



Qualitative Research to Support the Strategic Review on Health Inequalities in England Post 2010 (Marmot Review)

A report of qualitative findings from focus groups with deprived groups prepared for the National Social Marketing Centre and University College London

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1. Introduction

a. Objectives

- To understand the experience of disadvantaged groups: identified as BME groups, single parents and people with mental health problems in accessing public services especially where there are multiple needs and how this might change;
- Exploring the views of disadvantaged groups about how health inequalities affect their lives and what would make a difference to them; and
- Exploring with community groups what it would mean to empower individuals, groups and communities.

b. Method

In summary, the qualitative research consisted of a programme of discussion groups with members of the deprived groups highlighted in the literature review; single parents, Asian groups, Black groups and people with experience of mental health issues from Black, White and Asian ethnic backgrounds.

Eleven focus groups were carried out in total, in three locations, Moss Side in Manchester, Haggerston in Birmingham and Hackney in London, between 1st and 5th October 2009.

Asian participants were split into separate male and female groups, to enable them to speak at ease. We carried out a face to face depth interview with one of the female Bangladeshi participants with mental health issues, as she was uncomfortable taking part in a group situation.

Further details of the demographic breakdown of the focus groups can be found below.

c. Sample

The qualitative research was carried out with 74 participants split by group vulnerability type and spread across Manchester, London and Birmingham. The following specifications applied to all the groups:

- All participants were from deprived communities, and participants were predominately from Social Economic Grade (SEG) D and E
- Within each group there were at least three participants with experience of community involvement/volunteering
- All participants were interested in getting involved in the community

Single mothers

The single mother groups were made up of participants from white, black and mixed race backgrounds and all participants were aged between 18-39.

Focus groups carried out:

- 1 in Birmingham
- 1 in Manchester
- 1 in London, Hackney

BME

Black:

Participants were mixed gender, and were aged between 25-65. Participants were from Black Afro-Caribbean and Black African backgrounds.

Focus group carried out:

- 1 in Manchester

Asian:

Participants were split into separate gender groups, they were aged between 18-65 and from Pakistani or Bangladeshi¹ backgrounds.

Focus groups carried out:

- 1 Female Asian group in Birmingham
- 1 Male Asian group in Birmingham

Mental health issues

All participants had experienced mild mental health issues like anxiety, severe stress and depression within the last year. Participants were divided into groups by ethnicity and the Asian and white groups were also split by gender.

Focus groups carried out:

- 1 Female Asian mental health issues group in Birmingham
- 1 Male Asian mental health issues group in Birmingham
- 1 Black mental health issues group in London Hackney
- 1 Female mental health issues group in Manchester
- 1 Male mental health issues group in London Hackney

¹ A decision was made not to include Indian participants in mixed Asian groups as the literature review showed they experience less health inequalities and also would create difficult dynamics with these Muslim groups

d. Overview of regional differences

It is worth stating as a cover note to the report that, although there were no expectations of particular regional differences between London, Manchester and Birmingham where the groups were conducted, there were very few. Findings were therefore very consistent for specific vulnerable groups across these locations. The most significant difference to note when reading findings was that in Hackney, the regeneration of the Olympics in combination with the spread of more affluent, fashionable communities into East London was impacting on the make-up of deprived local communities. Further small differences are included for interest in Appendix 3.a.

2. Life experiences

This section details the experiences of disadvantaged groups as identified as priorities for further exploration: BME groups, single mothers and people with mental health issues (both White and BME). As identified by the literature review, each of these disadvantaged groups has some inherent issues which affect their specific life experiences and this is also reflected in the findings of the qualitative research. However, there were also some cross cutting experiences that are perhaps characteristic of such deprived groups. These were:

- Living with violence and anti-social behaviour
- Health issues
- Lack of money and opportunities
- Youth issues and the dilemmas of parenting
- Lack of social activities

We have explored these issues below, also detailing specific experiences of particular vulnerable groups where relevant.

2.1. Living with violence and anti-social behaviour

In all the locations we visited, dangerous violence, including gang culture, stabbings and shootings were visible on the streets and impacted in various forms on people's lives. This was of particular concern for single mothers, whose lives are very much based in their communities and led to fear for their children's safety.

"I feel safe but there are places I don't go. I know the places that I do go and the places that I don't go."

White Male group with mental health issues, Hackney

"A motorbike got set fire to outside there about three nights before and a girl got stabbed."

Single mothers, Manchester

Single mothers

Initially single mothers were quite defensive about their local areas and often blamed the media for defining and thereby stigmatising their towns for being linked with crime. They have grown accustomed to seeing and experiencing violence and anti-social behaviour and on occasion they were the ones knowledgeable and confident enough to get involved actively i.e. trying to reason with the criminals, or simply voicing their concerns about the noise. This came from individuals who had lived their whole lives

in particular areas: they reported feeling like insiders. Their actions stem from their sense of familiarity, affording them some influence over people in their vicinity.

However, when thinking about their children's long term futures, single mothers expressed apprehension about the rise of gang culture in their local areas and the huge impact this has upon the children in their communities.

"Too many shootings, stabbings - an aggressive environment"

Single mothers, Hackney

2.2. Lack of money and opportunities

Across groups, participants described life experiences bound by lack of not only money to buy what they needed for themselves and their children but more importantly by a lack of opportunity to lift themselves out of their economic circumstances. All groups identified the importance of good education, finding work and building skills but found themselves restricted from achieving them by their circumstances. However this was particularly of importance to single mothers who also appeared to suffer the greatest poverty.

Single parents

Lack of money was a particularly prevalent issue for single parents as it often has an immediate impact, for example on feeding their children healthy foods. At times single mothers reported relying on freezer food to get them through a week to enable them to pay pending bills.

"You have to struggle just to survive... "Yeah, we're having rice and peas and gravy and dumplings because it's nice!" not because I can't afford"

Single mothers, Manchester

The single mothers groups placed a lot of emphasis on the wide reaching impact of money issues on all aspects of their lives. When talking about money, single mothers revealed their primary concerns about work. Their focus was around a lack of available jobs that fit their family lifestyle, and pay and/or benefits only providing a living wage.

"I never have enough to treat the kids or go out anywhere"

Single mothers, Hackney

“Need a job that’s going to give me enough money to be self sustainable and childcare support.”

Single mothers, Birmingham

Single mothers in particular felt trapped by the disincentives of the benefit system; wanting to go out to work but feeling punished by the loss of benefits that this entails, even for a part-time job that would work around their family but not provide sufficient wages to support them.

“I’m one person who would be better off not working with two kids, I would have more money if I didn’t work.”

Single mothers, Manchester

2.3. Health issues

Mental health issues like stress, anxiety and depression were common concerns for all the disadvantaged groups we spoke to. The physical environment and anti-social behaviour in residential areas has a considerable impact on health, both mental and physical and particularly on those with existing mental health issues, and those with children. Lack of opportunity and money adds further stress on mental health and is also limiting in terms of buying healthy foods and gaining access to exercise classes.

Single mothers

Single mothers felt that their mental health was sometimes compromised because they found it difficult to cope with all the pressures of raising their children alone.

“I’m not mentally okay because I’m doing too much, but then how am I helping my children?”

Single mothers, Manchester

Single mothers were particularly concerned for the health of their children. In particular they were anxious about the impact of the physical surrounding environment. One single mother spoke to us about her child who suffers from eczema and asthma: she feels, the noise from gangs on the streets, exacerbates his condition as he is unable to sleep at night. Mothers in Hackney expressed concerns over their children not receiving adequate exercise as they are fearful of walking into certain areas.

"My son is covered in eczema, he needs to sleep and it is now 11 o'clock and I can hear [music] - go away, go away!"

Single mothers, Manchester

"Do you know you can't even go swimming if you're a single parent and you've got three children, because you need two adults with you."

Single mothers, Hackney

"I can't let Harry play out on the estate. He did used to go around the football pitch or whatever, but then you've got eighteen, nineteen, you know, late twenties and they're having a proper full man's football match."

Single mothers, Hackney

People with mental health issues

People with mental health issues report that they often find it difficult to admit/acknowledge that they have a problem which can perpetuate their situation and can prevent them from seeking help.

"A lot of people don't want to admit they've got any kind of mental health issues ... that perpetuates the situation."

White group with mental health issues, Manchester

"I don't really like talking about what's inside here or what's inside of my head, because the way I cope with things I do it in my own."

White group with mental health issues, Manchester

These participants report often feeling let down by public services and many cited bad experiences with their GP. Coupled with feeling unable to talk freely about their problems, this leaves them feeling isolated and disorientated. They expressed a need for more than just medication; they want to talk about their problems with a professional who is not just a counsellor but a qualified psychotherapist. Preference for help is face to face rather than in group settings, which can be difficult for people with mental health issues.

