CSAG – Community Soft Intelligence Briefing Paper

Key issues noted across various communities in Bradford District after the COVID 19 outbreak and the lockdown: a scoping exercise.	**Date: 06.05.2020** **Shahid Islam** **Aamnah Rahman** **Chris Cartwright** **Rosie McEachan**

Executive summary

Background

- We performed a scoping exercise to gather intelligence on key issues (positive and negative) affecting different communities in Bradford as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequent 'lock-down' effected on the 23rd March 2020.
- We explored immediate and longer term concerns for four groups living in deprived areas in Bradford: South Asian heritage families, White British families, Eastern European Roma community and Refugees and Asylum Seekers. We also explored positive elements of the 'lock-down' on communities
- We contacted 13 key community informants for this information. These were people actively involved within their communities who could provide insights into the challenges faced by local residents. We focused on communities in different parts of the district including inner city Bradford, Bradford South, Keighley Central and Bradford East.

Key concerns amongst South Asian Families

Lock-down rules and accessing information:

- Families living in multi-generational households find it difficult to stick to social distancing rules.
- Young people gathering in groups and not following social distancing guidelines
- Credibility of information sources regarding COVID-19 appears to be an issue.
- Hoaxes and fake news are spreading via social media channels which are causing anxiety and worry.

Exacerbation of existing financial insecurity and poverty:

- Reduction in income likely to have a major impact on families. The self employed and small businesses are particularly affected.
- Reported problems in access financial support packages from the government.

Accessing services, including those tackling food insecurity:

- Families not using services which may be available (e.g. food banks), due to stigma, and / or difficulties of referral system
- There is reduced capacity of voluntary and community sector organisations to deliver services as many are reliant on volunteers who are now not able to help due to lock-down restrictions.

Mental health
- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on mental health was felt to be an important issue both in the short-term and longer term.
- This impact caused directly by worry and anxiety about the virus, and also indirectly by impact on financial security.
- Loss and grief of loved ones and friends has had an impact too as lockdown has interrupted the usual grieving process of attending the funeral/burial and the mourning period.

Key concerns amongst White communities:

Lock-down rules:
- There is a perception that young people are not following social distancing rules. This is a cause of concern for older isolated adults who fear leaving their homes.

Exacerbation of existing financial insecurity and poverty:
- Financial poverty was a key concern and it was felt this would be made worse by the current crisis
- Families not being able to afford 'essential' items e.g. sanitary products, soap, toothpaste with these items are not always available in food parcels
- Families may not be able to access free school meals for children.
- Local business whose income has dropped are struggling to afford rent.

Home and learning environment
- For families with children, parents are struggling to access learning materials and struggling to keep children occupied.
- Many families do not have reliable internet access or not able to keep phone in credit.

Addiction
- Individuals who have problems with addiction who may have resorted to criminal means to pay for their addiction via shop-lifting or other petty crimes and can no longer do so may turn to more extreme methods if not given help.

Key concerns Eastern European Roma community

Lock-down rules and accessing information:
- Often multiple families live together, this makes it hard to follow social distancing rules.
- Awareness of rules for social distancing rules could be low, this could be in due part to low literacy levels.

- Teenagers are perceived to be not following the rules and are gathering socially in key community locations.

Exacerbation of existing financial insecurity and poverty:
- Many people within these communities have 'cash-in-hand' jobs or agency work, and are not eligible for benefits. They may fall through the cracks in terms of receiving support
- Larger family sizes mean more of a struggle to feed / food poverty.

Key Concerns Refugees and Asylum Seekers
- Face to face access to organizations for support with welfare and housing has been curtailed and this is usually how most people gain access to these services
- Financial issues a particular concern potentially increasing poverty
- IT system access is a problem which is affecting children's education

Positive Responses across all communities

Across all groups positive points within communities were also identified. These included: increase in civic and neighbourly behaviour, drop in crime, attempts to spread useful messages using videos in alternative languages, local landlords reducing rent for private households and small businesses and improvement in air quality.

Next Steps:

- This report will be updated when further information is available.
- The information gathered will be shared with local decision makers who are informing the District response to COVID-19.
- It will be combined with insights from communities collected via the Born in Bradford cohort study and used to inform the Born in Bradford COVID-19 research programme.

1.0 Background

This short report is a scoping exercise to understand key issues affecting different communities in Bradford District as a result of COVID-19 and the consequent lock down. We aim to highlight the immediate concerns (since the outbreak and for the next month) and then the concerns that may arise in the medium and long term future (3 months to 12 months). We also wanted to find out if there were any positive points that may have arisen that will highlight resilience and social solidarity in Bradford's communities.

