



**THE SECRET LIVES OF PARENTS:
UNDERSTANDING THE REALITIES FOR
PARENTS IN LAMBETH AND SOUTHWARK**

Community Research
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#01:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AN OVERVIEW OF THIS REPORT

[The Social Innovation Partnership](#) (TSIP) and [Impact on Urban Health](#) (part of [Guy's and St Thomas' Charity](#)) have been working together to explore support for parents in Lambeth and Southwark. This included everything from capturing the real experiences of parents and their support needs to better understanding their interaction with organisations and institutions.

Our research project, which included creating a 'Have Your Say' survey, conducting interviews with local parents and establishing a parenting forum (Parents' Corner) for open and honest conversation between parents from different communities, allowed us to identify numerous insights which we share in this report. These insights are presented back around our four research questions:

1. [What are the experiences of parents from different communities?](#)
2. [What are the experiences of parents with children of different ages?](#)
3. [Why types of support for parents from different communities need?](#)
4. [What support do parents access and what shapes their decision?](#)

Overall, we found that the experiences of parents are unique as the reality is that every family dynamic and the factors influencing it are different. However, there are commonalities between parents, and these provide the basis for an approach to service provision that is culturally relevant.

One of the biggest learnings during this research was the need to challenge accepted narratives around parents, particularly fathers, as a first step to improving the relationships between parents and support service providers. This should be done through parent-led research, that can harness the existing knowledge of local parents to unearth deeper insights.

#02: INTRODUCTION

WHAT WAS OUR AIM?

[The Social Innovation Partnership](#) (TSIP) and the Community Research (CR) team were funded by [Impact on Urban Health](#) (part of [Guy's and St Thomas' Charity](#)) to explore the experiences of parents in Lambeth and Southwark. In particular, Impact on Urban Health wanted to gain a deeper understanding of how parents interacted with existing parent support services and if they were meeting the needs of parents.

This research was conducted to inform Impact of Urban Health's Adolescent Mental Health (AMH) Programme which was established in 2020. The exploration of support for parents was just one focus of wider programme, with other areas of the programme looking at schools and research into behavioral disorders. As a starting point, this research project was steered by two hypotheses formed by Impact on Urban Health:

- Hypothesis 1: The people providing services in GPs or schools are not representative which is a driver of distrust.
- Hypothesis 2: There is an under-recognition of community organisations/informal support.

What we found through our research is that neither of these hypotheses capture the full story, highlighting the need for strategies to be informed by the lived experience of those you wish to benefit.

In this report, we share the findings from our research and a list of recommendations for Impact on Urban Health. These recommendations include possible approaches to better engage parents, organisations doing work that could inform the AMH strategy and areas for further research to provide additional insight to the AMH Programme team. In line with the ethos of community research, this report has been written as a team and so we hope you hear the voices of each of the CRs reflected throughout.

#03:
THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

STEP 1: FORMING THE COMMUNITY RESEARCH

As with any research project, our first step was to form our team of Community Researchers. Our team included a mixture of married and single parents, mothers and fathers, varying family dynamics and different cultures.



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STEP 2: SETTING THE SCENE

Before starting our data collection, we wanted to set the scene for the experiences of parents from ethnic minorities and low income households – particularly with respect to their interactions with institutions. We did this by reviewing the existing literature and writing a short literature review called *'Parenting and Access in Institutions in Lambeth and Southwark'*.

Below we share some of the key findings from this literature review relating to the interaction between children and schools, as the role of schools was consistently mentioned throughout our research:

- Educational attainment may not be an aspiration of all children, but schooling can often give priority to high educational attainment even though children are not always in line with the competitive educational model which schooling can often uphold. This is particularly the case for white working-class children but also an increasing number of middle-class children who have not necessarily taken on board their parents ideals. Furthermore, Black boys in the educational system face disadvantaged as they can be pathologized or perceived as being hyper-masculine, disruptive and aggressive. This can instil in the minds of teachers a self-fulfilling prophecy of poor outcomes for children.
- Teacher engagement with certain parents can often depend on cultural capital or bias. Teachers may give priority to parents who demonstrate a greater interest in their child's education and also have the requisite cultural capital in order to keep tabs on their child's educational attainment. Teachers may also be bias in favour of parents who share their own cultural norms and values than to parents who do not. The result can be that children who have backgrounds, be they cultural or socio-economic, which do not align with those of teachers, may be given scant attention in school and hence be at a disadvantage.
- However, this 'concerned cultivation', which may involve reading non-fiction literature or watching documentaries, does not have to be preserved for children from a particular socio-economic background and can be shared by all children in a holistic manner with the right strategies. Effective engagement therefore may require external partners and community initiatives which lie outside the remit of teachers, yet fully complements their work and hence their support for parents. Community-based initiatives which promote parental involvement are particularly important.

STEP 3: DEFINING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Building on the findings from the literature review and with input from Impact on Urban Health, the Community Research team set out to explore four research questions:

Q1

What are the experiences of parents from different communities?

Q2

What are the experiences of parents with children of different ages?

Q3

Why types of support do parents from different communities need?

Q4

What support do parents access and what shapes their decisions?

