

Understanding stomach bugs in UK ethnic groups.

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My aims

In my research, I aim to gain an understanding of the nature of ethnic inequalities in stomach bugs and how these may relate to gender or socioeconomic status.

Stomach bugs are a group of illnesses causing symptoms such as diarrhoea, vomiting, and abdominal pain, usually resolved without treatment. However, these symptoms can cause people to take time off work and school, affecting UK healthcare services and the economy. Differences in health remain high within and across ethnic groups. However, data on ethnicity needs to be of better quality. For example, researchers usually draw comparisons from two ethnic groups, White and non-White. This fails to capture differences between White Scottish, White Irish and White British men and women, and the differences within ethnic groups of similar heritage such as British Indian, British Bangladeshi, and British Pakistani.

A systematic review will be conducted to make sense of existing findings on ethnicity and stomach bugs. Studies will be located by searching published and unpublished literature, following an agreement between reviewers on which studies to include and exclude. This is required because studies on stomach bugs and ethnicity suggest conflicting evidence of this association. For example, some have found a higher risk of infection in people of White ethnicity, while others have consistently reported a higher risk in people of Asian ethnicity.

In addition, I will look at in-depth insights by understanding the 'lived' experiences of how ethnic minority groups manage their stomach bug experiences, like the consequences and exposure. This will help understand within-ethnic group beliefs, experiences, and practices, such as those of Indian, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi participants.

How I intend to conduct my research

Interviews will be conducted by contacting community leaders and centres depending on participant flexibility. Recruitment will focus on Blackburn with Darwen and surrounding areas Haslingden and Accrington. Blackburn with Darwen consists of an ethnically diverse population and is one of the most disadvantaged nationally, with one of the highest hospital admission rates for gastrointestinal conditions found.

To describe the burden of disease regionally, hospital episode statistics data will be used to consider whether UK admissions for stomach bugs vary by ethnic group and to what extent socioeconomic disadvantage explains this relationship. However, ethnicity data remains of poor quality, unavailable or suggests an overlap with other inequalities, such as intergenerational (involving multiple generations), and socioeconomic or geographical inequalities, making it challenging to establish the actual burden of inequalities in stomach bugs. This PhD aims to understand the nature of ethnic inequalities in stomach bugs and how these relate to gender and socioeconomic status to benefit public health by focusing on how stomach bugs vary between UK ethnic groups.