).

We suggest that the solution, in the coming years, for reducing the effects the coronavirus pandemic has had on families should include financial support and social reinforcement.

When families are not coping a de-escalation task force and urgent response team separate to the police should be deployed to provide care in communities. Over policing of lower-income migrant communities and ethnic minorities should be reduced, since the image of police for migrants as enforcers of crime, punishment and deportation is rooted in people's minds.

Built environments should encourage and incorporate social gatherings more, as they proved to be so beneficial for social distancing engagements during the pandemic. Green and outdoor spaces should be well maintained.

There should be increased funding in libraries and public internet services, since lockdown restrictions proved that network access is an essential service to all families to pay bills, to work from home, to access important news media or even to contact medical professionals. There should be fewer barriers to providing Wi-Fi, internet, printing and amenity services in the same way that water fountains are available, digital electronic services should not be exclusive. Just as how HSBC launched it's No Fixed Address service to provide financial inclusion to the nation's homeless, working alongside homelessness charities Shelter and Crisis and local councils. So far 700 accounts have been opened at participating branches. (Emma Lunn,2021)

The number of shelters for partner escaping domestic violence should increase. In 2020 the free 'Rail to Refuge' scheme- a joint initiative involving rail operators and the charity Women's Aid, proved vital in allowing women, men and children to travel to refuge services without fear of the cost. This scheme removed financial barriers to freedom and safety for more than 600 adults and 200 children, according to the Rail Delivery Group (June Kelly BBC,2020).

State, Faith, Free, Private schools, academies, city technology colleges and state boarding schools should have at least one onsite fully trained mental health professional to provide immediate crisis care and counselling to students. This as opposed to chaplaincy would help build practical emotional wellbeing therapy practices for students.

Laws criminalizing homelessness need to be revised, since income and financial stability post-pandemic are uncertain for families across the UK.

Finally, the method of collecting data from social studies and the socio-economic categories of research should be taken into consideration to reflect the unique sub-groups of migrants in the UK. How we classify illegal/undocumented migrants should be considered because collective grouping- while it highlights wide structural outcomes, at the same time highly specific groups may be framed to pit certain types of migrants against each other when comparing data outcomes. Just as ethnicity is multidimensional migrant communities are made up of very different identities and lived experiences trying to settle in a better place. 'It is possible to disaggregate data using nationally defined variables, including, for example, particular legal statuses and categories of migrants. This type of disaggregation can be the most responsive to a country's needs and most directly links back to national migration policy. However, policymakers may also be interested in understanding more about families of migrants, in which case migratory status of parent(s)/selected family member(s) of migrants can be captured (Leave No Migrant Behind, IOM UN Migration, 2021)

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