Policy Brief

Stay Home Stories

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Summary of the research

Home has been at the forefront of political and public health responses to, and people's lives during, the COVID-19 pandemic. Based in London and Liverpool, this research documents and analyses (i) the 'stay home stories' of adults, children and young people living in diverse homes and households in the UK; (ii) political discourse and media coverage about home during the pandemic; and (iii) work by artists and museums on home and COVID-19.

The research is based on:
- The thematic analysis of government guidance, ministerial speeches and >100 newspaper reports;
- 103 interviews with people from migration, minoritized ethnic and/or faith backgrounds, including faith and community leaders;
- >100 maps of home during the pandemic created by children and young people;
- >500 contributions to the 'Stay Home' rapid response collecting project at the Museum of the Home;
- 16 interviews with artists, photographers and performers and collaborative work with the project's artist-in-residence, Alaa Alsaraji.

We investigated:
- The politics of home;
- Home and migration;
- Home and religion;
- Home for children and young people;
- Stay home stories created by artists and collected and curated by museums.

Policy recommendations

- Any future restrictions, including 'stay home' directives, should (i) support the needs of single people, those in non-cohabiting relationships, LGBTQ+ families and dual-household families; (ii) mitigate the gendered inequalities of working from home and practices of care; and (iii) support people in poor quality and over-crowded housing and/or precarious employment, particularly when they need to self-isolate or work from home.

- Community, migrant-led and faith organizations have provided vital local support during the pandemic and are key for post-pandemic recovery. We recommend (i) strengthening coordination, communication and consultation between government and on-the-ground organizations; (ii) prioritizing core funding for translation services and digital training and access; and (iii) creating structures within and across community and faith groups to support leaders, particularly those working primarily alone.

- The inability to say goodbye, mourn and honour the rituals and traditions surrounding death and dying need to be addressed. We recommend the formation of a working party to develop ongoing pastoral support and memorial practices for all faith groups and none.

- Access to green spaces has been vital for well-being, social connection and belonging. We recommend (i) foregrounding access to green spaces within policies on physical and mental health, neighbourhood cohesion and children's welfare; (ii) making parks and other green spaces safe and accessible for all; (iii) building on improved environmental competencies to deepen children and young people's learning about local places.

- To address the digital divide for children and young people and recognize the importance of personal spaces at and close to home for their well-being.

- The development of (i) flexible and accessible economic support schemes for self-employed artists; (ii) accessible and affordable training in digital skills for artists for their own creative outputs and archiving and for online and blended work with diverse audiences; (iii) virtual and physical safe spaces for peer support and sharing of good practice; and the creation and identification of (iv) outdoor spaces for learning, art and performance opportunities.

- To support museums in (i) developing participatory approaches to museum procedures and cataloguing processes; (ii) sharing and disseminating good practice in online and blended engagements with diverse audiences; and (iii) fostering collaborations between artists and museums, including through training artists about archiving their material.

Key findings

- Our thematic analysis of political debate and media coverage shows that 'stay home' policies (i) conflated home with the household, and reflected gendered and heteronormative assumptions about the nuclear family and (ii) constructed and reinforced particular narratives about domesticity, citizenship and national identity. Those least able to comply included people in poor quality and overcrowded housing and/or precarious employment.
- Our interviews identify intersections between COVID-19, Brexit, immigration policies and structural racism that cause significant uncertainty, anxiety and inequality for migrants.
- Community, migrant-led and faith organizations have provided vital local support. Digital skills and access have been uneven, resulting in some faith communities and their buildings at risk of closure. Supporting faith and other communities has come at a personal cost to many leaders, particularly those working primarily alone.
- One of the most difficult outcomes of the pandemic has been coping with death and mourning when people have been unable to visit their loved ones, say goodbye, attend funerals or receive face-to-face pastoral support.
- Our interviews and maps show that access to outside – and particularly green – space has (i) improved physical and mental well-being; (ii) deepened neighbourhood, social and family connections; and (iii) enhanced local environmental competencies and a sense of place, including for children and young people. But uneven access reflects wider structural inequalities. Parks, for example, are neither accessible nor able to offer sanctuary for everyone.
- Maps by children and young people reveal (i) their resilience in finding and creating 'special places' within the home (including gardens and stretching to include other green outdoor spaces) to express spatial autonomy; and (ii) their emotional responses – both positive and negative – to the pandemic,

highlighting the importance of connections to people and places and the challenges of sustaining shifts in relationships and constraints to freedom over an undefined period of time.

- Artists and museums have developed new forms of participatory practice to work with audiences during the pandemic.Online and blended activities have the potential to engage hard-to-reach local, national and international audiences.
- In many cases, the pandemic has intensified artists' focus on other issues, including the environment, climate justice, sustainability and inequality. The pandemic has also prompted a number of artists to archive their material for the first time.
- The Museum of the Home is working with volunteers and participants to develop new procedures and cataloguing processes to address difficult and/or marginalised histories and to document the stories, voices and experiences about home and COVID-19. Collaborative work between the Museum, artist-in-residence and project team has enabled rituals of care, community interaction and sustainability to be embedded in the content, interpretation and build of the display.

Further information

www.stayhomestories.co.uk (see maps; report; blog posts; podcasts)

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