"It's "No sorry the doctor is busy, you will have to come back tomorrow" and then when you come back tomorrow it's the same thing."

Male Asian group with mental health issues, Birmingham

Some people wanted more clarity and information on their condition. They feel that they lack this basic information, and instead they spend most of their time dealing with the side effects from the medication they are taking.

"We don't get that much family support...I am not clear on the issues I have, they are not explained by the GP, and there is a need for more professional expertise to explain this to us"

Asian Female Mental Health Issues, Birmingham

For some participants, their mental health issues are often intertwined with other problems that they are facing and they therefore find it hard to seek help:

"You become more reclusive and you don't really want to talk to anyone, I would never speak to my Dad about it because he would just laugh at me, I wouldn't feel comfortable talking to my GP about it because I don't want to admit to that I am getting to the stage where I have been unemployed for so long, I find it a bit traumatic and stressful as I am about to loose my house too"

Asian Male Mental Health Issues, Birmingham

However there was recognition within the White mental health group that mental health services are under pressure and that there are many that are worse off than they themselves. Participants in these groups suggested that communities could think about setting up voluntary mental health services, run by the community for the community to help meet the need for support.

For some, assisting people with histories of mental health issues to gain involvement in community groups with others experiencing mental health issues was seen to be extremely valuable. It was felt that this would also help build confidence and skills for those leading the sessions, potentially in partnership with professionals and would enable the delivery of support from people who truly understand.

"I would like to learn to help people in the streets to help people ... have a special talk, a special environment for them where they can feel better"

White Female Mental Health Issues Group, Manchester

These participants noted the value of shared experiences, through equating community-based support for mental health with other issues in society like alcoholism:

"I think there's a lot of benefit in people having shared experiences. Look at a lot of the positive youth workers, it's because they've been little shits themselves and the kids respect them because they know they've been there"

White Female Mental Health Issues Group, Manchester

However, community-based support for mental health issues is not seen to be suitable for all people with mental health issues. Others are reluctant to seek community based support because they feel that they it may exacerbate their mental state further, they focus on trying to block out their health issues:

"Because you're going to be helping people that are depressed and you're going to feel depressed yourself, so what's the point ... just going around in a big circle"

White Female Mental Health Issues Group, Manchester

2.4. Youth issues and the dilemmas of parenting

Most groups talked about their perceptions of the young people within their communities, the common perception being that there is a great deal of youth crime and lack of opportunities for young people. Many also had a point of view on the importance of education, both in school and at home, on teaching the next generation the skills to improve their own life experiences and to be more respectful members of their communities.

"The only time I am concerned though is for the future of my children, the lack of opportunities for the younger generation and the lack of employment, that is very daunting."

Black group, Manchester

"He walked in to my kitchen and said "Mum, when we get older we're going to be hustlers"

Single mothers, Manchester

"If there is no education there is no jobs these days, so it is really worrying. If your children don't get a good education then what's going to happen to them?"

Female Asian group, Birmingham

Single mothers

Single mothers are acutely aware that the lack of a father figure makes disciplining children more difficult, and they are apprehensive about the effect this will have upon their children in the long term. They want to teach them to be a good man and good father in the future and see this as important. They recognise that it is worse for the new generation of younger single mums 'kids having kids' who haven't had enough guidance or structure, and their children are often perceived as being the least disciplined. These groups suggested parenting drop in sessions to ensure that these skills are available for as many parents as possible; this should include fathers as it may help them take on a more active role in their children's lives.

"Somehow you've somehow got to teach your son how to be a man, how to be a good father, do you know what I mean, and that is key. There are so few male role models."

Single mothers, Manchester

"My daughter right up to when she was about 2, she used to call me mummy daddy... because I was actually everything to my daughter all at once."

Single mothers, Manchester

Single parents have noted that their children often foresee a more structured future for themselves, involving ambition for further education/ university as a part of their future and feel that this is a good thing that should be encouraged and supported by fathers too.

"He said to his dad "Oh I can't wait until I'm older and I get my degree and I get my car" and his dad went "Did your mum put that in your head, that you need a degree to get a car?" and I thought wow, why are you compromising that? "Did you go to uni dad", "No, I'm not clever enough to go to uni" and I'm like why are you telling him that?"

Single mothers, Manchester

Working and wanting to spend time with the children is a hard equilibrium to strike, as most single mothers struggle to ensure their children have the best. They often make an altruistic trade off to ensure they are meeting the demands of their children, for example with 'play stations'. But they are aware that working hard to buy these things means that the kids will often be left on their own doing 'their own thing'.

"The kids will wear designer but I wear Primark"

Single mothers, Manchester

Many single mothers struggle with the need to take 'time out' in order to be good mothers against the guilt of leaving children in other people's care whilst they do so.

2.5. Lack of social activities

There was an overall sense amongst these deprived groups that people feel they are not as socially active as they could be; they are often inhibited by a lack of knowledge of activities in their local area, cost, time and fear of crime in their local areas.

Single mothers

Some single mothers want some time out as they feel that they are constantly proving themselves alongside struggling to provide. They talked about how hard it is to organise social activities and generally create a family atmosphere when they are on their own.

“If you are a single parent you don’t get to go out that much, you don’t really see anybody.”

Single mothers, Manchester

More planning is often required for trips and activities, however, there is a recognition that parents should try to be more involved with their children and not expect others to supervise for them. Single mothers suggested that more bonding would create greater respect, although at the moment it is felt that there are not enough activities for parents and children to partake in collaboratively.

BME groups

Discussions with Asian groups in particular highlight the importance of faith and religion in their lives and its value as a social activity. Contact with the mosque is common for the men and children in particular, Muslim women drop their children there to learn the Qur’an after school and it is a large part of their daily routine.

“Your culture is there, your religion is there.”

Female Asian group, Birmingham

“Basically it’s community in the mosque as well.”

Male Asian group with mental health issues, Birmingham

However conversations with Asian women highlight the lack of activities available to Muslim women in particular. These women complained that there was not enough for them to do to get involved in the mosque as they are not permitted to attend aside from specific occasions. They see a need for social activities for girls and women within the mosque. They also feel that social and cultural factors present a

barrier for women going to work. These women wanted to have more active social lives but were not used to going out alone and so would prefer to do so with other women in groups, which would make them feel more confident and safe.

"[We] can sort of take time out together as a family and it's two sets of hands but when you're on your own, you know, there's a lot of things that you have to consider for safety."

Single mothers, Birmingham

However, not all BME participants felt that it was beneficial to divide communities based on ethnicity and faith as they felt that this emphasised segregation and differences. For instance, they would prefer to see social activities for ethnic groups factored into community settings that are for all, like a community centre that caters for all under one roof. This may be resource intensive, but would be important as it would show that BME communities do not just see community in terms of their faith and culture (communities of interest), but that they understand the importance of a wider community that encapsulates all in their local vicinity (communities of place) which they feel is equally important.

"A proper big community building where it's accessible to everybody and it's different groups going on."

Black group, Manchester

BME groups with mental health issues

BME groups with mental health issues are more dissatisfied with more aspects of their lives than their counterparts in white groups. They feel disconnected from their communities and find there is a real lack of support for mental health issues, perhaps because it is seen as a taboo in some Asian communities and therefore their only source of support was the GP and anti-depressants.

"I would like the stigma about mental health not to be so much, and more education people about mental health illnesses and promoting what is out in the community and to actually overcome your problem or deal with it or live with it."

Female Asian group with mental health issues, Birmingham

The Asian females with mental health issues expressed a need for their communities to adapt to help vulnerable members of their community. They talked about the importance of the mosque as a focal point in their communities, though they felt that more needed to be done by community leaders to

encourage and promote the mosque as a functional space for the community. They mentioned community leaders' wives, who they felt could share their knowledge and skills and offer advice to women, for instance about spiritual wellbeing and how to live healthy lives.

3. Definitions of community

All groups were able to identify with the idea of community and they recognised the benefits that it can create. Most participants identified more spontaneously with communities of place rather than communities of interest; initially they focused on describing local areas and the people who live within them. However, some people started to question the definition of community as discussions progressed.

There were differences in the relative importance of the various community definitions raised. However across all groups there was consensus about the following characteristics of community:

- 'Knowing people' and having a sense of familiarity
- Unity and respect for each other
- A place that provides support systems and advice, where people look out for each other
- Pride in the local environment
- Common goals and interests

Knowing people

'Knowing people' and having a sense of familiarity was the most common feature of people's definition of communities.

"Community is a group of people that circumstances have brought together, either by means of economic or social or personal. So if you live in a place and you know the next door neighbourthat is a feeling of a community and that is how it expands"

Black mixed group with mental health issues, Hackney London

For other groups and particularly for Asian women, in-laws and family networks were a more integral part of their immediate sense of community. Having their husband's family near is often very important as these women's maternal homes are either abroad or in different parts of the country.

