



We are all in the same COVID19 storm, but we are not all in the same boat

The COVID pandemic has been with us now for over 18 months. In that time all groups across society have broadly speaking, experienced a decline in mental health and wellbeing.

However, a closer look at the psychological and social experiences of adults in BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic groups), paints a sobering picture. During the pandemic BAME groups including colleagues, friends and family, reported higher instances of mental ill health and wellbeing issues.

Some key reasons for this include:

- BAME individuals reporting greater levels of loneliness and worry about contracting COVID19, particularly during the first year of the pandemic. This was exacerbated messaging that all BAME people were highly susceptible to developing COVID19 as a result of their ethnicity. The messaging should have highlighted that BAME individuals are more likely to an underlying health condition, work in close proximity to vulnerable patients or interact closely with members of the public and therefore this placed them at a heightened risk of being infected by the virus.
- BAME individuals reported more sleep deprivation than the general population during the pandemic. Poor sleep was experienced by many people but again could be related not only to fears about being exposed to the virus, but also concerns about transmitting the virus to loved ones, particularly given the fact that many BAME households are highly representative of a variety of frontline and other key workers, and more likely to be multi-generational. Again, whilst these experiences weren't limited to BAME people they were disproportionately impacted by this.
- Greater levels of stress were also reported by the BMJ (August 2020) to be higher among BAME groups. Heightened stress levels may be linked to issues including: a lack of flexibility in terms of income, for example, not being in a position to reduce working hours either due to being the main or sole wage earner in the household or caring responsibilities. Excessive stress could be caused by inflexibility in terms of having to physically be present at a work location due to the nature of the work, and therefore less available to manage caring or family responsibilities, potentially heightened by the pandemic

Managing stress has been a major focus of the wellbeing agenda for everyone, whether working from home or in the workplace, during the ongoing pandemic. Ambulance services around the UK have made a tremendous effort to provide accessible and much needed wellbeing facilities in their respective Trusts. Individually and organisationally, we need to be aware of factors that can add to stress levels beyond those caused by the huge demand on our organisations at the moment. These types of social and economic stressors will have been felt by all ambulance personnel, but we need to be aware of that individual groups may be more likely to experience some of these challenges than others, so that support can be tailored and targeted.

As we continue to forge ahead in our collective battle to bring COVID-19 under control, and when approached by a BAME colleague, particularly during Black History Month, let's take the time to listen, enquire and attempt to understand the specific set of circumstances they face. It's essential as we focus on what we are told relating it to our own experience and how we would have handled the situation in our development as allies. In taking the time to listen to what is currently proving to be an overwhelming challenge for your BAME colleague, you may come to understand, that we are not all in the same boat.

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