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A qualitative study of young people's perspectives on inequalities in health

Authors

Hannah Fairbrother, PhD, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
Mary Crowder, MSc, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
Caroline Dodd-Reynolds, PhD, Fuse and Durham University, Durham, UK
Matt Egan, PhD, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK
Vanessa Er, PhD, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK (ECR)
Elizabeth Goyder, MD, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK
Naomi Griffin, PhD, Fuse and Durham University, Durham, UK (ECR)
Eleanor Holding, MSc, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK (ECR)
Karen Lock, PhD, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK
Steph Scott, PhD, Fuse and Newcastle University, Newcastle, UK
Carolyn Summerbell, PhD, Fuse and Durham University, Durham, UK
Nicholas Woodrow, PhD, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK (ECR)

Early career researchers denoted with (ECR)

Corresponding author:

Dr Hannah Fairbrother
Health Sciences School
The University of Sheffield
Barber House
3a Clarkehouse Rd
S10 2LA
Email address: h.fairbrother@sheffield.ac.uk

Background

Across England, inequalities in health are worsening, exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. The worsening of inequalities in health is particularly acute for some groups and places. Whilst there has been increasing interest in exploring public understandings of health inequalities, few studies have looked at the views of young people. Our study seeks to redress this by exploring young people's perspectives of inequalities in health.

Methods

Study Design

We carried out a qualitative study consisting of three interlinked focus groups (n=18). 15 focus groups were run online and three face-to-face. Focus groups were co-delivered with partnering youth organisations, and involved participatory concept mapping activities and the discussion of health-related news articles.

Participants

Working with youth organisations, we recruited 40 young people (aged 13-21) from six youth groups in areas of high and mixed deprivation across three geographical locations in England.

Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The data management software NVivo was used to facilitate coding.

Findings

Young people described a variety of different factors shaping their health including individual behaviours, personal/household resources, relationships and community, local services, the physical environment (particularly reputation and safety), psychosocial factors (including sense of belonging) and the socioeconomic context of the area (for example, quality and quantity of local jobs). However, throughout their discussions they foregrounded the importance of *interrelationships between factors*. Young people's understandings of inequalities in health were often rooted in their own experience and focused on an awareness of advantage and disadvantage. Young people articulated a number of different pathways through which they perceived health inequalities to be created, and consistently foregrounded the importance of poverty as a root cause of inequality. Priorities for change included improving: mental health support, access to safe and healthy local spaces, affordability of activities, healthy food availability and youth group funding.

Interpretation

Our study highlights that young people have nuanced, experiential understandings of factors influencing their and other people's health within their local areas. Exploring young people's perspectives of inequalities is crucial in designing policies which are relevant to, and informed by the people and places they impact.

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Contributors

Study design: Hannah Fairbrother, Matt Egan, Elizabeth Goyder.

Data generation: Mary Crowder, Vanessa Er, Naomi Griffin, Eleanor Holding, Nicholas Woodrow.

Data analysis: Mary Crowder, Vanessa Er, Hannah Fairbrother, Naomi Griffin, Eleanor Holding, Nicholas Woodrow.

Writing up: Hannah Fairbrother, Mary Crowder, Caroline Dodd-Reynolds, Matt Egan, Vanessa Er, Naomi Griffin, Elizabeth Goyder, Eleanor Holding, Karen Lock, Carolyn Summerbell, Steph Scott, Nicholas Woodrow.

Conflicts of Interest

We declare we have no conflicts of interest.

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