"It is very nice to have a family network, my in-laws are near so I don't feel isolated"

Asian Female group, Birmingham

Unity and respect

Having a sense of unity and respect for each other was often discussed within the context of the potential for communities to develop. Participants would like to see communities that are built on the foundations of caring for those most vulnerable in society.

"A community is important...if things go wrong at least we can all stand together... If you haven't seen you neighbour for ages, go and knock to check they are ok"

Black group, Manchester

Support systems and advice

Participants see community as a place that can provide support systems and advice, a place where people look out for each other.

“To know that if anything happened to you and you wouldn’t have to just rely on the police would feel good”

Black group, Manchester

Some participants commented on the places they were aware of that offered advice. However they felt that services were often overstretched, or that the really needy in their communities were unaware of them.

“There is an Advice Resource Centre just for the Asian community, they help you with benefits, tenant agreements, health problems, immigration, but it is hard to get appointments”

Asian female group, Birmingham

This situation led to people offering services to others in need within their communities, this was for family, friends and neighbours and generally spread by word of mouth:

“I used to help a lot of older Bengali women, like writing letters in Bengali to their families for when they send money back home and helping them with official documentation, they struggle a lot because they don’t know English... they have no social network in this country”

Asian female group, Birmingham

These examples show that people are often actively involved in their communities without necessarily realising it. This could be because it focuses on helping family and friends, they see it as their duty as it is part of their faith and also the way they have been raised.

Pride in the local environment

When asked about the meaning of community, many participants focused on the physical nature of their local environment. The lack of pride and neglect in the environment often left areas squalid, vandalised and unpleasant. This seemed to have a greater impact on those on the fringes of community life, like individuals with mental health who felt the environment made finding a purpose to venture out difficult.

“You can see the deprivation all you have to do is look outside it is in your face everyday litter everywhere, rats and rubbish it is a dump... it feels like people around you have no meaning to life I keep my curtains closed at times, it doesn't give you a purpose to do anything”

Female Asian mental health issues group, Birmingham

Participants suggested making local areas more visually appealing, and the Asian female groups suggested revamping the places of worship which might attract more people to congregate.

“The mosque really needs renovating they should make an effort to make it prettier to make it more inviting”

Female mental health issues group, Birmingham

For others, pride in the environment is more about creating areas for their children. This was especially true for those not living in cul-de-sac's who want green areas that are safe for their children to play in. In some areas renovation was already taking place - this was particularly true of London and Manchester. Within Hackney, participants talked about the regeneration which included building of new flats for the 'yuppies' that had moved into the area and other regeneration in preparation for the Olympics. However, they felt that these changes were not being driven by community needs but were just surface level change which they felt was designed to drive them out and make space for people from higher social grades who found their areas fashionable. Some participants showed great enthusiasm and passion to safeguard their communities which they saw as an extension of their identities.

“There is a mural in the area, a collage of all the different people who make up Hackney, but they were threatening to take it down and build over it, we protested this is art from the community, of the community, they can't destroy that we didn't let them it is still there and is a part of the community we have here”

Black mental health issues, London

Common goals and interests

Some participants mentioned that community might also not be based on place but rather on shared goals and interests. This was more prevalent in the mental health issues groups, as these individuals were often more interested in communities outside their local areas. They feel that this gives individuals the opportunity to transcend the geography of their physical and mental environments through immersing themselves in activities they are really interested in:

“For me community is when I go to my basketball group, it's women, but they are all from different places, different environments, so you come together, some work, some study, so they bring something different to the group”

Black mental health issues, London

This also becomes a way of interacting with others on a level they feel comfortable with. People from mental health groups did not always necessarily have a lot of contact with people in these places of common interest. However the sense of familiarity of being in a place where people shared common goals gave them a good feeling.

“People go to places like the gym and the church they have things in common as they have similar interests...it gives them something to look forward to”

Black mental health issues, London

3.1. The benefits of community

All groups recognised the value that community brings, whether one belongs to a local community or one unified more by similar interests. When discussing the benefits of communities, participants often talked nostalgically about close knit communities of the past. The common benefits were centred on security and familiarity:

- Security and social comfort a sense of well being

“It's secure, you feel secure, you know where everything is. Like I know if I need resource I can go to the Zion Centre.”

White Mental Health Issues group, Manchester

- Feeling a sense of belonging and being part of an area where you feel settled

“What does community mean? That you're part of something, part of your area. You belong to it and it belongs to you.”

Single mothers, Manchester

- Power to create change through working collaboratively

“...people want to get involved with that, people will want to support that, people will want to volunteer for that, people want to get education to fit the role so that can grow and I don't want people from outside of the community to do that, I want people from inside the community to do that because it's up to us. We care about it.”

Single mothers, Birmingham

- Time out to take part in activities

“The gym is important for me because it's my space, no one wants nothing from me, well not like they do at work and at home.”

Single mothers, Manchester

4. A picture of current communities

The physical picture painted of the local communities of vulnerable groups currently are of places lacking in resources, work or social opportunities, impacted by anti-social behaviour and racism and perceived to be more fractured than the remembered communities of the past.

Several common themes emerged in discussions of local communities across all vulnerable groups:

- Nostalgia for the past and old communities
- Dislocation reported within communities
- Fear of crime preventing opportunities from community interaction (with the impact of this more prevalent amongst those with mental health issues)
- Poor physical environments

4.1. Nostalgia for old communities of the past

All groups reported that communities were 'not what they used to be'. It was felt that in former years there was cohesion, communication and support networks within local communities that no longer exists.

"The community spirit isn't as strong as it used to be when we could knock on each other's doors."

Black group, Manchester

"People used to actually dance with each other. Someone would come in to someone's house and there were parties everywhere. Someone would just come in and fly over and say "Look, come down to my party" and people had a good time. Now all those sorts of things - and people lived in communities that embraced everybody else, but communities like you asked tends to actually be focused on different cultures at the moment."

Black group with mental health issues, Hackney

Participants reported specifically that there is less community activity and community events bringing people together.

"The Eid Mela (fair) is a great way of getting people together, but needs to be nearer Eid time, and there should be more general melas (fairs) for all faiths to get everyone involved"

Female Asian group, Birmingham

“Every year we used to have Kingstanding carnival. It was wicked it was and you used to have parades go up the street and all the kids would be on floats ...it created loads of unity as well”

Single mothers, Birmingham

In addition, many were unhappy about the loss of community centres (which had closed down in recent years) and places for children to play.

“We did a fashion show and then we invited associations and stuff and they didn’t like what they were seeing, so they cut us off, we weren’t allowed to do it no more.”

White Groups with mental health issues, Manchester

“There are no provisions for teenagers and late teenagers there. I live in the flats there and we’ve got teenage kids in there all time, “What are you doing in here?” “I’ve got nowhere to go, I’m playing here” ...go in the lifts or go and sit in the community area. I think that perpetuates what you were saying. Because these kids have got nothing to doall the youth centres that used to be in these areas have gone, the community centres have gone.”

White groups with mental health issues, Manchester

4.2. Dislocation within communities

In contrast to the reported cohesion of the past, across all groups participants described fragmented and dislocated communities. Fundamentally the reported dislocation within communities was felt to be based on a lack of communication and trust within these communities.

“People don’t communicate. Men and women don’t communicate, that’s why you’ve got Face Book... parents don’t communicate with each other and that is why Face Book know more about your kids than you do, there is no communication.”

Single mothers, Manchester

One reported cause of this dislocation is based on cultural divisions. Cultural clashes were reported by all groups, albeit from different perspectives. Many reported new cultural groups joining communities, adding to the pre-existing cultural mix. Some people reported this pragmatically as a barrier to communication and therefore cohesion. Others also expressed some resentment and frustration at the impact of such ‘newcomers’ entering long-standing communities.

"In Hackney now there are several communities which are defined by mainly their mother tongue. We have the Somali community, the Turkish community, the African community, the Caribbean community; so that is sort of the building block of our own community. For the communities, the building block is that you speak the same language, you have the same culture, from that you build up and then it's self explanatory."

Black groups with mental health issues, Hackney

"At the end of the day, people who've lived here for how many years, are beginning to feel pushed out"

Single mothers, Hackney

The Somali community received a particularly large number of complaints in all locations and across all groups. All different ethnic groups complained about Somali people displaying anti-social behaviours within communities and expressed some resentment about this. It may be worth monitoring the conflicts arising from this perception as it could easily fuel racist actions against the Somali community.²

"I shouldn't be stereotyping but where I live there's lots of Somali people and they've got big families, the children are always on the streets, the streets have come every more dirty, so there's food everywhere. I've got Somalis who live near me and who now speak to me and they didn't realise that it caused problems with mice and what have you by having dirt in the garden, so that again is a cultural thing."

