

AIR POLLUTION:

‘WHAT THEY SAY ABOUT US, WITHOUT US’

Community Research,
Literature Review 2020

TSIP

Impact
on **Urban
Health**



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#01 INTRODUCTION

As part of our work with Impact on Urban Health to research community engagement in the air pollution agenda, we decided the best first step would be a comprehensive review of the current literature which exists on this topic. We looked at literature widely around the air pollution agenda but specifically, we were focusing on the interplay between ethnic minority communities living in the urban locale and the impacts of air pollution.

From the insights we drew from this literature review we were then able to plan our next steps and outline our research questions.

In this presentation, we will reflect on the key insights that were concluded from the literature review.

#02 KEY FOCUS AREAS



**Air Pollution and Exposure in
Ethnic Minority Communities**

**The Interaction Between Ethnic
Minority Communities and
Environmental Issues**

**Class and Environmental
Issues in the Urban Locale and
Inner Cities**

#02 KEY FOCUS AREAS

Before beginning the literature review, we defined the key questions that we wanted to answer:

- What initiatives have there been in Southwark and Lambeth?
- What is missing from the current literature available?
- Where does air pollution fit into the Covid-19 discourse?
- Which areas have been highlighted when thinking about the exclusion of ethnic minority communities?
- What is the relationship between ethnic minority communities and environmental groups?

#03: INSIGHTS

KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Through reviewing literature within the environmental space and the urban genre we were able to draw five main insights:

1. There were four identified reasons for the lack of ethnic minority representation within air pollution, including language/accessibility, prioritisation, fear of speaking out and environmental racism.
2. The current literature is lacking in authentic urban voices, it is missing an interdisciplinary approach and has a prevalence of white middle-class voices.
3. There are links between air pollution, deprivation, COVID-19 and ethnic minority communities.
4. There is a history of environmental activism within Lambeth and Southwark and there is evidence of increasing initiatives within these boroughs to tackle air pollution, including initiatives headed by Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals.
5. There are tensions between ethnic minority communities and environmental groups due to a lack of understanding, differing relationships – for example, with the police - and a lack of representation.

In the following slides, we explore the insights listed above in more detail. All the quotes included in our insights in these slides are drawn directly from the original literature review.



Key Insight 1: The current literature lacks both the representation of urban voices and an interdisciplinary approach.

There is a lack of an interdisciplinary approach

Although we found a wealth of literature focusing on each side of this relationship, there was little to be said about the relationship between the urban locale and the environmental agenda. There is a huge scope for further literature and research into the overlap between these areas.

'There is a dearth of research on the interplay between urban studies on one hand and environmental on the other, and how this plays out within communities. The literature is also quite poor in regard to BAME communities and their exclusion and absence from the environmental agenda.'

Urban environmental voices are not represented

Even though we struggled to find much literature representing the voices of urban communities within the air pollution agenda – this does not mean they don't exist. These urban and ethnic minority voices do exist, they just aren't consulted.

'There are already localised insights within inner-city communities which need to be further liaised with due to the myriad of insights which are available in regards to the urban space, its decay and what can be done to mitigate against further local deterioration.'

Although ethnic minority groups are the most affected by air pollution, they are the least prominent voice within public debates on this issue. Instead, white middle-class voices tend to prevail and be dominant.

'Whereas for years urban locales have been home to a variety of protests movements, activism and community issues, environmental issues have not been as popular. Which may be due to the 'belief paradox' that environmental concerns are the preserve of the gentrified white middle-class.'

A photograph of a brick building with a green door and a red number 1, with a white text box overlaid. The scene is set in a courtyard or alleyway with several green trash bins and potted plants. The lighting is warm, suggesting late afternoon or early morning.

Key Insight 2: There are clear links between deprivation, COVID- 19 and ethnic minority communities.

Ethnic minority
communities are more
likely to live in deprived
areas

Crowded housing conditions and risky working conditions have been linked to increased infection and death rates for Covid 19...

'Only 2% of white Britons live in crowded conditions while 30% of Bangladeshis, 16% of Pakistanis and 15% of black Africans reside in crowded conditions in the UK (Washington, 2020). BAME communities are more likely to live in deprived areas which have higher rates of air pollution.'

A street scene in Lambeth and Southwark, featuring a brick building on the left, trees with autumn foliage in the center, and a street sign on the right. A white text box is overlaid on the image.

Key Insight 3: There is a history of environmental activism within Lambeth and Southwark and evidence of increasing initiatives to tackle air pollution, including initiatives heads by BAME individuals.

History of air pollution initiatives

When reading about the history of how the urban locale has interacted with various environmental agendas within Lambeth and Southwark, we found evidence in the 1990s of various air pollution initiatives coming directly from the community.

'The environmental direct-action activism of the early 1990s which found a comfortable home in Brixton in the early 1990s has long gone, for a variety of reasons.'

Importantly... 'the direct-action environmental activism has moved from the urban space to suburban areas.'

Current initiatives to tackle air pollution in Lambeth and Southwark

There are an increasing amount of initiatives and funding going into projects to tackle air pollution, however, despite growing calls from the public these initiatives do not go far enough.

