

The challenges and opportunities of conducting research on Covid, during a national lockdown

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Abstract:

Our study, 'Understanding Lambeth's LGBTQI+ communities in times of Coronavirus' is a mixed methods study, conducted between January and July 2021, funded by the London Met Transformation Fund, and developed in partnership with Lambeth Council and several local charities (Black Thrive, Black Out, Lambeth Links and Opening Doors London).

The study aimed to

- Identify the needs of Lambeth's large LGBTQI+ communities, especially within the current challenges posed by Coronavirus and the associated restrictions.
- Develop new understanding of the experiences and needs of Black and Ethnic Minority members of those communities who have been under-represented in previous studies.
- Co-design solutions with our research partners to see how the needs of these communities can be addressed within the current financial constraints across the borough.

Ironically, carrying out a study about the impact of Covid, while in the midst of a lockdown, posed a number of practical and logistical challenges:

- Building trust and rapport with stakeholders whom we had never met in person (only on Zoom) required additional effort and time.
- Recruiting participants was much more difficult because the usual places where we might go to talk to people, and engage them in the project, were all closed.
- Government restrictions on gatherings indoors impacted on our study design and the data gathering techniques we were able to develop.

This required us to be inventive and agile as regulations changed considerably over the life of the project.

Given the sensitive nature of the topic and our commitment to reach people who might otherwise be 'hard to reach' – including those who were not active digitally – this project raises issues that may be of interest to other researchers and provides an opportunity to learn lessons about the realities of conducting social science research in the real world.