Black group, Manchester

Much of the resentment was based on a perception of certain cultural groups resisting integration and this leading to dislocation and fragmentation. This was recognised also by people who belong to such culturally-segregated groups.

"I mean if people move in I'm all for it, but I'm all for you being part of the community and integrating, but I don't think that they integrate themselves."

"I'm being honest, it's because we're surrounded by our own people."

Asian female group, Birmingham

Asian groups were also able to talk about the reasons for this lack of integration, with many feeling intimidated by a perception of racism experienced when living in white communities.

² It should be noted that whilst there were Somali members in one of our Black groups in Hackney, they were actively involved in the community rather than being socially isolated. Further research with this group may be considered necessary to gain a full view of the Somali perspective.

“When there was 9/11 we didn’t find any difference [in racism] because we were living in the community [Asian], but people who were living outside,...they were having concerns. In Handsworth there is no problem, but there are places where there is not many Asians living there. They were having problems, people looking at them, starting at them, speaking at them.”

“Even if I am surrounded by Asians at least we have a lot of things in common, whereas I know with non-Asians, like because I’m quite strict, I wouldn’t go clubbing or pubbing or for a drink at the pub and things like that, so I know that I can’t socialise much with the non-Asians or the non-Muslims, I wouldn’t feel confident.”

Female Asian group, Birmingham

Another reported cause of the cultural dislocation occurring was competitiveness which occurs within ethnic groups.

Basic jealousy was one reported area of division:

“Our biggest problem, some of us believe that we’re better than each other”

Black group with mental health issues, Hackney

“Especially when I first moved round there, and obviously I fixed up my house different to how they fixed up their house and it was a bit like what you were saying “Ooh, look at that, how come you’ve got that?” ...rich, you must have a rich baby father or you must have this or that.”

Single mothers, Manchester

There is also an evident lack of trust within communities as a result of endemic community level crime.

“I think what’s probably gone wrong is like a trust thing because obviously different things have happened and generations have changed through drugs and stuff like that, people are not trusting anybody anymore so that’s what stops the community.”

Single mothers, Birmingham

4.3. Fear of violence, crime and intimidation

Fear of violence and crime was prevalent across all groups. It was perceived to be particularly unwise to venture out in local areas at night in all areas visited. The repercussions of this fear would appear to have a negative impact not only on individuals and their families but also on communities, breeding further mistrust and protectionism.

“Certain parts of Moss Side I wouldn’t go at certain hours of night. I mean I used to walk around there and had the children there, I’ve lived there so I know. It’s only certain parts, not so much the guns as the gangs.”

Single mothers, Manchester

“You know you can’t walk out on the streets at night. I would never let my children wander around, they have to be in before it’s dark if they get out at all, so it’s that kind of fence that we’re up against.”

Black group, Manchester

The obvious impact of this was not only isolation of individuals within their communities:

“People are scared to come out of their houses and go and knock on the neighbours houses, you know, like you said, once they go in to their flat they lock the doors up and they’re scared to come out.”

Black group, Manchester

The situation is apparently self-perpetuating as people are too afraid to report crime for fear of the repercussions for their families, meaning that individuals are not caught and crime appears to continue unabated on their doorsteps.

“I saw gun shooting, I saw the people get the gun out, fire the shot, and the police came around and I was all prepared to give them - then I thought I value my life and my children’s lives more than giving them that information.”

Black group, Manchester

“There’s people that’s been living in this area all their lives that are thinking of moving away from the drugs and stuff and people are frightened to say anything in case there’s repercussions, a backlash.”

Single mothers, Birmingham

4.4. Poor physical environments

The physical areas that people described were felt to impact not only on their health and their children's health but also on the sense of local community. Issues were raised not only about the design of the buildings and surrounding residential areas themselves and but also the impact of crime, litter preventing social interactions and physical exercise for them and their children.

"Because of the way that my flats are, it's not an estate as such that I live on, I live on a single block flat and the area that we have, if we did send the children out, is a car park. The greenery that we do have it says 'not balls, no play', no nothing, so I do not send my daughter out to say "Here Kelly, just go outside and play". As such, she stays in with me, she reads her books, she does her homework. If we go out she gets her bike, we go for a walk, we go to the nearest park. We do something. She obviously still gets fresh air and things like that, but it's not the same."

Black group with mental health issues, Hackney

There was recognition that attempts had been made to redraw the physical environments deprived groups live in over the last decade or so. However this was felt to be more of a 'papering over' of the remaining issues and inherent poverty.

"That was the end of the 80's they started moving people out then at the beginning of the 90's they started rebuilding, so the people who remember the old Hulme, lived in the old Hulme, it was a very tight knit community, but for all the problemswhat they've done is they've demolished the area, started rebuilding and they've mixed old and new, they've mixed commercial housing and private housing, they've mixed everything together and at the moment they're still developing the community spirit. There has been so much change here and new people who don't know Hulme, existing Hulme people, you've got different classes."

White groups with mental health issues, Manchester

"It's been covered up by new buildings. It's a very, very poor and poverty stricken area"

White groups with mental health issues, Manchester

In some ways this poverty was seen to have a unifying effect.

"I think that this community has suffered a lot over a long time and it's built a very, very strong community spirit."

White groups with mental health issues, Manchester

4.5. Differences in pictures of communities between groups

There were variations, however, in the extent to which different vulnerable groups felt that they 'belonged' to either communities of place or communities of interest. It is apparent that some disadvantaged groups for example, such as single mothers, are more likely to feel part of their local community, whilst others choose not to or have been isolated from their local communities of place.

Some groups, such as those with mental health issues, are more likely to prefer being part of communities of interest, potentially as a result of negative experiences within their local communities. This is also true of Asian groups who report feeling isolated in mixed race communities by perceptions of racism. Perceptions of racism and cultural impacts in communities also clearly differed according to perspective.

All of these differences resulted in varying impacts on health and opportunity and these are detailed below.

Single mothers

Single mothers, more than all other vulnerable groups, emphasised the positive aspects of local community.

For many, having grown up in the local area, they felt that, whatever the problems experienced within it, they were a part of it. As they expressed it, they view themselves as 'insiders' whose knowledge and confidence in communicating with the different groups gives them a distinct power that would not be available to others or 'outsiders'.

"I suppose to people that was born here and brought up here, I mean this is where they feel comfortable, but I suppose to an outsider they may not feel comfortable here."

Single mothers, Manchester

"It's a familiar community, I think there's a lot of generations or family generations grown up and had children and they live round here."

Single mothers, Birmingham

For this reason, most single mothers had a very developed sense of belonging, reporting that they 'know everyone' and feel secure within their communities of place. This was not so true in Hackney however. The single mothers group in Hackney expressed more concern over their local community compared to the other mothers groups, with one participant asserting a lack of integration and the resulting feeling of not belonging.

“Integration will be brilliant in my community because I would be able to feel like I belong.”

Single Mothers, Hackney

All single mothers recognised the potential impact of undesirable physical and social environments on their children. Many talked of a lack of play space and safe environments to play in.

“I think [it’s] safe, but only because I’ve lived on Holly Street all my life so I know everybody, whoever now. But I do worry about my kids. My daughter’s only eight but I can’t let her play out when somebody’s driving past every other week and shooting.”

Single mothers, Hackney

“They have a bonfire [on the green space near us], everyone puts all their shit thereand then on bonfire night they light itteenagers are there throwing rockets in each others faces, and my kids are there [so I was] shitting my self. It was like Beirut outside, you feel like you’re in Afghanistan, [with the fear of] fireworks or a gun shot.”

Single mothers, Manchester

Not all vulnerable groups experienced such extreme environments and there were suggestions from other groups that the differentiating factor may be the layout of the residential area. Those in cul-de-sacs or smaller residential roads reported satisfaction with the environment for kids, suggesting possibilities for improvement in the future.

“The house that I’ve just moved from in Chorlton was a cul-de-sac and there were always loads of kids playing there. I think it’s actually more about the feasibility of the kid playing rather than the danger aspect....[In] cul-de-sacs there are never any cars driving around so the kids can get away with it.”

White groups with mental health issues, Manchester

Single mothers appear to belong to less communities of interest than other vulnerable groups. Those mentioned were predominantly related to their children – for example associated with the school, or sport or dance classes the children took. The local supermarket was also raised as a place for socialising, although arguably this is also a community of place. However, those who did have other interests and communities, such as a gym membership or groups of friends to go clubbing or to bars with, reported the benefits of it for their own self-esteem and wellbeing.

BME groups

Comments from Asian and Black groups portray very different community pictures. Whilst the majority of Afro-Caribbean participants appear to be well-integrated into communities of place, Asian and African participants are more segregated within local communities. Similarly, whilst Asian participants reflected on strong communities built on the common interests of their cultural and religious groups, Afro-Caribbean participants commented that they would like to meet more people from their background but did not have the opportunity.