STEP 4: IMPLEMENTING THE RESEARCH METHODS

With our research questions defined, the Community Research team set out to answer them using three research methods:

- A **'Have Your Say' survey** to capture the experiences of parents in the midst of lockdown and the COVID-19 pandemic. This was completed by 77 people across London (60% were residents in Lambeth or Southwark).
- A **biweekly parenting forum called *Parents Corner***. This was an online space facilitated by the Community Research team. In total, this forum was attended by 11 parents and was a space to have open and honest conversations about the realities of being a parent.
- **One-to-one interviews with parents** to further explore our research questions and to build on the insights from the survey. We interviewed eight parents, four of whom were also members of the parenting forum. Any quotes used in this report are from parents.

Given the small sample size of the parents engaged during this research, we suggest that those reading this report view these insights as only just scratching the surface on the experiences of parents, rather than providing conclusive or definite answers to our research questions.

#04:
INSIGHTS

Q1 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS FROM DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES?

It goes without saying that there is no manual for how to be a parent – every parent and every child is different – and this sentiment was one we heard consistently throughout our research. There are countless factors that influence a parents' experiences, and it is the combination of these factors that make each experience unique.

By providing insights into the experiences of parents from different communities, our hope is not to categorise parents into a homogenous group, but instead to provide a narrative that parents in these circumstances can relate to. In the following slides, we speak to five different experiences:

- Working parents
- Parents from Black Caribbean, Black African and South Asian households
- Parents raising Black boys
- Single parents
- Fathers

Q1 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS FROM DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES?

Working parents

A key theme throughout our research was that many parents had to juggle three roles: parenting, employment commitments and maintaining the household. All these pressures resulted in parents having little time to themselves in order to wind down, reflect and find tranquillity. Therefore, we found that the restrictions imposed by the lockdown appear to have been particularly challenging for working parents, reducing their personal time from little to none.

The regular commute to work, which was used by some as personal time to read, watch entertainment, rest and relax, could be seen as a luxury no longer afforded to working parents as a result of the pandemic. One mother mentioned that her commute to work was one of the few moments wherein she would be able to “zone out” into her own world, allowing her to switch off and be away from the stresses of daily life before returning home.

For others, balancing working from home and attending to the children brought on a “guilt effect”, wherein parents felt that they were simultaneously not doing their job properly and not spending appropriate time with their children. One father mentioned that although he had more time to spend with his family, this had been detrimental to his productivity as a self-employed professional.

Q1 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS FROM DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES?

Parents from Black African, Black Caribbean and South Asian households

Although these are three very different cultures, what was interesting during our forum meetings were the similarities between parents coming from these communities, particularly when discussing mental health stigmas. The consensus across parents from these communities was that poor mental health was not spoken about in the household largely as a result of it being a cultural taboo. One parent spoke to the fact that “back home” (i.e. in Nigeria) the simple term *mental health* is associated with the most extreme forms of mental illness which contributes to a reluctance to identify with such issues.

Within Caribbean households, a similar stigma also exists for behavioural disorders and special educational needs (SEN). Culturally, there is a general attitude of simply denying the existence of such conditions or a reluctance to accept that these conditions are present within your child. These attitudes can not only make it more difficult for parents of children with SEN to receive adequate support from their families, but it can also result in environments that are not suited to the needs of the child. This can lead parents can feel that the best option is to distance themselves from their family at a time when what they really need is support. Members of the CR team felt the the South Asian community also held a similar sentiment towards children with SEN.

“...I'M HAVING TO REALLY TEACH MYSELF OF HOW TO PARENT A CHILD WITH SEN, ADHD, AUTISM, I HAVE TO BE TEACHING MY FAMILY AS WELL. SOME OF THEM, TO THIS DAY, STILL DON'T ACTUALLY BELIEVE IN ADHD OR AUTISM, THEY JUST BELIEVE THAT A CHILD IS NAUGHTY ... IT [NOT BELIEVING MY CHILD HAS SEN] MAKES ME FEEL SAD AND ANXIOUS WHEN I DO GO AMONGST THE FAMILY MEMBERS, SO I TEND NOT TO GO AROUND THEM.”

Q1 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS FROM DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES?

Parents raising Black boys

Raising any child is not an easy job, but there are particular challenges that come with raising a son. Furthermore, when you consider race, the additional weight of a raising a Black boy to become a Black man could be overwhelming for any parent, yet we spoke to numerous parents that had risen to the challenge. Nevertheless, they had faced and continue to face obstacles along the way including:

- The need to find positive male role models for their sons to their development, especially when their father is not fulfilling this role.
- Finding the balance between letting “boys be boys” versus preparing them for discrimination. In Lambeth and Southwark appearance can be an issue so young Black boys are forced to be more conscious of how they dress and who they associate with.
- Equipping children with the ability to discern what battles are worth fighting. Lambeth and Southwark are two boroughs that are densely populated with Black African and Black Caribbean communities so children can easily grow up in a bubble, and as a result receive their first experiences of discrimination within institutions. However, some of the time these boys will just have to walk away otherwise they will become exhausted.

Q1 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS FROM DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES?

Single parents

Despite the importance of a good father in a child's life, particularly when raising a son, the parents we spoke to shared the reality that in Caribbean and African communities it is not uncommon for a father to be absent or less present in a child's life. Therefore, we find single parent households in which the mother plays the role of both parents.

