

Health inequalities, ethnic minorities and COVID19: interactive theatre workshop drawing on a qualitative interview study

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Background

The COVID19 pandemic revealed and deepened existing inequalities. These were exacerbated by institutional and interpersonal racism and poorly conceived public health messaging. As a result, people from minority ethnic backgrounds in the UK were disproportionately affected. We conducted a creative interdisciplinary session to support interactive reflection and discussion on these inequalities between the actors and the audience, who was comprised of public health scientists and NHS practitioners, to come up with practical ways to address ethnicity-based health inequalities going forward.

Methods

We prepared a 45 min interactive scenario drawing on forum theatre approaches, which are based on the Theatre of the Oppressed: a set of dramatical techniques created by Augusto Boal. To understand what to include the interactive scenario we carried out a workshop built on a narrative interview study with 70 adults who had Covid between March, 2020, and November, 2021. We adopted a maximum variation sampling strategy focusing on people from minority ethnic backgrounds (45 of total sample). Interviews were done remotely and recorded via video or audio. Study participants were invited to tell their story in their own words, alongside semi-structured prompting. After thematic analysis, the research team worked with theatre practitioners from the Performing Medicine company to create scenarios from verbatim interview content. The format allows audience members to watch scenarios and interact directly with actors, giving advice on how to improve the situation.

Findings

Five themes from analysis explored in the workshop emerged: (1) existing racialised disadvantages that impacted COVID-19 exposure: employment, housing, and caring responsibilities; (2) unequal access to care, welfare, and support; (3) fears about the health-care system regarding quality of care and vaccine safety; (4) perceptions that the media and public health messaging blamed minority ethnic groups for spreading infection; and (5) increases in acts of direct racism. These informed the development of a 45-minute interactive scenario to be performed at the 10th UK Public Health Science conference.

Interpretation

There is an urgent need to re-evaluate public health messaging and care for people from minority ethnic backgrounds. This theatre workshop will support reflection to refine workshop content for further dissemination.

Funding

UK Economic and Social Research Council.

Contributors

AD and TR undertook the original research that informed this workshop, with SZ overseeing as principal investigator. LL and LH led the service improvement process. BE led the development of the workshop. SB and MA provided the creative direction for the workshop. LL drafted the abstract, with contributions from BE, TR, AD and LH. All authors have seen and approved the final version of the abstract for publication.

Conflicts of interest

We declare that we have no conflicts of interest.