

What has Born in Bradford learnt about communicating with diverse communities about outdoor pollution and health?

Who are we?

Born in Bradford is a world-leading research programme which aims to find out what keeps families healthy and happy. We have a vast 'city of research' infrastructure which includes detailed health and wellbeing information on Bradfordians enrolled in our three birth cohort studies and a connected routine dataset of health, social care and education data for over 700,000 citizens living in Bradford and Airedale.

What have we learnt?

1. Many people living in deprived areas do not prioritise air pollution over more urgent concerns

Insight: Our research has found that for seldom-heard communities living in deprived-areas, pollution is often not a priority issue^{1,2}. These communities have other, more pressing concerns.

*"But that smell [from fly-tipping], it's like the dead rat and it happens regularly and this is what we have to live with. For me, **living with this is harder than pollution...** and the rubbish and fly-tipping. These are the real issues" - British Asian (Indian), Female, Retired*

"Sometimes I have to decide if I should eat or if I should pay the bills. We're the wrong people to ask about these things. Owning a car is a luxury. In Keighley we battle to survive." - FG6, British Asian (Pakistani), Female, Unemployed.

Implication: Communities living in disadvantaged areas may not be receptive to messages about pollution and health because they are experiencing other more urgent issues in their daily lives.

2. Pollution is invisible – so it is difficult for people to know when there is a problem

Insight: There is high variability in people's perceptions of whether pollution is a problem. A recent survey in Bradford³ found 47% felt air quality was poor/very poor, and 31% were not concerned about it (Figure 1). The fact that you cannot see (or sometimes smell) pollution means that some people do not realise there is an issue.¹

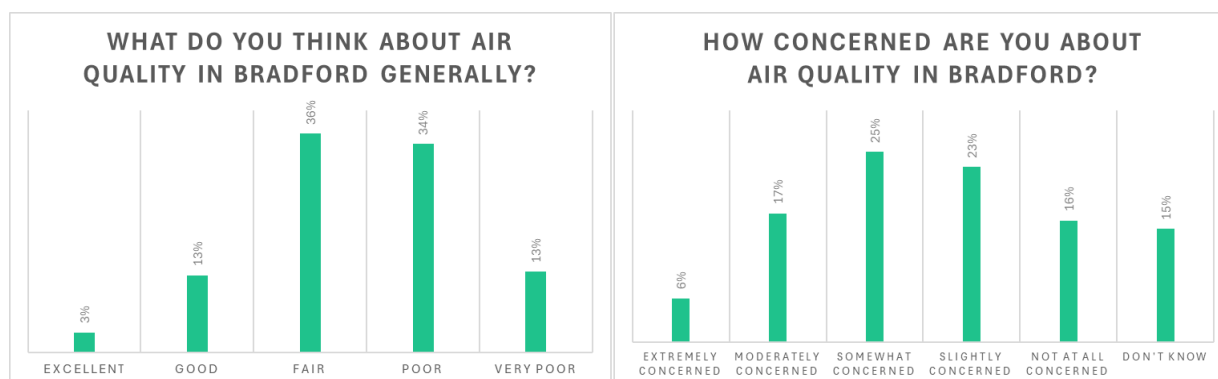


Figure 1. Results of a survey conducted between July-November 2023 in Bradford, N=2144. ³

"I'd say it's very poor quality but then how do you know, you can't see it" - British Asian (Pakistani), Male, Industrial worker

Implication: Clearer communication about levels of pollution in local areas would help communities understand the scale of the issue in their communities and why there is a need for change.

3. Communities living in urban deprived areas face barriers which limit their ability to reduce their own exposure.

Insight:

In many urban deprived areas communities experience spatial injustice with multiple environmental stressors, including pollution, noise and lack of greenspace.⁴ Vulnerable groups in particular (deprived communities, ethnic minority groups young children, the elderly) are **most likely to be exposed to pollution but the least likely to cause it**. For example, in Bradford 53% of Pakistani heritage children live in the most polluted areas, compared with 18% of white British children⁵. These structural barriers means that it can be difficult for communities to individually reduce their exposures.

Percentage of Bradford children living in the 'unhealthiest' environments by ethnicity

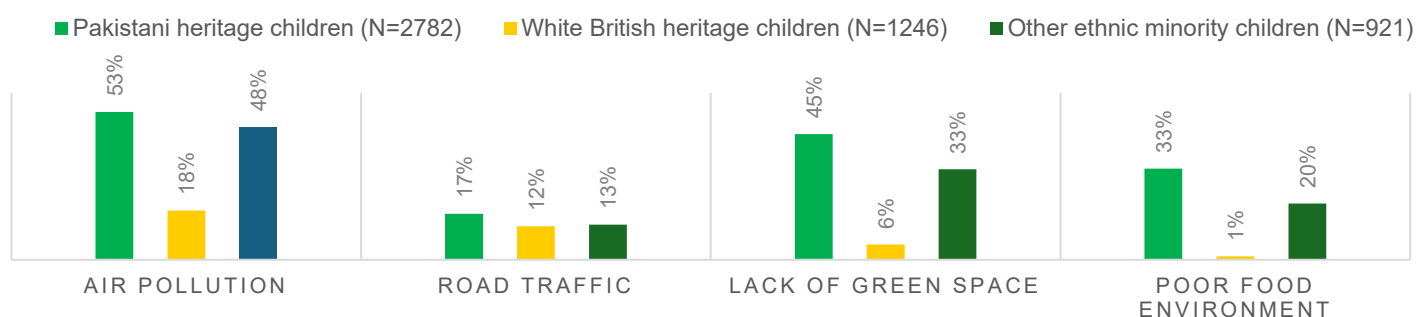


Figure 2. Data taken from N=4929 Born in Bradford children aged 10 years old. Graph shows the percentage of children living the worst (highest quintile of exposure) area by ethnicity.

Implication: Communication strategies that focus on individual's actions to reducing pollution may disadvantage communities who cannot make change themselves. In addition to communicating to families it is imperative that this is accompanied by action to tackle the systemic structural issues which cause spatial injustice that no individual can deal with alone.

4. People care strongly about children's health, and this can increase acceptability of policies to reduce pollution at source, such as clean air zones.

Insight:

Communities and policy makers care about children's health^{1,2,6}. This helps to increase the acceptability of policies, such as clean air zones, which can be implemented to improve pollution levels. Children feel passionate about clean air. Work which involves children as 'citizen scientists' carrying low-cost pollution monitors, can be used to work with local stakeholders to galvanise change in communities.

"No-one can argue about children's health... it feels to me as though that argument has really helped us" - Policy maker involved in implementing the Bradford Clean Air Zone

"Its ideals and everything is very positive. It's health, like they say health is wealth so yeah, the aims are admirable. I've got young kids; I want clean air as well" - Employee living in Bradford

Implication: Children are strong advocates for clean air. Communication campaigns which are driven by young people and focus on their health will be persuasive for both communities and policy makers.

Authors: Professor Rosemary McEachan and Dr Sunil Bhopal.

For more information contact: rosie.mceachan@bthft.nhs.uk

Scan me for an
online copy and
references!