While being a single parent undoubtedly comes with its challenges, such as limited resources, additional pressures and potential difficulties establishing a consistent routine, there are also positives which are often not spoken about. The mothers we engaged were able to share their views on the positives of being a single parenting and we have shared two of these below:

- By playing the role of mother and father, your child sees just how hard you work to provide for them and the sacrifices you make, giving them a better understanding of what it takes to be a parent.
- As a person, it makes you stronger as you are responsible for providing anything your child is lacking in the best way that you know how.

We wanted to highlight these views because as a team we recognised that so often the narrative around single parents comes from a perspective of deficiency rather than that of strength.

Q1 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS FROM DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES?

Fatherhood

Early on in the project, we also recognised that we wanted to dedicate a space to hearing the experiences of fathers because too often their voices are not heard nor amplified, particularly when it comes to parenting. We dedicated a forum meeting to creating a space solely for men and fathers by designing an exclusive session - Parents' Corner presents Daddies' Voices. Below we share some of the key insights from that meeting:

- The fathers present all held a belief that a father needs to be active and consistent in their children's lives, no matter the relationship with the mother. Yet, the reality is that the relationship with the mother often determines how involved a father can be in his child's life. This can mean some form of mediation or reconciliation intervention would be beneficial for a father.
- Religion can be the main support system with some fathers drawing on their spirituality to support them with their parenting as well as provide them with the "wisdom to navigate the whole system".
- Many fathers spoke to creating their own parenting culture, meaning they were not bound to the parenting styles prevalent during their own upbringing. This was also a sentiment shared by mothers who openly acknowledged building on the "good" parenting behaviours they experienced growing up and changing the "bad". In Black African and Black Caribbean households, this is especially seen in approaches to disciplining children.
- The consensus was that there is generally a lack of "investment and support" for fathers, with the feeling that fathers are left to fend for themselves.

In addition to what was shared during the session, the most vital learning from Daddies Voices is that this forum and dedicated space for fathers has continued independently, highlighting just how valuable and necessary such spaces are.

“FROM MY PERSPECTIVE [THE ROLE OF A FATHER] WOULD BE TO NURTURE A CHILD FROM A VERY YOUNG AGE AND, YOU KNOW, TEACH THEM ETIQUETTE, MANNERS, RESPECT, MORALS, EDUCATE THEM TO THE BEST OF YOUR ABILITY.”

Q2 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS WITH CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES?

With respect to our second research question, parents spoke more to the lack of support available when parenting a child in secondary school versus a child in primary school, rather than the changing support needs for a child of varying age during primary school. Furthermore, for parents of children with Special Educational Needs, the absence of support once their child gets to secondary school can be felt even more. One reason for this may be because parents felt they had more involvement in their child's life during primary school. For example, parents touched on having both social and formal meetings during primary school, whereas in secondary school meetings with the school were mainly in the formal capacity. One parent gave a specific example stating, "*I don't even get an invite to sports day anymore.*"

Nevertheless, the insights into the experiences of parents with children of different ages were most prominent when talking to parents about lockdown and the impact it was having on their family. In both the survey and one-to-one interviews, parents with younger children were particularly concerned about their child's mental health and the impact lockdown was having on their development.

*“... I SAY THAT MY DAUGHTER IS VULNERABLE
BECAUSE IT'S AFFECTING HER MENTAL
HEALTH. I COULD SEE HER BEHAVIOUR AND I
WAS A LITTLE BIT - I WAS I WAS VERY
WORRIED ABOUT HER.”*

Q2 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS WITH CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES?

In addition to the quotes on the previous slide, this finding was also present in the survey, particularly when looking at how parents stated their children were coping with lockdown. Focusing on the determinants, in Lambeth and Southwark the main factor influencing how parents rated themselves was employment/education (e.g. university) concerns. Other common factors mentioned by parents included access to childcare and managing their mental/physical wellbeing.

As for their children, parents stated different factors for different age groups:

Aged group	Main factor impacting child's ability to cope
0 - 3	Lack of interaction with other children
4 - 7	Missing friends
8 - 11	Missing friends and adapting to home school
11 +	The prospect of exams and becoming complacent with school

Q2 WHAT ARE THE EXPERIENCES OF PARENTS WITH CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES?

This survey question was also able to speak to who may need targeted support, particularly as the UK exits lockdown:

- Of the young people (respondents aged 18 – 24) who engaged with the survey, all of them stated that they were ‘feeling overwhelmed’ or ‘just managing’ suggesting a real disconnect between support provision and young parents (whether due to a lack of availability, awareness or access).
- Of the parents who rated themselves as ‘feeling overwhelmed’, 90% of them gave their child a better rating suggesting most parents were making significant effort to shield their children from their stress or difficulties. This was likely having an additional adverse impact on their ability to cope.

		Since the start of 2021, how do you feel you [the parent] are coping with your current situation and the changes to the government restrictions?			
		Coping very well	Coping fairly well	Just managing	Feeling overwhelmed
Since the start of 2021, how do you think your children are coping overall with your current situation and the changes to the government restrictions?	Coping fairly well	50.00%	58.33%	28.57%	10.00%
	Coping very well	50.00%	4.17%	7.14%	10.00%
	Feeling overwhelmed	0.00%	8.33%	7.14%	10.00%
	Just managing	0.00%	29.17%	57.14%	70.00%
		100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Q3 WHAT TYPES OF SUPPORT TO PARENTS FROM DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES NEED?