Group discussion also revealed a degree of conflict between the various BME groups; between Asian and Afro-Caribbean and between all groups and Africans (particularly Somalis), emphasising that communities can often be divided into sub-groups along racial and religious lines.

“It is religion because the Muslims are living there, but there’s black people there who are living there who have now turned to Muslim, Somalians are there. So I think what Tony Blair did back in the day, saying all these people that came over from Somalia, the asylum seekers that came over, from Iraq or wherever, where do we put them? Let’s put them in Birmingham, but we can put them in a particular part of Birmingham where they’ll actually feel comfortable, purely because there’s Halal meat there, Asian shops, mosques, blah, blah, blah, so let’s put them in Spark Hill or Adenbrooke blah, blah, blah, and that is how the community is built. It’s not just people who’ve lived there for ages and ages, you’ve got people who are coming and going, and the first port of call is there.”

Asian male group with mental health issues, Birmingham

“In every religion, in every caste there’s good and bad so you can’t just point your finger at one particular religion.”

Asian male group, Birmingham

Some participants, particularly in Asian groups, were intimidated by a perceived racism experienced in their local communities but the majority in the Birmingham area avoid living in ‘White’ communities.

“I’ve got two neighbours, and I’m not being rude, they’re both white, they have never spoken to me or smiled at me, they sort of blank me.”

“If I was a person on my own with non-Muslims or non-Asians I would be terrified, I would not move in to an area where there is 99% of non-Asians or non-Muslims, I wouldn’t dare to move in to such an area because I’m always frightened because they might look at me because of the way I dress, or they might look at me because of the

issues that are going on around the world. I don't want to be terrified by things like that all my life, I've got my life to get on with."

Asian female group, Birmingham

There were some examples of white people making efforts to communicate but these were reportedly more likely to be the older generation.

"We have got a nice family, they're white, she works for the church I think, she's a - I think she has one of them collars on and she is ever so nice, so friendly. Who won the election in America, is it Obama? The first time what happened, she sent leaflets to everybody in the road and invited us to her house... I thought that is nice...so we went and watch the Obama thing and she had a few others friends and I had a really nice lunch there and everything. Since then we have made such a friendship, whichever food I had left over in fasting I used to pass it on."

"Yeah it's the young ones. As I said the elderly are really nice and I want to communicate with them."

Asian female group, Birmingham

The resulting impact of perceived racism was that many Asian people are keeping to themselves within insular communities. It was reported that Somali people are also remaining within their cultural group.

"I feel happy and then I feel scared at the same time. Because I haven't blended in that well"

Asian female group, Birmingham

We feel more confidence, we feel more safe in our own community."

Asian female group, Birmingham

People with mental health issues

People with mental health issues expressed a particular lack of involvement in, and engagement with, the local communities in which they live. The views of people with mental health issues suggest more than just a perceived loss of community cohesion, with some placing themselves on the fringes of local communities.

"I'm not really involved in my community so to speak but it seems like there is a community and it's nice."

White group with mental health issues, Manchester

"I don't know many people from around my area."

White group with mental health issues, Manchester

"They are neighbours, but I don't think of them as community."

White group with mental health issues, London

Fear of violence is also particularly profound in mental health groups with many people relating experiences of violence or stories of other people they had seen experiencing it. As a result, many were nervous within the areas they lived. Some were isolated completely whilst others talked to immediate neighbours only.

"[I feel] a bit nervous after [being mugged] and when my son moved out he put locks on all the windows and doors, everything"

White group with mental health issues, Manchester

Many of those with mental health issues preferred to be part of communities of interest instead:

"I spend most of the vast majority of my time in Chorlton, that's where I work and that's where I do a lot of my socialising."

White group with mental health issues, Manchester

"I would say I have no time for socialising, because I am so busy with my own life, so for me it is enough, hello, I'm happy with that."

White group with mental health issues, Manchester

BME groups with mental health issues

The isolation experienced by white people with mental health issues is apparently even more profound for those suffering mental health issues in Black and Asian groups. A greater proportion feels distant and separate from their local community when compared to their counterparts in white groups. The isolation and fear experienced by white groups with mental health issues is compounded by fear of racism. BME groups with mental health issues are then further isolated within their own ethnic communities due to a stigma and lack of understanding within BME groups of mental health issues.

Within the Asian mental health groups, the females in particular focused on jealousy and competition within their communities and its impact on their feeling of isolation and social exclusion. People with mental health issues are often left unsupported as their condition is not understood as mental health is rarely talked about.

"I mean if you're doing well they can't see that, there's jealousy, if you're not doing well then they just put you down even more and, you know, we don't get that kind of support mentally like you would like to."

Female Asian group with mental health issues, Birmingham

"[There is a] stigma about mental health, [you should] educate others about mental health."

Female Asian group with mental health issues, Birmingham

Additionally, these women did not feel supported by services available to them, they complained about lack of offers for counselling and other support other than medication from their GP's. Yet their GP's were their only source of support as they were unaware of any other places they could seek advice. They mentioned their local GP surgery in Birmingham which segregated the waiting room in two halves with a curtain for women and men, they felt that this was unnecessary and imposed segregation between men and women. They expressed a desire to be more involved in the communities whether that is with their local community of place through more ability to get involved in social activities or their communities of interest

"A GP surgery should be a common place for all, if you have a personal health issue you can see a lady doctor but that is about it"

Female Asian group with mental health issues, Birmingham

For the male Asian groups the focus was more on the perception of racism from other communities, which influences their level of comfort when they are in their local environment:

"You can't go and play with the kids in the park without a bunch of kids from different cultures eyeballing you which makes you in danger and your kids in danger so you don't feel free do you."

Male Asian group with mental health issues, Birmingham

As a result many of those within the Asian and Black communities with mental health issues are avoiding their local areas, which they find particularly stressful.

"Sometimes you wake up, people are smoking ganja around the corner or someone driving fast. It's just like madness, morning to night. If I have a good day I try to get outside from the house, I try to get away from my area, I try to go somewhere to chill out, or try to link someone up and go somewhere in a car, just away from my area."

Male Asian group with mental health issues, Birmingham

There was a distinct desire expressed to change this situation:

"I am not actively involved in my community, something I want to change."

Black mental health issues, London

"I don't really take part in community activities but if I was going to it would be more health and fitness, recreation activities for kids, trying to get them back in to programmes like football, basketball, and Trevor was talking along the lines of maybe training and jobs and trying to basically get people back in to work, that's my main thing anyway."

Black group with mental health issues, Hackney

5. Suggested community solutions

Across all vulnerable groups participants expressed considerable enthusiasm for finding community-based solutions to the issues they had described in their communities and also in their own life experiences. They were inspired by the idea of change and in particular about communities themselves harnessing this change. This enthusiasm took several forms:

- A desire to reconnect and recreate lines of communication within communities and across cultural groups.
- A will to use this act of reconnection and togetherness to initiate and build opportunities within communities e.g. by sharing skills or simply building confidence.
- Aspirations in particular for solutions driven for and by the next generation, their children.
- The importance of change being delivered via a partnership between trained professionals but also importantly with those who have experience of the issues being addressed.

The term 'community empowerment' was not used amongst the vulnerable groups consulted. The word 'empowerment' was found to be off-putting as it was not a familiar word that they would use in everyday life. Participants instead suggested 'community unity', 'community action' and 'community enabling'.

Groups were able to generate several specific ideas for community-based solutions, many of them were centred around tackling youth issues which was seen as a real tangible way to create change. Here are some examples of the ideas suggested:

- Preventative programmes for youth (particularly for ages 13-18)
 - Programmes similar to those designed for youth offenders but for youth that have not necessarily committed a crime. Offering activities like rock climbing and inspirational lectures, run by young people who have grown up in the community.
- Encouraging ambition and aspiration
 - Teachers helping children develop their aspirations i.e. factoring in work experience placements which are more tailored to their ambitions – these work experience placements could be run by people in the community who have gained work
- Role models
 - Professionals taking an active interest in their communities and giving something back
 - People from the community coming in to schools and offering sessions on career development and life skills
 - Sporting bodies actively getting Asian children involved in the 2012 Olympics
- Inclusive social activities for the family
 - Activities for the children and parents to participate in together in one place and share skills
- Creating more community cohesion

- Bringing people together in community centres for social events to create more communication and social support. These could be based on popular activities like music and dance.
- Bringing different cultures together under one roof to break down barriers and learn about each others' cultures.

Some of these ideas are worked up in more detail below.

Empowering youth

The strength of feeling across all groups regarding youth issues and empowering young people was significant. Concerns focused heavily on a lack of suitable role models in the community. Parents want the best for their children and group discussions often revealed that for parents this means giving young people the opportunities that they did not have. Various possible solutions were suggested which all involved equipping young people with life skills and greater involvement in the community at their core.

