



Protecting wellbeing and resilience in BAME families and communities during a public health emergency

Note No. 5
15 June 2022

Policy Leeds
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leeds.ac.uk/policy-leeds

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Ignoring race, gender and class when tackling a pandemic can undermine not only wellbeing across Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic families and communities (BAME FC) but also their levels of trust in government. A framework to protect wellbeing and resilience in BAME FC during public health emergencies was developed by Co-POWeR to ensure that laws and guidance adopted are culturally competent.

The inequities of the COVID-19 pandemic were clear by April 2020 when data showed that despite being just 3.5% of the population in England, Black people comprised 5.8% of those who died from the virus; whereas White people, comprising 85.3% of the population, were 73.6% of those who died. The disproportionate impact continued with, for example, over-policing: 32% of stop and search in the year ending March 2021 were of BAME males aged 15-34, despite them being just 2.6% of the population.

The emergency measures introduced to govern the pandemic worked together to create a damaging cycle affecting BAME FC of all ages. Key-workers – often stopped by police on their way to provide essential services – could not furlough or work from home to avoid infection, nor support their children in home-schooling. Children in high-occupancy homes lacked adequate space and/or equipment to learn; such homes also lacked leisure space for key workers to restore themselves after extended hours at work.

Over-policing instilled fear across the generations and deterred BAME people – including the mobile elderly - from leaving crowded homes for legitimate exercise, and those that did faced the risk of receiving a Fixed Penalty Notice and a criminal record.

These insights arose from research by Co-POWeR into the synergistic effects of emergency measures on policing, child welfare, caring, physical activity and nutrition. Using community engagement, a survey with 1000 participants and interviews, focus groups, participatory workshops and community testimony days with over 400 people in total, we explored the combined impact of COVID-19 and discrimination on wellbeing and resilience across BAME FC in the UK. This policy note crystallises our findings into a framework of recommendations relating to **arts and media communications, systems and structures, community and individual well-being and resilience**. We promote long term actions rather than short term reactions.

Framework for wellbeing and resilience in BAME FC

Arts and media communications

- **Action:** Provide opportunities for BAME FC to fully participate in the creative arts as producers and consumers by developing creative arts programmes, schemes and facilities that are accessible and inclusive to all ethnic groups and communities.
- **Who:** Department of Health and Social Care, Local Councils and all Arts Councils.
- **Why:** The provision and access to creative arts are essential for the health – physical, mental and social wellbeing and resilience – of all communities. This action will ensure that the arts are used to empower BAME FC through positive narratives, improve representations and visibility. As put by a participant: “...we’ve transformed the image of the gym... we post from training to sparing to us being out running, to some of the fun things we do... So if someone was looking in from the outside, they will see a different image of the gym, a more welcoming image.” Such positive narratives engage and destigmatise vulnerable youth, and also promote the vivacity and vitality of civil society.

Systems and structures

- **Action:** To enhance trust in public authorities, the police should not have any role in processes for enforcement or monitoring of compliance with public health law and guidance; these processes should be developed in consultation with BAME FC, and translated into relevant community languages.
- **Who:** Ministry of Justice and public health authorities.
- **Why:** Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, trust in official health guidance and the UK government has dropped, with those agreeing they have low trust in Official Health Guidance going from 11% to 32%, and those agreeing they have low trust in the UK government going from 23% to 38%. Given existing disproportionate policing of people from BAME FC, strengthening police powers reduces trust in all public authorities and undermines the overall effectiveness of laws introduced to deal with public health crises like the pandemic. When combined with public health measures, police powers are counterproductive and inappropriate to the task.

Community wellbeing and resilience

- **Action 1:** Fund culturally relevant programmes on physical activity and nutrition through community groups and services.
- **Who:** Office of Health Improvement and Disparities.
- **Why:** Voluntary community groups that support physical activity, healthy eating and mental wellbeing were hit drastically by the pandemic by lack of resources. “*I’m involved with this lunch club...that helps me get out, prevent loneliness and we learn a lot about healthy eating... but the pandemic has sort of affected it*”. Government should work with existing BAME community groups, building on their infrastructure of trust and access to those in need of support.
- **Action 2:** Long-term investment in local youth services, specific to the needs of local communities, are required to provide non-judgemental safe spaces, taking into account racial and other structural inequalities faced by BAME families.
- **Who:** Jointly the Department of Health, the Department of Education, and Local Government.
- **Why:** BAME communities anticipate hostility when accessing services. A Bangladeshi, Muslim father in Bradford told us “we are not asking to have it special, but because we live in this society... they [the government] should look at us and say ‘look, they have a need, that needs to be fulfilled as well’...adapt services”. His wife added “one size doesn’t fit all... you should look at [the] individual community and their needs”.

Individual wellbeing and resilience

- **Action:** Carer’s allowance to be increased for unpaid carers so they can sustainably look after older people and themselves.
- **Who:** Department for Health and Social Care, Department of Work and Pensions.
- **Why:** Recognising care as work, contributing to the UK economy, is critical. One carer said: “we are out there looking after these old people, the vulnerable people... the job we’re doing is a lot.” Equality, diversity and inclusion should be improved to stop racialised and gendered discrimination of paid and unpaid support care workers: as one participant questioned “are you fighting the virus or are you fighting racism? You don’t know which one to fight”.

Further information

The Consortium on Practices of Wellbeing and Resilience in BAME Families and Communities (Co-POWER) is an 18-month ESRC-funded research consortium, formed by BAME professors at the Universities of Leeds, Sussex, Goldsmiths, UEL, Southampton, South Wales, Royal Holloway, UCL and Warwick. co-power.leeds.ac.uk

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We acknowledge the wide debate on the use of the acronym BAME.