In the section we explore the support needs of parents in more detail. Being a parent can be challenging at any time, but being a parent in the midst of a pandemic has created additional pressures. Personal circumstances will vary for most parents, and so will their support needs. After analysing the interviews, forum sessions and survey data, we have been able to identify 4 key support areas.

1. School Support

As a result of the lockdown due to the pandemic, parents had to take on home schooling duties to support their children with their learning. This was challenging, particularly due to the fact that many parents are now working from home. Parents have had to juggle home schooling, working from home and normal household duties. Many parents felt unprepared, overwhelmed and not supported enough by schools. Support needs varied from understanding the curriculum and the technology used during home schooling to help with internet access and devices. And for parents that speak English as a second language, understanding the materials their children were learning before getting to the point of teaching their children, was an extra barrier to overcome with little support to do so.

In addition, the parents we engaged coming from Black African or Black Caribbean households spoke to their first contact with schools usually stemming from a problem or issue. With no established relationships, there seems to be a disconnect between parents from these communities and schools; making these parents feel unsure as to how to navigate the school system confidently. However, for parents with that *insider* knowledge, they are able to effectively interact with the school and intervene in their child's school life.

A final insight that was shared by one parent was more support from schools when your child is advanced. Building on the insights from the literature review, there is a need to ensure that differences in the cultural norms between a teacher and child do not negatively influence the opportunities for a child to progress in school.

"I THINK IT WAS HER HEAD OF YEAR. AND THAT RESPONSE WAS, WELL, THE TEACHERS DO HAVE THEIR OWN LIVES AS WELL. AND THEN AFTER THAT, I DECIDED TO ESCALATE IT [TEACHERS NOT BEING PRESENT DURING ONLINE LESSONS]. BECAUSE I'M NOT GOING TO LET THEM GET AWAY. SO I DECIDED TO ESCALATE IT, AND SPEAK TO THE HEAD TEACHER. AND I STATED MY CONCERNS TO HER OVER THE PHONE AND VIA EMAIL, BECAUSE I'M VERY CLUED UP ON PAPER TRAIL. YEAH. SO I SENT AN EMAIL. AND I GOT A RESPONSE VIA EMAIL, AND VIA PHONE AS WELL, WHICH I APPRECIATED."

Q3 WHAT TYPES OF SUPPORT TO PARENTS FROM DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES NEED?

2. Food Support

As expected, the pandemic has also put financial pressure on many low income families. Parents who normally qualified for free school meals were having to provide these meals for their children (on top of other mounting costs and in the midst of employment concerns as mentioned in the first section).

Even with schools that do provide free school meals in *normal* times, parents spoke to the quality of these meals often being below standard and not catering for the needs of children from different cultural backgrounds. Parents indicated that they would like to receive more nutritious foods for their children, but also more culturally appropriate foods. There was an understanding that it would be hard to cater for everyone individually, but parents still felt more effort could be made to allow culture to inform what food is provided.

Q3 WHAT TYPES OF SUPPORT TO PARENTS FROM DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES NEED?

3. Parent Support

Parenting support tends to revolve around the child and parents often forget about their own needs for support. The lockdowns have made things harder and with many parents now working from home, they feel that they do not have the time or space to properly recharge. Not being able to see family and friends is making parents, especially single parents, feel lonely and isolated. In one of our forum sessions we held a brainstorming session around potential services that parents would like to have access to. These were some of the suggestions they came up with:

- Groups/classes to support single parents (and their children)
- Respite (e.g. holidays/away days/retreats)
- Befriending services

During the session, parents indicated that they would like these services to be parent-led and more culturally diverse. Without services designed in this way, we find that parents (particularly those from South Asian households) tend to seek wellbeing support from their families which is ultimately due to this being an established, trustworthy network. However, as we heard during the forum, parents are keen to create more spaces where they can discuss how they are feeling and learn from one another.

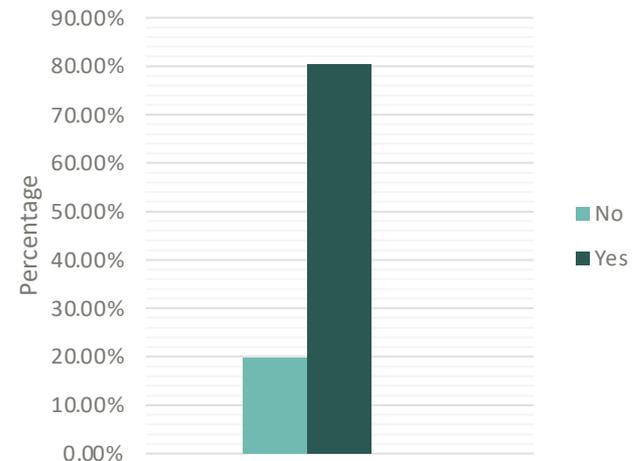
Q3 WHAT TYPES OF SUPPORT TO PARENTS FROM DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES NEED?

4. Access to outdoor space

Finally, through our survey, we were able to ask parents about their access to outdoor space (e.g. a garden or local park), which for so many for us was a luxury during lockdown. Of those that responded, 20% (1 in 5) stated they did not have access to outdoor space. This finding was consistent when comparing respondents from Lambeth and Southwark to those from all London boroughs.

