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‘British Families in Lockdown’ is a qualitative study led by Leeds Trinity University which has investigated the day-to-day experiences of British families during the first seven weeks of lockdown. Fifty-six families from a diverse set of socio-economic backgrounds, geographies, religions and cultures participated in telephone or video calling semi-structured interviews and they shared their detailed, personal stories and experiences of employment, children’s schooling, health, well-being, family life, leisure time and technology use during the first phase of lockdown.

Outside of this study, reported Covid-19 evidence is overwhelmingly quantitative based, scientific, clinical, anecdotal or journalistic, as such, these qualitative insights will help build a more rounded picture of British family experiences. The study was quick to respond to the pandemic and is one of the few qualitative studies collecting data from the UK population during the initial stage of lockdown. Our initial findings demonstrate some of the complex ways in which Covid-19 has impacted equalities debates related to ethnicity, disabilities and gender. Our data supports quantitative reports to some extent but there is contrasting evidence and wider issues to also consider.

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

- BAME parents often faced more challenges whilst home schooling due to language difficulties and would have benefitted from more support.
- Several British-East-Asian parents were concerned about anti-Asian and anti-ethnic hate crimes and discrimination.
- Some British-East-Asian parents and children would avoid the use of public transport and going to certain places to avoid the possibility of any Coronavirus related confrontations or comments from others.
- Some BAME parents perceived there to be culturally distinct experiences and attitudes to viral threats which affected the way that some cultural groups responded to Covid-19 risks and lockdown.
- Some British-Chinese parents felt that media reporting of Covid-19 and its association with China could create or entrench existing stereotypes and prejudice towards the Chinese community.
- Many BAME parents were critical of the government’s response to Covid-19, especially if they had experienced the SARS epidemic elsewhere.
- Public attitudes towards face masks were said to be changing over the course of lockdown and British-Chinese parents reported less fears about their use in public.

CORONAVIRUS and BAME PEOPLE

In terms of the participants’ ethnic identities we asked how they chose to identify at the start of the interviews. Some parents were able to identify themselves through their race or through their nationality, but ethnicity seemed (for some) to be a confusing term. We were

happy for the participants to identify themselves however they wished. Around 60% of our sample identified as White-British, with approximately 40% being categorised as BAME. We deliberately recruited a significant number of participants who may identify as having East-Asian ethnic connections. Given reports that Covid-19 has fuelled Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide (Human Rights Watch, 2020), including a 21% increase in anti-Asian hate crime in the UK (Grierson, 2020), the inclusion of British-East-Asian parents specifically, allowed our study to explore any racial tensions, difficulties or challenges in relation to the coronavirus.

When the following data is related to the experiences of British-Chinese or those with British-East-Asian ethnicity, we have identified it as such. When we use the term BAME, this data also includes accounts from other BAME participants including Black-British and British-Pakistani parents.

- Several BAME parents had limited or no English language skills which impacted on their ability to home school children and their understanding of tasks being sent home from schools and early years settings. In such situations, older siblings or other family relatives were often asked to assist.
- Some BAME parents who were educated outside of the UK were unfamiliar with the National Curriculum or the Early Years Foundation Stage which led to low levels of confidence when attempting home schooling.
- Some BAME parents were finding home schooling difficult and would benefit from further support from school or early years settings, especially if children were identified as having additional needs.
- For several British-East-Asian parents, they were familiar with public health guidance relating to Covid-19 due to direct experience with the SARS epidemic. These families felt prepared for the lockdown and were accepting of the social restrictions imposed.
- For parents who had limited or no English language skills, government guidance with regards to Covid-19 and the lockdown was not clear or well understood. Advice was often sought from friends and families instead.
- Many BAME parents were critical of the government's response to Covid-19, especially if they had experienced the SARS epidemic or when comparing the UK's response to other Asian nations.
- One British-Pakistani participant felt that there were religious and cultural reasons why BAME rates of infection were higher in their community.
- Some BAME parents perceived there to be culturally distinct experiences and attitudes to viral threats which affected the way that some cultural groups responded to Covid-19 risks and lockdown.
- Some BAME parents felt that other countries were responding better to the threat of Coronavirus compared to the UK.
- Some parents who had international family connections, thought that people in other countries were safer than people in the UK due to the UK's slow government responses.
- Several BAME parents were concerned about anti-Asian and anti-ethnic hate crimes and attitudes as seen in the media and felt unsafe when they were outside of the home. For a small number of parents, they expressed specific concerns about the safety of their children.

- Some British-East-Asian parents and children would avoid the use of public transport and going to certain places to avoid the possibility of any coronavirus related confrontation or attacks from others.
- A number of British-East-Asian parents and children had experienced anti-Asian attitudes and hostility within educational settings and public spaces.
- Other British-East-Asian parents had not experienced any negative behaviours towards them as a result of the coronavirus threat. However most had heard of someone who had.
- Responses to anti-Asian attitudes and suspicion varied, some families would ignore remarks when made, others would take a more direct approach and challenge comments.
- Some British-Chinese parents felt that media reporting of Covid-19 and its association with China could create or entrench existing stereotypes and discriminatory views in the UK (e.g. perceived eating habits, assumed to be Covid-19 carriers based on ethnicity).
- British-Chinese families felt that negative remarks and assumptions about Covid-19 and its association to all people of Chinese origin were either unfounded or unfair.
- Those who identified as British-Chinese mostly separated themselves from the attitudes and behaviours of the Chinese government.
- British-Chinese parents were critical of the wet markets in China and perceived them to be unhygienic.
- Some British-East-Asian parents with public facing work roles, were concerned that negative perceptions of Chinese people as a result of the Coronavirus, could have actual or possible implications for them at work.
- Some parents felt that the UK government could be more supportive of BAME families in terms of addressing anti-Asian hate crimes and attitudes.
- Some BAME families did not wear face masks to avoid drawing attention to themselves, despite wanting to use them for protection.
- Many BAME parents who wore face masks were treated with suspicion and intolerance before the lockdown began. One primary school did not permit the wearing of face masks when requested by one British-Chinese parent before the school closures began.
- Public attitudes towards face masks were said to be changing over the course of lockdown and British-Chinese parents reported less fears about their use in public and encouraged their children to use them as a result.
- For several BAME parents, children's movements and exercise regimes tended to be restricted to the home environment and private garden as opposed to public spaces.
- BAME parents seemed particularly worried about the risk of a second spike as social restrictions are eased.

CONCLUSIONS

BAME parents and families were sometimes having different experiences to non BAME parents, particularly in terms of actual and perceived racial tensions resulting from the reported international origins of coronavirus. There were also concerns for BAME parents

over home-schooling when English was not their first language. British-East-Asian parents with international experiences of epidemics felt that the UK government was slow to respond to the threat and took additional precautions themselves and other countries were perceived as being safer than the UK.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Some BAME parents with language difficulties would benefit from further support from school or early years settings, especially if children were identified as having additional needs.
- If BAME families are avoiding public transport out of fear of confrontation, there needs to be a serious review of societal values and the existence of prejudice in society and how this can be addressed.
- The possibility that mothers have been more involved in childcare than fathers need further research. The impact of differential statutory maternity/paternity leave periods on gendered childcare roles and perceptions requires further investigation.
- Encouraging equality between parental roles in terms of childcare should possibly be consistent from the birth of the child in order to avoid later gender discrepancies.
- It is of concern that BAME parents often held perceptions that their friends and families in other countries and nations were safer and less at risk than people in the UK.
- Potentially, lessons from the East-Asian experiences of SARS and other international experiences of epidemics should play a more prominent role in UK responses and in public information announcements.

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