

"ALL THESE STRESSORS"

A visual project about health in the urban environment with children and young people from NW London

Children and young people's priorities for health

Throughout 2022 and 2023, the Mohn Centre have worked with children, young people and parents from four community groups: Old Oak Primary School, Nova Family Programme, The White City Youth Club (Part of the Harrow Club Family) and West Thames College. Together with our community partners, we have supported children and young people to document the issues in their urban environment that they felt were shaping their health and wellbeing.

The children and young people took photos, created maps, recorded their views and debated topics. We have transformed all of this content into a series of short films representing the key themes that have emerged through this work. These children and young people have presented us with a holistic view of their experiences of health and wellbeing, challenging us to work across traditional boundaries.

This work sets a visual agenda for an ongoing discussion between the Mohn Centre and our local community about priorities for research.

The Mohn Centre for Children's Health and Wellbeing

The Mohn Centre's mission is to create a community-led, transdisciplinary research centre.

We aim to be at the leading-edge of addressing childhood physical and mental health challenges and inequalities in urban environments.



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Primary school age children

We worked with children in year 5 at Old Oak Primary School over the course of a term and with children and families at Nova Family Programme for a full day of activities. Through the images and discussions five themes emerged.

- The importance of **nature, green spaces and the environment** to the children, and the connections they made with this, opportunities to run, let off steam, exercise and get fresh air.
- Key **places in the community** where they accessed healthcare or which contributed towards wellbeing, e.g. doctors, dentists, school, mosque and community centres.



- The children had a strong awareness of the idea of **healthy and unhealthy food** and where in their neighbourhood they accessed food (supermarkets, sweetshops, fast food outlets). At times they were unsure about how often it was ok to have sugary food as 'treats'.
- **Pollution and rubbish** - Both groups talked a lot about the dirty air and particularly mentioned the A40 and traffic on their way to school. They also took lots of images of litter and rubbish - highlighting the child's perspective on our urban environment.
- **Social media and phone use** - The children were very aware of phones and social media as a place where there may be unsuitable material for younger children. They also spoke about the addictive nature of phones and how adults often spent a lot of time on them. They could also appreciate that phones could be used for research and staying in touch with friends.

"Being stuck in traffic feels stressful, because traffic makes you late. And when we go in the car, we normally go through a stressful area, because our map says it's faster, but it's not because there's loads of traffic. The traffic really slows us down"

OLD OAK STUDENT





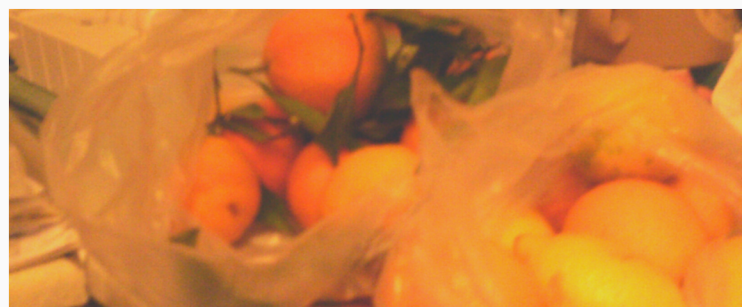
Young people

The older young people (12 to 20 years) we worked with highlighted some different concerns. Using images to prompt discussion we asked young people from the White City Youth Club and West Thames College about the issues they thought impacted on young people's health.

The young people talked a lot about **stress**, stress at home, concerns about **safety and knife crime** and the impact of **police stop and search** on young people's mental wellbeing.

They highlighted the role of **drugs and alcohol** as both a response to stress but also the cause of other problems for young people's health. Some young people talked about risky sexual behaviour and linked this to young people's drinking.

Social media and pressures on both young men and women to look a certain way or behave a certain way was also a recurring theme and one that added to their stress.



Food was also a cause of concern for this age range. They recognised that popular fast food (e.g. fried chicken) wasn't healthy but also highlighted that it was affordable, accessible, and healthy eating could be inconvenient or expensive. It was not an option that was easily available on the high street.

A number of young people mentioned the **importance of having someone to speak to** and how health education needed to be delivered in a setting and manner that allows young people to feel comfortable asking questions or sharing what they were going through. A couple of young people suggested that mainstream classes where there may be 30 young people present didn't allow for this open or honest discussion.



Next steps

The issues raised by children, young people and their parents and carers present an agenda for discussion for the Mohn Centre in shaping its strategy and priorities.

Over the next six months we will continue discussions with our community partners and colleagues across the Centre to develop our understanding of the themes and opportunities for future research.

We will be cataloguing the material from the engagement sessions and sharing it with researchers across Imperial to maximise the impact of this work.



For more information

If you would like to get involved or find out more about the Mohn Centre and its work with the community please email mohncentre@imperial.ac.uk

Scan the QR code to visit our website and watch the films.



“Yeah like KFC, McDonalds, they should do more healthy options than they do, I know it's like a junk food fast food restaurant, but they should do more like healthier options that still taste good but it's just healthier”

YOUNG PERSON



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