When we do focus on respondents from Lambeth and Southwark, we find this statistic becomes worse for different groups. For those who could be viewed as a first generation immigrants, this statistic increased to nearly 25% (1 in 4) not having access to outdoor space. For men, a staggering 40% stated having no access to outdoor space compared to less than 10% of women. Although it's important to remember our sample size was small, these findings still speak to the need to consider the equity in the current distribution of resources and to tailor support for parents from different demographic groups.

Do you have access to outdoor space?



Q4 WHAT SUPPORT DO PARENTS ACCESS AND WHAT SHAPES THEIR DECISION?

Our final research question was to explore the factors that influence parents' interaction and engagement with support services. As we found in the previous section, there is a real need to adapt services to meet the needs of different groups. Through our research, we identified 3 key factors influencing the relationship between parents and support services.

The first factor was **ATTITUDES**, particularly cultural attitudes. During our engagement with parents, those from Black Caribbean, Black African and South Asian households spoke to the prevalence of distrust for institutions within their communities – *institutional scepticism*. Regardless of the realities for parents engaging with services now, taking caution when engaging with institutions is an attitude that has been passed down through the generations. These attitudes are difficult to overcome as the fears that parents have when considering institutional support are rooted in truth.

"I THINK THERE'S A LOT OF STIGMA AROUND ASKING FOR HELP ESPECIALLY FROM, FOR INSTANCE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES, BECAUSE THERE'S THAT WHOLE STIGMA OF IF I ASK FOR HELP, ARE THEY GONNA SEE THAT, COME IN AND TAKE MY CHILD? YEAH, THERE'S THAT STIGMA, ESPECIALLY, I THINK WITHIN THE BLACK COMMUNITY... SO YEARS AND YEARS AND YEARS AGO, SOCIAL WORKERS ARE NOT THE SOCIAL WORKERS THAT ARE TODAY. SO THEY DIDN'T HAVE CERTAIN THINGS PUT IN PLACE TO HELP PARENTS OR THERE WASN'T CERTAIN SERVICES AROUND TO HELP PARENTS GET TO A STAGE WHERE THEY CAN PARENT EFFECTIVELY... AND OBVIOUSLY, IT'S A GENERATION THING. IT COMES DOWN THE GENERATIONS."

Q4 WHAT SUPPORT DO PARENTS ACCESS AND WHAT SHAPES THEIR DECISION?

The second factor was **AWARENESS** and this can be split into two types.

- 1. Self-awareness:** Some of the parents we spoke to were honest about their personal journeys and their transition from dealing with issues on their own to having the ability to reach out for external support. From these conversations, it became clear that the decision to seek external/institutional support is a personal one and parents must come to the realisation that they need/would benefit from that support by themselves. They have to realise that their situation can change for the better. As a CR team we discussed how this lack of awareness is cyclical in nature - by witnessing certain situations during childhood, we then believe that this is just how things are.
- 2. Institutional awareness:** From our survey there was an overwhelming lack of knowledge on local organisations offering support during the pandemic. In Lambeth and Southwark, nearly 4 in 5 parents who completed the survey said they did not know of any local organisations offering support for parents and families during this time. Furthermore, nearly half of parents from Lambeth and Southwark said they had not received support during this time but would have liked some – and this figure increased to nearly 70% for men. We believe this further challenges the common narrative that men do not want support.

Q4 WHAT SUPPORT DO PARENTS ACCESS AND WHAT SHAPES THEIR DECISION?

The third (and final) factor was **ACCESSIBILITY**. Through our engagement with parents, we found accessibility covered a range of aspects from the affordability of activities to the degree of cultural understanding of service providers to the number of spaces available.

The importance of cultural understanding is heightened when you consider the experiences of parents who speak English as a second language and their need to not only express themselves clearly but also understand the information being given to them. This was shown to be vital for parents to both feel comfortable to seek support and to continue to engage with groups delivering support.

Finally, the parents we engaged continued to highlight the unpleasant way in which institutions interacted with them. During our forum meetings, parents described Southwark council as 'hostile' and other institutions such as the Job Centre and hospitals were seen to 'talk down' to people.

“HAVING SPANISH DOCTORS OR SPANISH SUPPORTERS IN MENTAL HEALTH OR MEDICINE IS VERY IMPORTANT. BECAUSE I HAVE EXPERIENCE FROM MY LACK OF ENGLISH, YOU KNOW, A LONG TIME AGO THAT THE CONNECTION WITH DOCTORS THAT SPEAK ENGLISH HAS BEEN A VERY, NOT BAD, BUT IT’S LIKE I NEED THE SAME. I DON’T UNDERSTAND, I DON’T GET BECAUSE SOMETIMES THAT BRINGS MISUNDERSTANDINGS. SO, YOU GO IN WITH DOUBTS OR YOU LEAVE THE PLACE WITH THE SAME AND MORE DOUBTS.”

Q4 WHAT SUPPORT DO PARENTS ACCESS AND WHAT SHAPES THEIR DECISION?

From our survey, just under 1 in 5 Lambeth and Southwark residents said they would not feel comfortable accessing support from a local organisation, but (interestingly) this figure dropped to less than 1 in 10 for men. Below we share some of the reasons parents gave for not feeling comfortable engaging with local organisations.



