Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Structural Vulnerabilities, Resilience and Migrant Communities-led responses to COVID-19 in West Yorkshire

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Aims

- To understand migrant communities' responses to COVID-19.
- To understand their coping and [community] support mechanisms during the pandemic.
- To highlight community resilience, agency, and resourcefulness in the light of the pandemic and lack of mainstream support. The Racial Justice Network reports that it was inspired to do this research by what it saw in the way migrant communities responded

to the pandemic.

The research was commissioned by the Racial Justice Network, an anti-racism charity based in West Yorkshire, and funded by Queen Mary University London's collaboration and strategic impact fund.

Methodology

This was qualitative research - semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 community advocates based in West Yorkshire, mainly in Leeds, Wakefield, Bradford, and Halifax. Being members of migrant communities, participants held insider-status within their respective communities. During the pandemic, participants have been active in supporting individuals and families in their communities. Before the interviews, they also took part in a series of community advocates meetings as part of the Racial Justice Network's COVID-19 campaign. This helped to build trust and relationships prior to the research.

Key issues

- **Laws, legislation, and policies entanglements:** the research found that the pandemic exacerbated and brought to the fore existing socio-economic, health and digital inequalities partly caused by hostile environment policies, Brexit, the New Immigration Plan, the Police, Crime and Sentencing Bill and the Domestic Abuse Bill. The researchers identified a lack of trust in authorities from migrant communities, especially from people subject surveillance and immigration control.
- **The effects of colonial legacies during the pandemic:** the authors found that asylum seekers were viewed by the state as bearers of disease and a threat to the 'public', and new arrivals in particular were being relegated from the public eye. Asylum seekers who arrived between 2020-2021 were transferred to unsafe, overcrowded, and disused military barracks in remote parts of the UK. The unsafe and unsanitary conditions increased their

level of exposure to COVID-19.

- **Isolation and mental health problems, including retraumatisation:** the research found that with the physical closure of many refugee organisations, refugees and asylum seekers lost crucial meeting and support spaces. Under lockdown restrictions, they suffered from loneliness, isolation and retraumatisation. Digital inequality also had an adverse impact on refugee parents' mental health as they were unable to support their children with home-schooling. Community advocates also suffered from burnout and a sense of responsibility in supporting their communities.
- **Lack of engagement and due care from authorities and government institutions:** the authors reported that local authorities were too slow to adapt to and meet the complex needs of migrant communities during the pandemic. Communities were not represented in decision-making spaces. It was highlighted that the impact of the pandemic on migrant children and youth was not adequately addressed.
- **Resisting and Surviving:** the researchers found that despite the structural constraints and vulnerabilities identified, migrant communities and groups generated innovative strategies to support each other during the pandemic. For example community members and advocates provided summary translation of COVID-19 related messages, information, and practical support to fellow migrants.

Recommendations

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Web Link
https://racialjusticenetwork.co.uk/2021/07/22/migrant-communities-led-responses...
Migrant Group
Asylum seekers
Refugees
Topic
Access to healthcare
Community and society
Health
Integration
Place
West Yorkshire
Year
2021
Resource Type
Report

Source URL: *https://www.migrationyorkshire.org.uk/research-entry/between-rock-and-hard-place-structural-vulnerabilities-resilience-and-migrant*