"I think that children of Hackney should be led to believe that they could go to university... I didn't in a million years believe I could ever grow up and go to university and I'm pushing my daughter now, I'm telling her that it's normal to go to university."

Single Mothers, Hackney

Idea: Role Models, professionals and local people working collaboratively

Problem:

- Growing gang culture and the increased threat of violence and intimidation from youth groups
- Parents fear for the futures of their children
- Lack of activities for young people to get involved in
- Making community inclusive for young people
- Encouraging young people's ambition and aspirations

Solution:

- Parents and other adults from the local community act as role models and get involved in:
 - Actively engaging young people through after school activities
 - Help to teach life skills like advice from young Mums on pregnancy
 - Teach vocational everyday life skills like handling money
 - Provide young people with someone to talk to about their problems
- Would contribute to a greater sense of community
- Would help to bridge the generational gap

Building skills and opportunity

'Community Swap' is an idea that developed through discussions with the single mothers group in Manchester and white mental health issues group in Hackney.

Idea: Community Swap

Problem:

- A lack of skills, and resources through which skills can be developed, inhibiting work opportunities and the ability to get involved in the community.
- Participants missed out on education in the past, but want to develop new skills and confidence
- Many adults would not feel comfortable in the environment of a local college.

Solution:

- Individual skills can benefit the wider community, freely trading skills at 'Community Swap'.
- Would help users develop new skills
- Would encourage integration and reinforce a sense of community and togetherness.
- The casual and open environment of the Community Swap would give those apprehensive about registering for courses at the local college a new route to developing skills.

Tackling racism

An idea to tackle racism and create more inter-cultural community cohesion was suggested in the mixed sex Black group in Manchester.

Group discussions brought to the fore the seriousness of racism. A significant proportion of participants, especially in Birmingham, were affected in some way by racism or aware of its impact on communities.

Idea: One Community/Community Centres

Problem:

- Communities are not only divided by geography, but can often be divided along racial and religious lines.
- It is possible for conflict to arise as the result of intolerance bred by a lack of understanding.

“At the moment it’s all segregated. You’ve got the Somali one, the Irish one, the West Indian one.”

Black Group, Manchester

Solution:

- Participants drew attention to the importance of countering ignorance, and developing and nurturing lines of communication between segregated groups.
- Some strongly advocated the central role community centres should play in facilitating and teaching cultural understanding.

“We’re going to learn to hold conversations and get to know about their culture and they will get to know ours.”

Black Group, Manchester

5.1. Current awareness and involvement in community activities

Some participants mentioned involvement in or awareness of community empowerment activity already in existence in their communities. Two of these are documented as case studies below.

- Time Bank in Shepherds Bush
- Hackney Homes

Case Study: Time Bank

'Time Bank' is an existing national charity that seeks to match volunteers with suitable projects that fit around their life styles and time constraints. Time Bank works with businesses and other charitable organisations develop volunteer recruitment programmes, and helps to match volunteers based on their skills, passions and the experiences they want to gain.

Time Bank argues that volunteering and community involvement are a vital part of healthy society, and since its formation claims it has attracted more than 220,000 people to volunteer in the UK. Furthermore, the charity provides a comprehensive support network, a dedicated helpline and email and service.

Case Study: Hackney Homes

Hackney Homes is a not-for-profit organisation launched in 2006, and is responsible for managing council homes in Hackney. The primary function of the organisation is to manage rent collections and maintenance on Hackney Council homes. In addition, Hackney Homes goes further and liaises with other local organisations to ensure the successful coordination of regeneration projects in Hackney and helps to make Hackney a pleasant environment to both live and work.

"He doesn't work for Hackney Homes, but he's a DJ and he does DJing for free and they do face painting for the kids and things like that and they come to each estate and they put on like a day of food and everyone gets a ticket and you get free food and you can go and get advice about housing maybe, just different advice from people and just have a fun day with the kids in the summertime and they put on like bouncy castles and face painting for the kids and different activities for the kids to do and they do a small section where they kids design their own T-shirts and things like that, but he also has a job, you know, he does his time every summer to do that and I sometimes help and I don't mind doing that."

Single mothers group, Hackney

5.2. The barriers to community empowerment

Whilst enthusiasm to find solutions was strong, participants were also realistic about the challenges presented by implementation. Across the vulnerable groups the main barriers or potential issues raised related to:

Scale of challenge & resources

Participants recognised the sheer scale of the challenge and the resource intensive nature of such solutions. Many suggested restoring community centres to create a focal point for all members of the community to interact, however they wanted these to have more inclusive programmes and activities, for instance a parenting skills drop in centre, a massage room for mothers to have some time out and a crèche for the children, all ideally under one roof. Participants did recognise that this would be expensive, which led many to express a willingness to get involved. They suggested devolving power to the communities to offer their time and skills which would help build individual skills and confidence as well as contributing to improving their communities.

'Red Tape'

Participants often perceived the government regulations, funding requirements and 'red tape' would be significant obstacles for implementing change. Some spoke from experience of particular community activities they had been involved in, for others it was a general mistrust and apathy towards government.

"The government make you jump through hoops and tick loads of boxes and put unfair statistics on it to say you've got to meet this deadline, that deadline and the other deadline, I think as long as you can prove that you're doing something in the community the government should support that and watch it grow"

Single Mothers, Birmingham

Some participants recognised the importance of management of funding, though they hoped that they would be trusted to take on real responsibilities without too much government intervention:

"It would be good to get to run the thing without too much interference, of course check that the funding is getting spent appropriately but don't make it so I daren't spend £1 on a bottle of milk for the community centre for fear that it will be taken out of next years funding"

Single Mothers, Manchester

Scepticism about achieving meaningful change

Participants felt strongly that only meaningful change that would affect a wide range of people would be worth the effort, there was some scepticism that these solutions would stay on paper and not necessarily lead to 'real' change.

"If it doesn't move anywhere, if it just stays locked up in a file, which is absolute waste of time"

Single Mothers, Manchester

Lack of confidence & fear

Participants conveyed an overall basic lack of confidence in their own abilities to deliver which was rooted in fear of failure

"I am all fired up, but at the same time shitting it if I had my own business, having a car that you know is yours and your kids striving, but it can all go what if it all gets taken from me tomorrow I'm scared of that"

Single Mothers, Manchester

This sense of fear and lack of confidence was particularly prevalent for groups suffering from mental health issues. Their solutions focused on therapy for people in the community with mental health issues, yet they revealed that the nature of their condition might prevent them from being receptive to help.

"It exhausts me I personally spend most of my time literally trying to avoid it, I actively don't want anything to do with it, which is why the thought of therapy is something I desperately want but might not be able to participate in...its selfish but depression is very tiring"

White Female Mental Health Issues, Manchester

Practical considerations & security

Practical considerations like securing buildings, preventing 'trouble' and criminal activity which can occur with large numbers gathering around and targeting such buildings was noted, especially by those who had experience of using youth centres. Some of these challenges were recognised to be considerable and would therefore need careful preparation and investment to counter. However, participants were able to make the following suggestions:

- Communication and information distributed by members of the local community themselves
 - In the hope that familiarity and friendly faces will encourage people to take part.
- Starting local and small and then building out
 - Rallying support from estate/local vicinity and then stretching further would make the challenge more achievable

- Not running groups late at night
 - Should help prevent the fear of gatherings becoming breeding grounds for crime

“We can’t open until 10 o’clock because it’s a risk to the staff and young people. We can’t open ...10 o’clock, the kids will be in bed, and trouble may shoot up the place, we can’t open until 10 o’clock, it’s not safe to”

Single Mothers, Manchester

6. Conclusions

The main task of the qualitative research was to explore the concept of empowering communities to improve wellbeing. The outputs are designed to help the development of guidance on how to empower communities from bottom up and how best to motivate deprived groups to lead healthier lifestyles, as well as an indication of some of the practical barriers.

Discussions with the target deprived groups have provided a rich picture not only of the communities that people currently live in and belong to, but also their definition of community itself and their ideas for using the power of community to address some of the challenges they face. Overall, terms preferred were 'community action' or 'community-based solutions'.

BME groups

The experience of deprived BME groups is not uniform, as identified by the literature review. Whilst racism impacted in some form on all BME groups, it was with differing effect. Some groups, such as Asian and Somali groups, are more likely to be socially excluded from communities of place. They are more likely than generally more integrated Black Afro-Caribbean groups to experience and perceive racism within these communities. The impact of this is a self-perpetuating cycle where isolated communities turn further in on themselves and racist attitudes increase as inter-cultural communication decreases.

Black Afro-Caribbean groups also reported experience of racism but primarily in other areas of life rather than in their local community. Several stories emerged of discrimination within workplaces and also of the physical abuse of police officers. For many this had long-lasting impacts on mental health, willingness to engage in services and trust in professionals. It also compounded the sense of despair about job opportunities for the most deprived. Some expressed a desire for more developed communities of interest within cultural groups. There was a suggestion from Asian females to create more opportunities for women to gain skills through group activities for women, like henna painting classes and developing work skills.