Q4 WHAT SUPPORT DO PARENTS ACCESS AND WHAT SHAPES THEIR DECISION?

Given those three factors – attitudes, awareness and accessibility – it is unsurprisingly that parents did not have much to say about the support they were currently accessing. For parents that had specific needs, such as a child with Special Education Needs or speaking English as a second language, they appeared to be more in touch with the local support available, but general engagement with support services was in short supply.

In our survey, we asked respondents to share any organisations they had received support from. Across all respondents, just 4 organisations were identified which we have shared below:

- [Coin Street](#)
- [Parents and Communities Together \(PACT\)](#)
- [Burgess Sports](#)
- [Kids Adventure Play \(Spring Lane\)](#)

#05:
RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM OUR CO-DESIGN SESSION

Our final meeting with the parents was a co-design session. We used this time to focus on two key insights from our research:

- How might we improve awareness of and access to services for parents?
- How might we bridge the gap between schools/teachers and parents?

Our intention was to identify parent-backed approaches that Impact on Urban Health should keep in mind when looking to engage with organisations. Interestingly, while these two insights spoke to very different aspects of parenting, the discussions in both groups yielded similar insights:

- There needs to be more of a focus on **human connections**. When parents are engaging with institutions, (at the start) it should not be as service provider and service user, instead it should simply be two people getting to know each other on a human level. There should be no titles and the aim is for those two people to relate to one another through a common understanding – in the words of one of the parents, ‘we don’t have to be the same on the outside, as long as we are the same of the inside.’
- Meetings should happen in a **neutral space**, with a preference for meetings outside in parks rather than in buildings. This is to remove the feeling of institutions having the “home advantage” and to encourage all those involved to feel on an equal playing field.
- Service provision should be **holistic in its approach**, providing a single space where parents can receive a variety of information and be signposted to the support that best meets their needs. Organisations should not work in silos.
- Organisations offering support to parents should be **positioned as services to help** throughout the life of a parent rather than services to only intervene when things go wrong. This is to reduce any stigma associated with parents engaging with such organisations.
- Interactions should be **mutually beneficially by promoting co-learning**. Parents were keen to not only be made more aware of any local support available, but also to influence and shape what these support services look like. Other stakeholders that parents were keen to engage including politicians and the local police.
- **Events should be fun**, especially when trying to engage parents for the first time, with the promise of a fun event getting parents through the door and their presence then providing an opportunity to start a conversation about support.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

In this slide we share a set of recommendations for the AMH team which we hope will inform the direction of the 10-year programme.

Supporting parents from different communities and with children of different ages

- Support parents to have the time to improve their own wellbeing and consider about the relevance of the current wellbeing support available, particularly for fathers
- Consider reframing the messaging around mental health to remove the stigma associated with existing language
- Co-design culturally relevant approaches with communities to:
 - More effectively market existing support services
 - Create more safe spaces for parents to receive support and learn from others outside of their family network
 - Increase understanding of Special Education Needs and behavioural disorders
 - Support the development of young boys without positive male role models
 - Provide innovative ways for single parents to receive respite
 - Better support young parents (aged below 25)

Addressing the support needs of parents

- Build on the co-design session insights and design effective approaches to bridge the gap between parents and institutions, including learning from parents who have successfully engaged with institutions
 - There should also be more thought into how information can be made accessible to those who speak English as a second language, and the additional support offered to ensure they can confidently and meaningfully engage with local services
- Look to engage with local food banks providing culturally appropriate foods
- Support policies and approaches that encourage collaboration, such as by engaging with organisations that support the “no wrong door” approach and encouraging its use more widely
 - The policy aims to ensure that people seeking help are given appropriate support (or referral), regardless of where they enter the support system

POSSIBLE ORGANISATIONS TO ENGAGE

In addition to our research, we mapped available parent support in Lambeth and Southwark and identified a wide range of available support services. Although not all services are directly located in Lambeth or Southwark, there are many throughout London that cover both boroughs especially because many services are currently being offered online. Our interviewees and forum members however did not seem to be aware of these services, indicating that these services are not marketed effectively or made accessible.

Based on the insights from our research, these are some of the services that we have identified and think it would be beneficial for the AHM team to engage:

Father2Father

Father2Father came highly recommended as it provides support, training and development to fathers, men and adolescent boys. Their mission is to increase the proportion of children growing up with involved, responsible fathers and male role models.

Dope Black Dads

Dope Black Dads is a digital safe space for fathers who wish to discuss their experiences of being Black, a parent and masculinity in the modern world. Dope Black Dads is building a solid online presence and has been recommended to us by several people from our networks.

Dope Black Mums

Dope Black Mums is a digital safe space for Black women and a micro-community that strengthens and supports black women from the diaspora to parent from a place of empowerment. Dope Black Mums is active on social media and has been recommended to us.

The Whole Parenting

The WHOLE parenting aims to teach parents around the world how to be intentionally connected to their children, how to practice empathetic, non-punitive, firm but gentle solution oriented discipline, mutual respect and the nurturing of competence in both the parent and the child. This is key to supporting parents to develop their own “culture”.

