# Health Inequalities and Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Populations: Insights from the Coronavirus Discourses Project

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## BACKGROUND

The Coronavirus Discourses project supports public health partners Public Health Wales, Public Health England, and NHS Education for Scotland.

Using a unique multi-method approach, we are investigating the flow and impact of COVID-19 public health messages.

One focus of our project is messaging related to BAME populations, who are substantially more at risk of contracting and/or dying of COVID-19 than other, White, communities. [1] [2] [3]

## CORE APPROACH

- Corpus linguistic approach: analysing a digitised body of texts with specialist software to identify common patterns in language
- Public surveys
- A Public Involvement Panel (PIP): consultants and reviewers for analysis and research outputs

Our approach allows us to to analyse large amounts of real-world language data, whilst engaging with BAME communities at every stage. We ensure that the project gives back to the communities guiding the research direction.

## DATA

Governmental speeches about COVID-19 (Table 1).

Public opinions from comments posted in response to articles on The Guardian online (Table 1).

Survey perspectives on specific public health posters (Figure 1).

| Corpus Data | Texts | Total words |
|---|---|---|
| Readers' comments on news articles about BAME people and COVID-19 | 5,092 | 408,103 |
| UK Government speeches delivered by Boris Johnson | 53 | 44,605 |
| Welsh Government Speeches (all speakers) | 72 | 357,694 |
| Scottish Government Speeches delivered by Nichola Sturgeon | 196 | 85,150 |

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for corpus data

## KEY FINDINGS*

*See also challenges & opportunities for context

In language about BAME people we found:

- **Positive stereotyping.**
'people from Asian societies still put emphasis on the common benefit and are willing to make sacrifice to protect the elderly and the vulnerable in the society.'

- **Associations with other susceptible groups.**
'During the pandemic, people in precarious and low-paid jobs, those in deprived communities, people from ethnic minority backgrounds women and people in poor housing have suffered disproportionately.'

- **Diminishment of challenges.**
'The inequalities and injustices which have seen BAME citizens suffering disproportionately'

- **Denial of higher risks.**
'there is nothing ethnical / race- or identity related about corona. It's mainly down to behaviour of individuals.'

- **Requests for more information.**
'how does it compare to the annual flu deaths? How much are people of different ages, ethnicity, location infected and affected by the virus etc.'

- **Discrepancies** between approaches recommended in health communications literature and language of UK leadership. (See [4]).



Figure 1. Public health messages discussed with our Public Involvement Panel

## CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Corpus linguistics functions best when the data is practical to gather, and appropriate for the research.

Each of the discourses we examined provided opportunities for further research as well as challenges to consider.

- BAME voices are underrepresented in the discourses we collected and examined.

- We will now look beyond public comments on mainstream news websites to gather feedback, using community engagement to identify language sources where the populations of interest have contributed to the discourse.

- Our pilot survey attracted ten respondents, six from White backgrounds, four from Asian backgrounds. No respondents were from Black ethnic backgrounds, which would be problematic in a wider survey.

- Future plans to gather survey perspectives will include a circulation plan in order to attract a truly representative set of responses.

- BAME communities are heterogeneous, thus should not be considered collectively. Each of the different communities affected by COVID-19 should be consulted accordingly.

- We acknowledge the importance of community-specific engagement. [5] [6] [7] We plan to continue working closely with our PIP and partners.

## PUBLIC HEALTH CONTRIBUTION

This research will impact the understanding of, hence the adherence to, public health messages. The findings discussed here, as well as our ongoing research, will help us to produce key outputs for writers of public health messages including a catalogue of specific messages and their trajectories over time, and accompanying guidance to optimise the effectiveness of future messaging campaigns.

## ONGOING RESEARCH

Alongside the opportunities for further research identified in 'challenges & opportunities', we are also developing a privacy preserving tool to study the contents of users' public and private messages.

Using this browser-based tool, we can analyse text data, whilst preserving the authors' anonymity.

It will help us to investigate the trajectories of public health messages (i.e., the way in which public health messages change once they are released to the public through re-framing by recipients).

In this way, we can reflect back to all the communities involved.

## PROJECT UPDATES

Updates available on the C19Comms website
https://c19comms.wp.horizon.ac.uk/

Follow @C19Comms on Twitter

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