'Save Oval Streets is a campaign group which began in 2017 made up of residents from the Oval Triangle and campaigning for action on traffic in Oval'

BAME representation in the air pollution agenda

There are groups which are led by BAME individuals. This suggests the issue around exclusion may be deeper than a lack of visible representation. Below is a list of initiatives/groups in the air pollution agenda with BAME representation:

- Wretched of the Earth
- No Tar Sands
- Platform London
- Stop Killing Londoners
- Climate Camp
- Climate Reclaim
- Bank Track



Even when ethnic minority communities do speak and have an opinion on issues which affect them, why do you think their voices are not heard?

Key Insight 4: There were four identified reasons for the lack of ethnic minority representation within air pollution, including language/ accessibility, prioritisation, fear of speaking out and environmental racism.



The language
around the
environmental
debate is
inaccessible

The dominance of the white middle class within urban debate has entrenched a language which acts to exclude others.

‘Gentrification has therefore led to a middle-class control of acceptable expression and a dictation as to how this should play out in the urban locale and how to articulate expression...’

Some ethnic
minority groups
have more
pressing issues

Long term health impacts like air pollution may come second priority compared to more immediate problems, like knife crime, housing concerns or employment concerns.

'The residents of these locales are focused on daily survival and this reality is not understood by environmental organisations from outside of the communities in which they parachute into for protests, demonstrations, marches and 'die-ins'.'

Ethnic minority
groups may feel
afraid to speak
out

There is evidence around ethnic minority groups trying to address urban problems but being ignored or told not to do so. For example, when residents in the Grenfell tower building raised concerns...

'Several residents were even threatened with legal action if they were to make their claims and concerns public.'

Environmental racism

The combination of these factors produces a system of environmental racism.

'Minority communities have had an increased exposure to environmental pollutants reflecting legacies of environmental racism wherein systems have produced and perpetuated inequalities.'



How do we study environmental racism?

A street scene at sunset with a white text box overlay. The scene shows a road with a red double-decker bus, a sidewalk, trees, and buildings. The text box contains the following text:

Key Insight 5: Tensions exist between ethnic minority communities and environmental groups

Environmental
groups haven't
shown any
evidence of an
anti-racist agenda

Climate change movements have not attempted to engage with poor or BAME communities...

'In the last few months Extinction Rebellion have announced that they have been late to recognise white supremacy, diversity and racism. This turn was motivated by complaints from its own members coupled with global racial tensions.'

There is a failure of these movements to recognize their own positionality...

'The chants of 'we love the police' naturally antagonise people whose experiences with the police as an institution have been violent and oppressive because of racism.'



How can we create a collaborative approach
around shared equity?

#04: RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Through using our insights from the Literature Review, in the following slides, we provide recommendations that can be taken to allow the voices of underrepresented communities to be heard within the air pollution agenda. We also used these insights to inform the next steps in our research. We present these recommendations and insights by keeping in mind the key principle below:

“Families from different socio-economic backgrounds negotiate their environments and concerns about sustainability differently, there is not a one-size fits all model.”

This is relevant when the available information and possible alternative options have not been exposed to them. Families from poor inner-city families therefore need to play a role without it being left solely as the preserve of the stereotypical environmentally-engaged white middle-class ‘green’ family. A way to being this may be for local families and communities to be informed of environmental and safety hazards in their locales and be empowered to raise these concerns and understand the detrimental effects.

ACTIONS

- A new type of 'Cooltan Collective', as it were, is needed. Comprised of energetic BAME youth from local areas, collaborating to inform, partner with and lead on local environmental issues and who have the urban cultural capital to slightly change the narrative of local environmental issues.
- Environmental regeneration and green renovation cannot be distributed solely among those with greater wealth and residential privilege. More representation of local people is required so that their views and voice contribute to the sustainable delivery of public services in their locales. Along with greater inclusion and participation of BAME communities in the decision-making processes.

ACTIONS

- Collaboration which merges the expertise and technical skills of environmental activism with the networking skills and energy of communities. Included in this is encouraging public-private partnerships aimed at improving both socio-economic and environmental factors of low-income areas.
- Designing urban spaces to include greener spaces for informal sellers and disruptive enterprises to sell goods to commuters. This is important as many disruptive entrepreneurs in areas such as Brixton, for instance, have good networks with the urban locale and marginalised communities and can make environmental issues more appealing and relevant.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Through recognising the gaps in the current literature, we have identified three key areas for further research:

- Urban cleansing and regeneration
- Equitable environmentalism and the black youth
- Invisible and lost contribution to the urban locale

#05 NEXT STEPS

From this literature review we outlined our key research questions which looked at underrepresented communities more broadly:

- How can air pollution become an agenda that is relevant to and inclusive of underrepresented communities?
- What are the most effective ways to educate underrepresented communities on the impacts of air pollution?
- How would a community-led environmental group operate in the 21st century?
- Which of the identified barriers to greater representation in air pollution are more significant in different underrepresented communities?
- How can each of the identified barriers to greater representation in air pollution be addressed?
- How do the solutions to increase representation in air pollution differ for different underrepresented communities?

TO READ OUR BLOG WRITTEN BY SHAUN DANQUAH AND PAUL ADDAE ON THEIR REFLECTIONS AFTER WRITING THE LITERATURE REVIEW PLEASE CLICK [HERE](#).

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO READ THE FINAL REPORT CONCLUDING OUR FINDINGS AND RECCOMENDATIONS FROM THIS PROJECT PLEASE CLICK [HERE](#).

THANK YOU!

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