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Although this research project has revealed so much, we found there were some questions that warranted further research:

- Understanding the differences in parenting needs to raise a child in primary school
 - Although this was one of our original research questions, we believe that gaining a better understanding of the differences would require a dedicated research project
- Understanding how parenting needs change as a child transitions from primary school to secondary school
- Understanding the experiences of fathers
- Understanding the experiences of bilingual parents
- Understanding the approaches of existing parent support (and what informs this approach)
- Understanding where/how parents receive information
- Mapping existing local parent-led initiatives

Given the vast nuance in the experiences of parents, we think would it to be beneficial for the AMH team to engage and capture the experiences of parents over a longer period of time than this research project allowed – whether through a forum or interviews – and to create a space for continuous knowledge exchange between parents and the AMH team.

#06: CONCLUSION

WHAT WE WANT YOU TO TAKE AWAY FROM THIS REPORT

Our research into support for parents in Lambeth and Southwark has highlighted the extent to which each parenting experience is nuanced and unique. Coming back to the two initial hypotheses that underpinned this research:

- Hypothesis 1: The people providing services in GPs or schools are not representative which is a driver of distrust.
- Hypothesis 2: There is an under-recognition of community organisations/informal support.

We found that in that case of the first hypothesis, it is not simply about making institutions more representative, but we also need to consider the existing cultural attitudes that are prevalent within communities that are potentially the bigger drivers of institutional scepticism, particularly for those from Black Caribbean, Black African and South Asian households. Furthermore, when we consider the second hypothesis, our research has highlighted a real lack of awareness for support services so existing providers (even those that are parent-led) need support to redesign their engagement approaches.

In this report, we share a range of insights and offer a list of strategic recommendations for the AMH team at Impact on Urban Health, including possible organisations to engage with. More importantly, however, at the heart of the programme's 10-year journey should be a commitment to providing the resource, opportunity and space for more effective collaboration between support services for parents.

#07:
APPENDIX

OUR SURVEY QUESTIONS

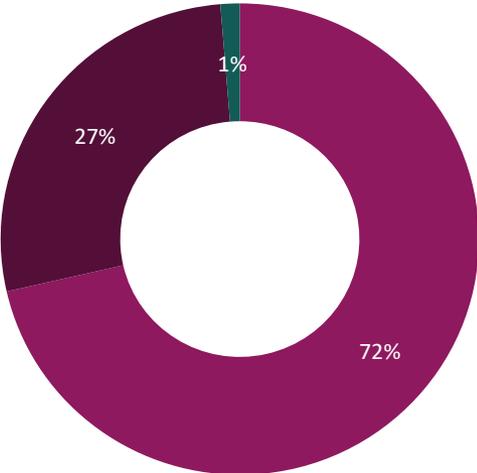
Below is a complete list of the questions asked in the 'Have Your Say' survey and In the following slides we provide a demographic breakdown of all those who responded.

1. Which London borough do you live in?
2. What is your age?
3. What gender do you identify as?
4. Do you have any children?
5. What is your first language(s)?
6. What country were you born in?
7. What ethnicity/ethnicities do you identify as?
8. Since the start of 2021, how do you feel you are coping with your current situation and the changes to the government restrictions?
9. Please tell us about some of the factors impacting on your ability to cope. E.g., childcare, employment, etc.
10. Since the start of 2021, how do you think your children are coping overall with your current situation and the changes to the government restrictions?
11. Please tell us about some of the factors impacting on their ability to cope. If you have children of different ages, please speak about them individually (including their age).
12. Do you have access to an outside space? E.g. a garden or local park.
13. Do you know of any local organisations offering support for families or parents during this time? E.g., digital access, food packages, resources for home-schooling, etc
14. Would you feel comfortable accessing support for parents or families from a local organisation?
15. Have you received any support for parents or families from a local organisation during this time?
16. Is there any other support for parents and families that you would like to see local organisations offering? This could include childcare, food, utility bills, etc.
17. Is there anything else you would like to add?