We informally engaged 13 people who are considered active in their communities either through employment, volunteering or an elected role in their community. We focused on communities that experience highest levels of deprivation taking into account the diversity of the city's demographics, differential levels of risks from the outbreak and varying levels of engagement with services. We focused on communities in different parts of the district including inner city Bradford, Bradford South, Keighley Central and Bradford East. In doing so, we concentrated on different ethnic groups residing in these communities and for the purposes of reporting have split the communities in the following way; South Asian, White British, Eastern European Roma and Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The rapid nature of the outbreak and the timescale in producing this report has made it difficult to include every community or to cover the issues in any depth. We found in many cases the issues affected different groups similarly despite not sharing an identity or neighbourhood. The purpose of this scoping exercise is to bring to light issues for planners and implementers that key community respondents feel are important for their respective communities. This will be equally helpful for researchers who are planning to conduct any research in the selected communities/neighbourhoods.

2.0 South Asian Community

This community mostly resides in the inner city wards of Bradford and central Keighley areas. We spoke to people who work in various community roles and heard about a range of important concerns. Many people are self employed or run small businesses which have seen their income either completely stop or significantly reduce since the lockdown. There are reports of problems with accessing support for their financial situation as the system for this hasn't been working effectively and it is unclear who is eligible to apply. Equally, accessing banks and government departments in the short term has proven difficult. Those who were employed, many have lost their jobs and the affect of this is always negative on self esteem and mental health as well as financial security.

An Imam of a Mosque said the *"financial problems for people who have lost their jobs is going to be a major problem – this is on top of the fears about virus affecting their family".*

He also said the mental health problems and anxieties are going to surface further down the line:

"Once this is over there will be many people who are going to have mental health problems and anxiety. At the moment things are in the moment so people are managing and people are staying away from accessing services but this is going to be a problem later"

Another respondent told us that people from the Asian community do not seem to be making full use of the services they could access to help them during this difficult time. One of the reasons, perhaps, people are reluctant to visit food banks is due to fear of stigma and

the negative impact on their social standing in their community if they were seen to be going there. Also many items stocked in food-banks are not customary to Asian diets (soups, pasta, tuna, rye bread etc.) and this may suggest to people that this service is not relevant to them. For those who have tried to access this service have found the process problematic as there are referral processes to negotiate before support is provided.

A representative from an organisation that provides support for mental health issues told us providing support is becoming problematic as demand has increased but capacity to deliver has not followed suit. Capacity has inversely dropped, in their words: *"We were told key challenges are trying to retain our bank of volunteers and adequate PPE to continue our outreach support. We have lost key staff and retraining/re-staffing will mean having to start from scratch again"*.

Another respondent told us abiding by all the conditions and restrictions has been a problem for South Asian residents. People have fears about leaving family members isolated as that might be detrimental for their wellbeing. This point particularly applies to older parents who live alone. The other side of this coin is many people live in multi-generational households and this potentially increases the risk of contracting the virus. On this point a recent report noted:

> "Overcrowding in households is another important factor prevailing against effective social distancing. Overcrowding is more common in all ethnic minority groups than in the White British majority. Whereas 1 in 20 White British households are classed as overcrowded, this characterises a third of Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Black African households in the UK. Average household size is larger for Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Black African groups, including multi-generational households in which older people are more likely to be living with younger adults and hence at risk of cross-transmission within the home (especially if household members feel forced to continue working outside the home)" (Qureshi et al. 2020, p6).

A key issue that adds to the above problem is the conflation of messages that are authentic with those that are hoax and fake news. One of the respondents said: *"part of the problem is untrustworthy news sources and hoaxes: Information is lacking and not timely. NHS information not forthcoming and fake news making it difficult"*.

This is something we have witnessed to be a major problem through a number of community WhatsApp groups where messages have been shared that have been sent to promote fear and mistrust. These include messages about medical teams deliberately killing patients and messages sharing fake treatments that imply people do not need to follow guidelines. The viral nature of messages means it is impossible to trace source but these have been a major source of frustration which is why groups like Bradford4Better have locked down all their groups and only allow verified messages to be shared which must go through the group admin. Issues about fake and hoax messages have been highlighted in the local and national press which has resulted in increased stress, panic buying and people abstaining from accessing services when they critically needed it.

A final point to add is many young people are not abiding by the social distancing guidelines/regulations.

3.0 White British Communities

We spoke with a community organization covering the Thorpe Edge, Thackley, Ravenscliffe, and Fagley area. These are neighbourhoods which are high on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation and therefore considered areas of high socio-economic deprivation. The demographic composition of this ward, according to most recent census data is predominantly White British.

We were informed that the older vulnerable people are scared to go out because of the virus but also fear going out because many young people are not heeding the message of 'stay at home'.

The community centre was currently supplying 205 meals a week to the vulnerable which did not quite stretch far enough to include everyone who needed one. Many families cannot afford other essentials such as soap, sanitary pads, toothpaste but these are not usually supplied to the families by the centre unless they have received a donation of such goods. Not having these essentials could increase hygiene and health problems.