All BME groups welcomed the opportunity for more inter-cultural communication within communities. This was perceived to have the potential to break down lines of conflict and address racism by working against ignorance. Community-organised cultural events, sport and music based activities would act as a draw as would the opportunity to interact within and across cultural communities.

Mental health

Mental health issues such as depression and anxiety are difficult issues for people to discuss. This is both due to the stigma in society about mental health and due to the person's own difficulty in accepting and addressing their issues. Men in particular find it difficult to talk about their mental health and this will

need to be addressed in the delivery of services. Many people that we spoke to were getting little help with their depression or anxiety partly because of this reticence to admit an issue until it is too severe to ignore but also because of inappropriate or insufficient services. Drug-based solutions were not seen to be desirable and many called for more opportunity to see psychotherapists or councillors.

Many people with mental health issues are not integrated in local communities and would welcome more community-based support. However, community-based support for mental health issues is not seen to be appropriate for all people with mental health issues as many feel that their clinical issue is an individual matter or that they would not feel comfortable discussing it. However, for some, enabling people with histories of mental health issues to gain involvement in running cultural activities or groups with others experiencing mental health issues was seen to be beneficial. It would help build confidence and skills for those leading the sessions, potentially in partnership with professionals and would enable the delivery of support from people who truly understand

BME mental health

Black and Asian people with mental health issues appear to be more dissatisfied with their experiences both within their communities and in their interaction with services than any other group. Issues of racism experienced by the other BME groups are compounded by feelings of stigma related to having mental health issues. Issues of social isolation and lack of confidence characterising BME groups with mental health issues are compounded by perceptions and fear of racism.

Asian mental health sufferers report particular issues of social dislocation as they feel both excluded from White communities and also struggle to discuss their mental health issues within their Asian communities due to lack of understanding.

Solutions suggested involve working with people from BME groups with mental health issues to help educate other members of their ethnic communities. This group would also welcome health and fitness based activities as a vehicle to get more involved in local communities in general. Female Asian groups would value community-based opportunities to interact in an all-female environment which is safe as many miss this currently.

Single parents

The literature review concluded that lone parents are particularly at risk of poverty and this was confirmed by the qualitative research with this group. Single mothers in deprived communities are living under a considerable level of financial and emotional stress as they struggle to bring up children on low wages or on benefits. This stress is compounded by unhealthy physical environments lacking in resource for their children and plagued by anti-social behaviour and often the presence of the local drug

culture. Job opportunities and avenues for self-improvement for themselves and their children are perceived to be limited.

Single mothers, more than any other deprived group consulted, have a strong sense of unity and belonging within their local communities which offer the benefit of security and social comfort. They are less likely to belong to communities of interest beyond those associated with children. Perceived solutions suggested lie in harnessing the unity and drive of single mothers to provide the best opportunities for their children by sharing skills in a community setting. Bringing mothers and children together to share and learn new skills is perceived to have social capital benefits for both parties. Further statutory measures would be necessary to fully overcome the considerable barriers single mothers face to gaining in financial security which is seen to be strongly linked to the ability to eat and live healthily.

7. APPENDICES

a. Full recruitment breakdown

- 9 Groups spread across 3 locations (London/Birmingham/Manchester)

Location	Participant type	Specification
Target group 1 London: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hackney - Catham - DeBeauvoir - Haggerston - Queensbridge - Victoria 	Female single parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 participants • SEG: 5 DE, 3 C2 • Gender: All female • Mix of ages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x 18-24 • 6 x 25-39
Target group 2 Birmingham: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kingstanding - Erdington 	Female single parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 participants • SEG: 5 DE, 3 C2 • Gender: All female • Mix of ages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 x 18-24 • 6 x 25-39
Target group 3 Manchester: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moss Side 	Female single parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 participants • SEG: 9 DE, 1 C2 • Gender: All Female • Mix of ages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 x 18-24 • 7 x 25-39

<p>Target group 4 Manchester:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rusholme 	<p>BME – Black</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 participants • SEG: 8 DE, 2 C2 • Mix of ages: • 3 x 25-39 • 4 x 40-55 • 3 x 56-65 • 65+ • Ethnicity: Afro Caribbean/African
<p>Target group 5 Birmingham:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Alum Rock - Aston - Handsworth - Smethwick 	<p>BME – Asian</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male Group: 4 • Female Group: 4 • SEG: 5 DE, 3 C2, • Mix of ages: • 1 x 18-24 • 4 x 25-39 • 1 x 40-55 • 1 x 56-65 • Ethnicity: 4 Pakistani, 4 Bangladeshi
<p>Target group 6 London:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hackney - Chatham - Clapton - Hackney Wick - Leabridge - Queensbridge - Rectory 	<p>BME – Black mental health issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 participants • SEG: 4 DE, 4 C2 • Gender: 4 Male, 4 Female • Mix of ages: • 2 x 18-24 • 3 x 25-39 • 3 x 40-55 • Ethnicity: 2 Black Somali, 3 Black Caribbean, 2 Black African, 1 Other Black
<p>Target group 7 Birmingham:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small Heath - Edgbaston - Sparkbrook 	<p>BME – Asian mental health issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Male Group: 4 • Female Group: 3 (+ 1 face to face interview) • SEG: 5 DE, 3 C2 • Mix of ages: • 2 x 18-24 • 5 x 25-39

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 x 40-55 • Ethnicity: • Ethnicity: 4 Pakistani, 4 Bangladeshi
Target group 8 Manchester: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moss Side 	Female White British – mental health issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 participants • SEG: 8 DE, 2 C2 • Gender: All female • Mix of ages: • 3 x 18-24 • 1 x 25-39 • 3 x 40-55 • 3 x 56-65
Target group 9 London: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hackney - Chatham - De Beauvoir - Eastdown - Haggerston - Kings Park - Northwold - Rectory 	Male White British – mental health issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8 participants • SEG: 4 DE, 4 C2 • Gender: all male • Mix of ages: • 3 x 18-24 • 1 x 25-39 • 1 x 40-55 • 1 x 55-65 • 2 x 65+

b. Discussion guide

Goal: capture:

- People's life experiences and interactions (with others and with services)
- A picture of different communities and how they work
- Exploring community issues and people's suggested solutions incl the role of empowerment

Introductions [10 mins]

- Explain why we're here, how it will run (THERE WILL BE A BREK HALF WAY THROUGH)
- No rights and wrongs, important to hear from everyone
- Recording (confidentiality)
- Each introduce themselves – name, what you do, who you live with, any hobbies/interests that you have (can be anything that you like doing) *Single mothers – check ages of children.*

Communities of place

General discussion [20 mins]

- Tell me about where you live - what's Hackney (districts) / Manchester / Birmingham like to live in?
- What are the streets like? Buildings?
- What is there to do round here?
- How do you feel living where you do? E.G IF NECESSARY PROMPT Safe/unsafe? Happy/Sad?
- How long have you lived here? (ask each person in turn)
- What about the people who live here? What are they like? EXPLORE
- Is there a sense of local community?
 - Who do you know, who do you see, who do you talk to, who don't you don't talk to in your community
- Have you seen any changes or has it remained the same? Have there been newcomers and what is the effect of this?
- Explore trust, safety, inclusion, exclusion
 - Do you feel safe in your local community?
 - Who do you talk to?
 - Who do you trust?
 - Who don't you trust?
- Do you feel a part of your local community? What makes you feel this way?
 - Do you *want* to be part of your local community? Why / why not?
 - What are the benefits of being part of your local community?
 - What stops you feeling part of your local community?
 - What would help you feel more part of it?
- HAND OUT TYPICAL DAY EXERCISE

Capturing pictures [20 mins]

- Draw out map of who makes up people's immediate / local community (on blank paper)

- Allow 5-10 mins for people to do this, then discuss:
 - What works and what doesn't work in these communities
 - What are the issues
 - What could make them better?

Communities of interest [20 mins]

- Are there any other sorts of community that people are part of or are aware of which might not be physical or based in your local area? DISCUSS BRIEFLY to introduce idea, FLIPCHART if helpful
10 mins:

- Work in pairs to brainstorm other communities that people might be part of (with some prompts if people get stuck e.g. sports activities, other parents of children's school, children's groups, religious groups, people you work with)
- Individually, people draw on other communities onto their previous map / new page

10 mins

- Feedback and brainstorm as a group – different communities and what they are like
- Discuss as a group – issues, benefits, how these communities makes people feel, any issues
 - What needs to happened to make these communities better?

BREAK: 10 – 15 MINS (if you like, give out LIFE PICTURE for people to fill out if they are doing nothing, but would be good if they are bonding!)