OUR SURVEY RESPONDENTS

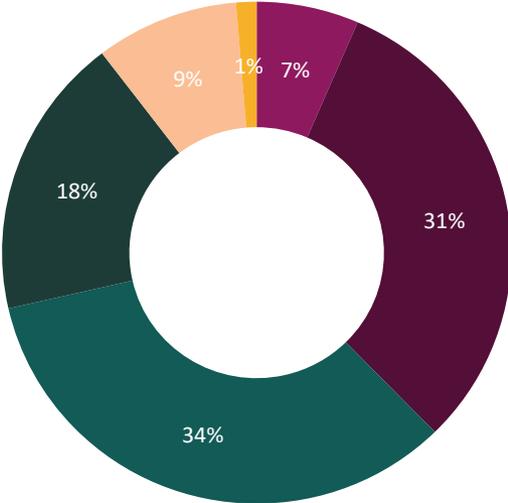
Respondents by gender

Female Male Prefer not to say



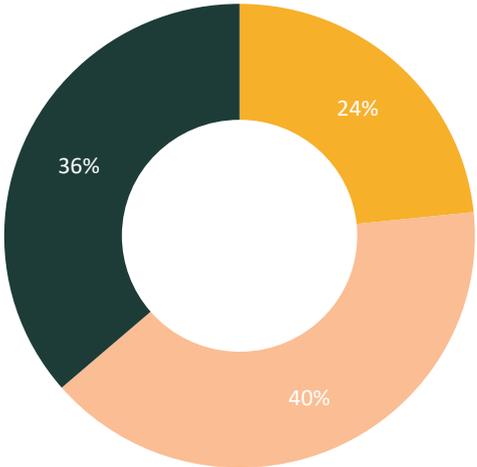
Respondents by age

18 to 24 25 to 34 35 to 44 45 to 54 55 to 64 Prefer not to say



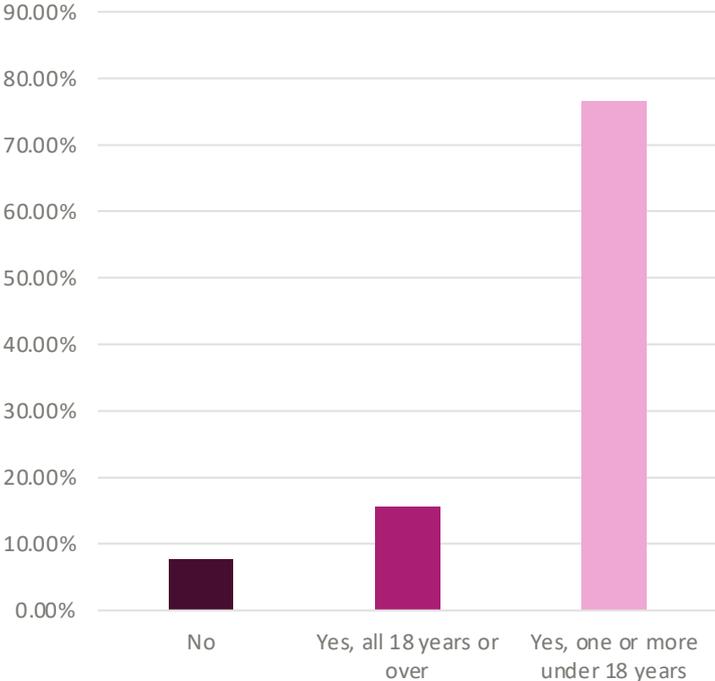
Respondents by location

Lambeth Other Southwark

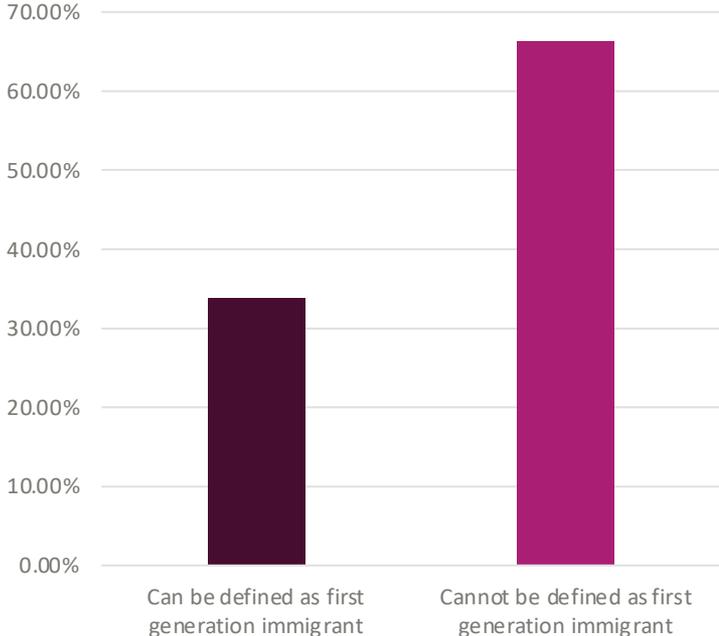


OUR SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Respondents with children



Respondents that could be defined as a first generation immigrants



OUR SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Of those who responded, the most common first language spoken was English and the most identified ethnicity of Black British.



BLUE SKY THINKING: LAMBETH AND SOUTHWARK IN 10 YEARS

In our co-design session with parents, we also asked about the services they hoped their children would have access to in the future, not bound by what they thought would be possible. We wanted to share these “blue sky” ideas, to give a picture of what support for parents in Lambeth and Southwark could look like at the end of the ten-year AHM programme:

- **Shared referral system** so that organisations work together to share referrals, especially if the support they’re providing isn’t quite right
- **Open access parenting manual/guide** as everyone parents differently and how you parent depends on the way you became a parent (there’s no one-size-fits-all to parenting). This manual would cover different aspects of parenting that would be expected in a parent’s lifetime and provide space for other parents can feed into it.
- **Support network for parents that have gone through breakups and are trying to co-parent.** This would include how to navigate a system from different perspectives, e.g. if both parents have work, how do you support the child and provide a space that is not too different to their household?
- **Bilingual support**, including talking about our feelings, listening, being patient and empathetic with others.
- **Communication support** to get support from others who have lived through (and overcome) certain experiences. This could include support from around the world.
- **Open forum** (similar to Parents’ Corner) where you cover different topics and provide a space for parents to share their concerns and learn from each other.
- **Social activity group** where people can have fun together and voice their problems too.
- **Targeted support for parents** depending on the age of the parent and child. This would include teenage pregnancy and parenting classes for children that have additional needs but for different ages
- **Affordable weekend retreats for parents**

THANK YOU!

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