Unemployment is high in many of the aforementioned neighbourhoods with those who were employed either on short term or zero hours contracts. The lockdown has significantly affected the employment status in an adverse way compounding extant poverty. Many people are in a queue trying to apply for Universal Credit which does not pay anything for many weeks at the start and there is much uncertainty about whether Agency contracted staff will be eligible for furlough arrangements. At any rate, the issue of financial poverty which was a problem before COVID 19 is likely to get worse.

Many parents with children are phoning the community centre and saying their children are struggling at home as they cannot go out but have no stimulus. The schools have transferred their activity online for learning but a great majority of the families in these areas do not have computers or Wifi access. Many parents do not have credit on their phones to make a call. We were told many of the local schools were already under pressure as many children did not meet their age appropriate learning needs and these children will be left further behind because of this gap in their learning and development. The community centre has made up some packs for 69 families (167 children in total) to help them keep occupied but this is only a one-off short term intervention.

When discussing these issues with someone who represents the Holmewood area, we heard similar kinds of concerns, as they put it *"poverty will get worse because of the insecure employment"*. We were also informed that many families depended on the free school meal as a way to keep children fed and with this gone there is going to be extra pressures on families and problems for children's' nutrition.

Economically speaking, the Tong ward, in which Holmewood is located, is a diverse ward with differing levels of socio-economic status. In the more deprived areas the issue will continue to be higher rates of unemployment and consequent poverty. In the less deprived areas such as some parts of Bierley and Tong Village, the issue will be problems with housing as most people have taken a mortgage especially in the newly built areas and may not be in a position to carry on paying if they are not back to work in the next 6 months. The freeze on mortgages for 3 months is helpful but help may need to be extended if people are not able to return to work.

With small local small businesses closing, the Newlands Community Trust has halved the rent for shops that are located within their premises to business tenants to help them try and stay open. Many residents are now buying things on credit cards and other forms of short term credit that will be a problem in the future when they need to pay it back.

We were informed by one key respondent that many people who have addiction problems (namely drugs and alcohol) would often go into shops and supermarkets to shoplift to support their addiction but with restrictions in place at supermarkets and many shops closed this has not been possible. Burglary is also not an option because most people are at home. Whilst this is good for crime reduction, it is a vulnerable section of our society that is going to face more problems and may turn to other more aggravated forms of crime without support to help them.

4.0 Eastern European Roma Community

One of the key respondents informed us that many Roma families have returned to Slovakia since the outbreak (approx 100 families). The main reason is many people from the community fear that guidelines are not being adhered to which are then putting people at risk. They see that it might be safer back in Slovakia as most people watch news channels from either Slovakia or Czech Republic which went into lockdown earlier than UK.

For those that remain here in UK, employment is a problem as most people are either in agency work or in 'cash-in-hand' jobs both of which have become short in supply. The rules around living in Britain as an EU citizen makes it very difficult to claim any welfare benefits and so this is not an option as many Roma families have found that claiming any benefits is in breach of their agreement to reside in the UK.   Larger family size (on average compared to other communities) means there are more children to feed and without the help of free school meals and no/low income there are going to be problems with food poverty.

Another respondent informed us that there are multiple families living together and this is a risk for spreading the virus. Police have also said there are issues surrounding social distancing and awareness around protocol around COVID-19 in the Roma communities. There were a large number of complaints logged over Easter weekend which included young people from Eastern European Roma backgrounds that were breaching the guidelines.

Most Central and Eastern European shops have posters displayed in community languages about social distancing but literacy levels are low and so the messages have not been effective. There are many families going to visit each other at each other's homes and the number of teenagers congregating in groups is a noted worry.

The services accessed by Roma families have seen reduced contact. These include support for housing and employment advice, mental health support, and citizenship support.

5.0 Refugees and Asylum Seekers

We spoke to a representative from an organisation that supports families across the city of Bradford who are either Refugees or Asylums Seekers. Key concerns in the short term were the tight living arrangements families are placed in; sometimes the accommodation is shared which means the risk of the virus spreading is increased.

Permission to work is a complex area and many people are dependent on welfare benefits which they usually require support from the voluntary sector to claim or query. This is usually on a face to face basis. With the lockdown this has been near impossible which has meant people have had no means to access help and support for welfare related issues. Equally, many of the organisations that provide such services are themselves facing an uncertain future which will only make things worse for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

Access to internet is major problem as is having the hardware to use it. Many children are missing out on this and so a campaign has been launched to try and provide laptops and Wifi access for families with children. We were informed that many weeks have passed where children have not engaged with their school and have missed out on their education.