85 MIN TO THIS POINT – YOU SHOULD BE OVER HALF WAY THROUGH NOW – JUST OVER AN HOUR LEFT

Life experiences [20 MINS]

- What about you personally, what is life like for you in these communities? DISCUSS. *For Single mothers PROBE AT ALL POINTS ALSO – for their children?*
- Give out LIFE PICTURE (A prompt to explore how people are feeling about – work, family, where they live, money, their health etc at the moment) and allow people 10 MINS to fill in.
- Refer to LIFE PICTURE (but reassure don't need to discuss any particular part)
- Obviously the goal is to be as happy, content and well as possible but what are the things that stop that at the moment?
 - What's good about life at the moment?
 - What's difficult? Particularly probe according to group e.g. Mental health – socialising?
 - What stops you feeling well and happy (e.g. smoking, time, money, stress, family pressures)
 - What would help to overcome these things e.g. easier access to healthy foods, more 20MPH speed zones, schools involvement in feeding children, more play areas / safer environments to exercise in
 - How do services (like GP, job centres, advice centres) help / not help and why

Community definition and what it can do [20 MINS]

- What is a 'community' / what does 'community' mean to you? FLIPCHART
- Do you think your communities have a role in helping people live better? If so how? If not why
- What are the main issues for you and your communities? DISCUSS ENSURING EVERYONE SPEAKS – PROBE SPECIFICALLY FOR BY EACH VULNERABLE GROUP i.e. single mothers
- Whose role is it to make things better? Go through each issue if appropriate
- What is your role? PROBE – what could you do? Have you ever done anything before? What made you do that? What impact did it have? What do other people in your community do?
- What are the barriers to people taking action to improve their communities / address issues

Examples of community empowerment [20 MINS]

Explain: in some areas communities have, with the help of funding etc from organisations and from local government, set up schemes or groups to build the strength of their communities and help people within it

Show COMMUNITY ACTION and talk through the examples.

- Check everyone understands.
- Overall, how would they describe this idea overall to a friend? What would they call it? Community Action? What does it mean? What do they think of it as an idea?

For each idea:

- What do you think of it? Is it a good idea, bad idea?
 - What's good about it?
 - What aren't you sure about?
- Can you think of anything that could be done in your community to help overcome issues in this way? How? / Why not? IF NECESSARY REFER BACK TO PREVIOUS ISSUES MENTIONED and let people discuss in pairs.
- Would you want to be part of activities like this? Why / why not?
- What would encourage you to become part of it?
- Do you think other people for whom it might be designed would want to be part of it?
 - What would stop them wanting to? PROBE PRACTICALITIES E.G. TIME, COST
 - What would overcome that?
 - How would you encourage others to become part of it?

c. A note on regional differences

London (Hackney)

New affluence and regeneration

New more affluent communities growing and entering Hackney – now co-existing amongst the long-standing deprived communities who view them as ‘yuppies’.

“For example, Broadway, near London Fields, that’s completely changed. I think that used to be more community based. And also Hoxton area used to be different as well, but I think there’s a lot more, is it upper class type of thing? They call them the yuppie types.”

Single mothers, Hackney

“It’s becoming quite hip for them because they’re moving in and changing a lot of stuff to suit them.”

Single mothers, Hackney

For single mothers in particular this is having the impact of dividing the community and making their own community of local ‘mothers’ in particular less cohesive and supportive than in the other areas visited. They also perceive longer term impacts of this for the next generation.

“We just see them hanging out at sandwich bars and stuff....In fact they send their nannies with their children to the centres.”

“Because if your attitude is a certain way, children are not born a certain way and obviously when you go to a community based school your children have to integrate and they just keep themselves to one corner and they’re not integrating on that level. So I think that’s really bad because all children will communicate with each other and play with each other, but if the parents have an issue then they’re going to pass that on their children and I think that’s where it’s really, it’s disgusting basically.”

Single mothers, Hackney

Postcode territories

Hackney, more than the other areas, appeared to have very clearly delineated gangs according to territory or postcode. Communities are therefore more strictly localised and divided, particularly for young people who would not venture into another gang’s postcode:

“There's a lot of gangs around here and if I send him over the shop for an onion, you know, he says 'Mum I can't go because Holly Street's out'”

“It all depends what part of Hackney you live in....It's like Holly Street can't go do London Fields and London Fields can't pass through Holly Street.”

Single mothers, Hackney

Manchester (Moss-side and Hulme)

There were no strong differentiating factors between Manchester and the two other areas. Two minor factors were:

- The media notoriety of Moss-side and of the drug wars of the 1980s were mentioned as a particular feature.
- Overall, it would appear that Manchester was potentially the most cohesive and mixed of the areas visited in terms of community spirit born out of shared poverty and challenges. This was particularly pronounced in the Single Mothers group.

Birmingham (Haggerston)




In Birmingham race issues were particularly pronounced. Many commented on the race riots which occurred between Black and Asian groups in the preceding weeks before the focus groups took place. Young Asian men spoke particularly about being discriminated by the group and the female Asian groups spoke most about the isolation they felt within white local communities. There was a more pronounced sense of segregation along racial / cultural lines and this may be a result of more geographically defined separations between cultural groups in residential communities. In Moss-side and Hackney different cultural and racial groups were intermixed meaning that there were less areas described as 'a White area' or an 'Asian area'.

d. Sample of life pictures from the focus groups

Single mothers group, Birmingham




Life picture...

How do you feel about the following at the moment...?

				Why?
Work	✓			Not enough pay. divide between uniform / non uniform
Family			✓	close family, even though on my own have good family support
Money	✓			debt, running the house + car, feeding clothing kids
Friends/social life		✓		feel that I don't get out enough get to be me.
Health			✓	good health need to loose weight but getting there
The area where I live (environment)	✓			dislike it, dirty,
My community (people)		✓		
My/my children's future		✓		course want better for kids don't feel unico here is best for them,




Life picture...

How do you feel about the following at the moment...?

				Why?
Work	✓			can't get a job that fits my needs and that of the family's.
Family		✓		
Money	✓			never have enough to treat the kids or go out anywhere.
Friends/social life			✓	without my friends I wouldn't go or do anything.
Health		✓		
The area where I live (environment)	✓			I don't always feel safe.
My community (people)			✓	
My/my children's future	✓			I would like to move out of Hackney to give them a better life.

Life picture...




How do you feel about the following at the moment...?

				Why?
Work	✓			I'm depressed depressed about at queenbridge + feder express. I would to complete my electrician course and get full-time employment Dont see them enough because of work.
Family		✓		
Money	✓			money is always a problem. you work, work work and you cannot enjoy life or have the things you want.
Friends/social life	✓			Dont have enough time.
Health		✓		reasonably healthy, but I tend to eat on the go as I have no time to prepare before hand.
The area where I live (environment)			✓	I'm fine Hackney is my home, in every shape, size or form. NO ONE can take their choices
My community (people)	✓			every one has a good attitude
My/my children's future	✓			Scared for them.

From Asian MHI issues




Life picture...

How do you feel about the following at the moment...?

				Why?
Work	✓			Too many people out of work, no jobs available.
Family			✓	
Money	✓			Everything now is very expensive to buy, and the prices of all bills, Petrol too high.
Friends/social life		✓		Friends these days just want to use you, not very good friends these days.
Health	✓			Doctors don't really care about your health, just give you painkillers. Not proper treatment that you would need.
The area where I live (environment)		✓		Too many rats, rubbish, pollution.
My community (people)	✓			Not too friendly, not caring about anyone.
My/my children's future		✓		I worry about my children's future, because now all the problems are getting worse day by day, not improving. Children are not safe.












Life picture...

How do you feel about the following at the moment...?

				Why?
Work		✓		its not what I want to be doing + doesn't challenge me but it supports me well + I'm grateful to be employed
Family		✓		my family are in London so they're not really a part of my daily life - and we're pretty disfunctional ... but I love 'em.
Money			✓	I stopped drinking + smoking a while ago + get work full time so I seem to have £ to spare for the 1st time in my life
Friends/social life			✓	I'm not massively sociable anymore since stopping drinking (!) but we got amazing friends + couldn't be happier
Health		✓		need to get fit need to eat better
The area where I live (environment)			✓	it makes me comfortable I like my house
My community (people)		✓		I'm not really involved in my community so to speak but it seems like there <u>is</u> a community + its nice
My/my children's future			✓	its exciting.... (I'm still young!)

Life picture...

How do you feel about the following at the moment...?

				Why?
Work				not enough hours or money.
Family				Love ^{staying.} (HAPPY)
Money				need more
Friends/social life				Good life
Health		50% 		Need to stop smoking.
The area where I live (environment)				Getto need to get out.
My community (people)				not very much of a community.
My/my children's future				Want them to have the best, stuff that I never have