



Embedding attention to ethnicity and migration within public health

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About the research

This project responded to past criticisms that public health research and practice in England fails to adequately consider ethnic diversity, disadvantage and discrimination. Despite a long history of migration, well-established ethnic minority populations and growing ethnic diversity, health inequalities work has predominantly focused on socioeconomic deprivation.

This 14 month project that took place 2017-18 took stock of current approaches to understanding and addressing the health needs of migrant and ethnic minority people within local and national public health arenas.

Our objectives were to describe:

- data availability and routes to improvement;
- examples of promising practice;
- capacity development needs across research and evaluation;
- and the health issues identified among migrant and ethnic minority populations.

We undertook a series of desk-based reviews. We looked carefully at Joint Strategic Needs Assessments for 32 Local Authorities (>150 documents). We also examined national policy documents and mapped quantitative data sources.

Consultation work included interviews and workshops with public health practitioners and researchers, and a public engagement group. These activities involved over 100 people and provided additional perspectives on current practice and areas for improvement.

"I found attending these workshops invaluable as they gave me an opportunity to really listen to others - to hear about their work and experiences and a chance to reflect on my own practice in this area. It was also useful to share our experiences in Doncaster and to respond to thoughtful questions. Space to reflect, think and listen is a really important part of practice and this project helped our thinking within the Doncaster public health team."

Susan Hampshaw,

Head of Service (Public Health Delivery) – Doncaster Council

Policy implications

- Rather than being a specialist concern, attending to ethnic diversity and migration must be part-and-parcel of understanding and meeting the health needs of local populations.
- Promising local practice in needs assessment and strategic planning should be shared and bench-marking should be used to encourage wider adoption.
- The growing attention to new migrant groups is welcome but should be integrated within a broader ethnic diversity and anti-racism agenda.
- Efforts are needed to increase the volume of public health research that addresses ethnicity and migration. Steps must be taken to diversify the public health research workforce.
- Knowledge generation systems must be reconfigured to transfer resource and influence to ethnic minority members of the public.
- Though completed prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, recent events that highlight persistent ethnic inequality should provide additional impetus to address the shortcomings identified by this study.



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Key findings

Local public health practice:

- Most Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) paid some attention to ethnicity and migration, but understanding and analysis were limited. Examples of promising practice were found, but these tended to be ‘special’ pieces of work.
- Few ‘headline’ JSNA documents included clear messages regarding health needs of these groups. Recommendations for action were rare.
- Growing concern with new migrant groups and ‘asylum seekers’ was evident.
- There was little explicit attention to monitoring or tackling racism and its impacts on health.
- Comparing to a 2010 assessment, there was little evidence of improvement in data availability, analysis or strategic planning to improve the health of these groups (see Figure 1 below)

National research arena:

- A review of major funding streams indicated little research focused on ethnicity or migration as key social determinants of health.
- Stakeholders identified weak national leadership, limited investment in datasets, and White-dominated academia as key concerns.

Further information

[Salway S, Holman D, Lee C, McGowan V, Ben-Shlomo Y, Saxena S et al. Transforming the health system for the UK’s multiethnic population *BMJ* 2020; 368 :m268 doi:10.1136/bmj.m268](#)

For further information please see the SPHR website at: <https://sphr.nihr.ac.uk/research/integrating-attention-to-ethnicity-and-migration-within-applied-public-health-and-health-inequalities-research/>

Contact the researchers

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About the School

The NIHR School for Public Health Research is a partnership between the Universities of Sheffield; Bristol; Cambridge; Imperial; and University College London; The London School for Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM); LiLaC – a collaboration between the Universities of Liverpool and Lancaster; and Fuse - The Centre for Translational Research in Public Health a collaboration between Newcastle, Durham, Northumbria, Sunderland and Teesside Universities.

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Figure 1: Assessment of attention to ethnicity within JSNA documents 2010 and 2018

