

Policy Brief

Cultural translation and interpreting of Covid-19 risks among London's migrant communities (AH/V013769/1)

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KEY INFO

Research question: How do migrant communities in London receive Public Health messages and how can Public Health messaging be improved for these communities?

Policy area or themes:

- Guidance, Messaging and Behaviour Change
- Places and Communities
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Methods: 688 online survey responses and 183 interviews

Geographical area: Mainly London

Research stage: In progress

Summary of the research

This research addresses the often-noted disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on migrant communities and the difficulty of reaching those communities with Public Health messages. To address this problem, we studied how different and diverse language and cultural communities receive information about Covid-19, interpreted/translated it according to their conventions and acted upon it. We hypothesized that different ways of understanding Covid-19 affected how communities responded to it and ultimately lead to variation in mortality rates.

We conducted systematic online survey to get a first understanding of different tendency amongst 14 language communities: Arabic, Algerian Arabic/French, Bengali, Chinese, Hindi, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Punjabi, Somali, Sylheti, Swahili, Turkish, and Yoruba. These were followed up by interviews in a more open format to get a more detailed understanding of the challenges each community faces.

We also researched narratives about Covid-19 in communities in London and compared these with those in the places of origin of each language community. Based on this information, we identified how communities understand Covid-19 and why they behave and react in certain ways.

The research was conducted by 17 researchers at SOAS, University of London, many of which were part of those language communities. Our online survey was answered by 688 people and 183 people participated in our interviews.

Covid-19 is not over. Omicron is spreading and still affecting some communities more than others. Many people do not get vaccinated. Many also do not know about long Covid. If people do not receive the "right" information they cannot respond properly and risk people's lives and wellbeing, including their own.

Policy recommendations

- Provide clear English Covid-19 guidelines: even local people are confused about the government's English recommendations. In communities less versed in the nuances of English, interpretation of these guidelines can be far more confusing, rendering them less helpful.
- Work with language and culture specialist from communities and universities. They can provide advice on how to reach and communicate with each community.
- Support local governments to provide audio translations accessible both through websites and by telephone.
- Provide a hotline where people can talk/consult in their own language/s

Key findings

Our online survey showed that 71% of 688 people obtained information on Covid-19 from outside of UK. Of these, 79% thought this helped them understanding Covid-19 better. Below we cite examples of survey responses related to issues that were consistently mentioned. They show that people do not get enough information or that the information they get is not clear. Information needs to be provided in a broad range of relevant languages and be provided by mediators who understand and communicate with people with different cultures and habits.

“The language barrier”

1. “Cultural upbringing reflects the application and the adherence to the procedure and precautionary measure”
2. “I don't think people are understanding the information”
3. “I think educating community leaders would help in this regard”

Our 183 interviews in 15 language communities revealed that:

1. People across communities do not know about Long Covid or do not have sufficient information about this condition.
2. People have mental health problems because of uncertainty regarding Covid-19. In some communities they expressed need for counselling with someone who understands their culture and speaks their own language.
3. In some communities many people do not trust governmental information, especially about vaccinations.

Further information

[UKRI/AHRC Covid-19 research project report: Cultural translation and interpreting of Covid-19 risks among London's migrant communities \(AH/V013769/1\) | SOAS University of London](#)

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