The increase in food prices has put major financial pressure on the Refugee and Asylum Seeker families; most families already receive less in welfare entitlement than everyone else and so their budgets never stretched far enough to meet their needs in the first place. A hike in prices has further compounded their financial problems.

Information is a major problem as many people miss out on accurate provision on what they need to do and also what they can access.

6.0 MEDIUM TO LONG TERM ISSUES

The above points relate to the immediacy of the issues affecting the communities. We asked respondents to highlight any concerns that may be anticipated after 3 months and upto the next 12 months. We were told many of the issues raised immediately would continue for several months until peoples' lives returned to some normality. Some specific medium to long term concerns for each community is mentioned below:

6.1 South Asian Community

One respondent said: *"Some women will be skipping meals currently and will have low iron levels. Their mental and physical health will suffer due to poor diet and lack of exercise, many will have to go to GPs for iron injections etc".*

Another respondent highlighted: *"impact on health is going to be massive, weight gain and loss, children marked down for educational grades and Domestic Violence is going to increase for some due to poverty, lockdown, anger and isolation".*

We were also informed that people have not had a chance to go through the grieving processes and this is going to be a problem later when people have a chance to process all this turmoil. As one person put it *"It's going to take communities years to get over and build back up again".*

6.2 White British Communities
In relation to the areas we mentioned above the key issues affecting these areas, we were informed, are escaping poverty and maintaining their housing during a time of potentially prolonged unemployment.

6.3 Roma Communities
The issue of invisibility is likely to be a problem as many Romani people do not record their ethnicity in official counts and so could be missed by services. One respondent said: *"we can fail to notice all sorts of things about Roma communities because they are not distinguished in monitoring. So, if people can be asked to be aware, we will have a better understanding".*

This same respondent went on to highlight: "*One area that is worrying me a bit is many of the indicators of higher risk for COVID-19 seem to be statistically more prevalent in studies of Roma communities – underlying conditions like heart and lung issues and social/economic like poverty and living in Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) which should be a danger sign".*

6.4 Refugees and Asylum Seekers
Domestic violence could potentially become a major problem. Many people are desperate for help and may already have problems with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). If we add to this they are at home in tight living arrangements, unable to earn whilst at home with children who cannot attend to their learning or eat properly, then it might build up levels of frustration that might give rise to higher incidence of domestic violence.

Another issue is employment opportunities for Refugees and Asylum Seekers which were already scarce before the outbreak. Most people took jobs in low skilled and low paid sector but with increased competition for all jobs will mean Refugees and Asylum Seekers will be pushed further down the pecking as people with connections, language skills and experience will be applying for these jobs.

7.0 Positives
Here are some of the positive points key respondents have noticed during this outbreak when discussing the communities they work in. These points do not need separating by ethnicity as some apply across all groups.

- People being more civic and helpful towards their neighbours and community was a point noted by most of our respondents. Many people have put themselves forward to help others.

- A drop in crime has been noted as most people have been at home.

- Short videos in community languages have been helpful for the Roma and South Asian communities as people understand health messages better.

- A number of local landlords have reduced rent (which is often very high) because they want to keep their tenant which has reduced financial pressure.

- Air pollution is down

- Most people have abided by the guidelines

- Food distribution has worked really well for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. Collaboration between the local authority and voluntary sector has particularly been a strong point in making this work.

- An App to refer vulnerable and needy Refugees and Asylum Seeker families to the Bradford Foundation Trust has worked really well as partner organisations have easily made the referrals when needed for essential supplies such as food and toiletries.

8.0 CONCLUSION

This report is the result of conversations with 'community active people' who engage with and represent communities we have discussed. It should not be considered a research project in itself but instead is a useful precursor for anyone formulating plans to conduct research in the named communities. Equally, it is not exhaustive in what is covered as time, social distancing rules and respondent availability did not allow us to cover the issues in any depth.

What we have heard through this short exercise has highlighted that different communities experience challenges in a unique way and it is crucial that planners and providers are mindful of the diversity of needs and challenges that have arisen as result of COVID 19. The communities that are sometimes referred to as 'under-served' and 'seldom heard' may not get heard through traditional forms of consultation or engagement exercises and so it is crucial that their voice and needs are not excluded as this will only lead to increasing extant health inequalities.

Challenges and needs are never static and so these may change over time and so it will be important to be mindful of any developments in this area. Planners and implementers must remain vigilant to ensure there is harmony between national policy directives and local needs.

This report will be used in parallel with the survey research currently being undertaken by Born in Bradford (BIB). The findings noted here will inform further areas for research and should help ensure key points are flagged up to relevant services about important issues affecting specific communities. This report will be updated when new issues come to light.

REFERENCES

Kaveri Qureshi, Ben Kasstan, Nasar Meer and Sarah Hill (April 2020) Submission of evidence on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19, and the UK government response, on ethnic minorities in the UK. University of Edinburgh