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Population & Public Policy

Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
Chair, Women and Equalities Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

1 May 2020

Dear Ms Nokes,

I write in response to the Women and Equalities Select Committee call for evidence for the inquiry "Unequal impact: coronavirus and the impact on people with protected characteristics".

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) produces data and statistics to support decision-makers in the UK and our trusted, impartial information is more important now than ever. The coronavirus illness (COVID-19) is a significant challenge for the UK and we are working to ensure that the UK has the vital information needed to respond. This means we will seek to ensure that information is provided faster, using new data sources and changing how our surveys operate, to ensure we provide necessary information as the situation unfolds.

In response to the Committee's call for evidence, we have reviewed the data we have published relating to the impact of Covid-19 on people with protected characteristics. The following provides a summary of the existing evidence we have on this issue and highlights some planned relevant future work.

From our recent publications to date, some of the key findings on the impact of the illness or the responses to it on specific protected characteristic groups include the following:

- As has been widely reported, deaths from Covid-19 are disproportionately affecting older age groups¹, with rates increasing significantly as age increases, starting from age 55 to 59 years in men and age 65 to 69 years in women. Death rates from Covid-19 are also significantly higher for men than women².
- Over a third of those living alone, and therefore vulnerable to the isolating effects of lockdown, are aged 70 and over³, a group that is already more worried than the rest of the population that they or their family will be infected⁴. This is also the age group that is more likely than the general population to regularly stop and talk to their neighbours and to rely on adults outside the home to provide them with food or essentials⁵, activities which will have been affected by social distancing measures.
- Households headed by the youngest, those aged 16 to 34 years, were less likely to have sufficient financial funds to cover a drop in household employment income⁶. We also find

¹ [Deaths involving COVID-19, England and Wales: deaths occurring in March 2020](#)

² [Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales, provisional: week ending 17 April 2020](#)

³ [Household projections for England – household type projections: 2016-based](#)

⁴ [Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain: 9 April 2020](#)

⁵ [Coronavirus and social relationships and support for vulnerable groups: 2017 to 2018 and 2018 to 2019](#)

⁶ [Financial resilience of households: the extent to which financial assets can cover an income shock](#)

that younger workers were least likely to work from home prior to the lockdown period, which in part is driven by the occupations young people are employed in⁷.

- Concerns over the pandemic are higher among disabled adults than non-disabled adults and, with more disabled adults self-isolating, there is evidence that it is having a negative effect on their well-being⁸. Since the start of lockdown, disabled adults are also significantly more likely to say that they are spending too much time alone than their non-disabled counterparts and are reporting much higher rates of loneliness.

The ONS is also planning the following new pieces of analysis to be published during May to increase the evidence base:

- Using new data linking Census 2011 to health data, we will publish Covid-19 deaths by ethnicity in early May, extending this analysis as more data become available to adjust for a range of different characteristics to add context to any differences found. The aim is then to extend this work to explore deaths from Covid-19, outcomes of hospital admissions and length of stay, by a range of characteristics including age, sex, disability, ethnicity and religion⁹.
- Updated measures of personal and economic well-being will be published, including breakdowns for protected characteristic groups where possible. We will also be exploring the different characteristics that matter most to personal well-being and groups that are most susceptible to loneliness.
- We will publish separate articles, drawing on a range of different sources, including the redesigned Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, to explore the experiences of different protected characteristic groups in relation to Covid-19, specifically, differences between the sexes, differences among those of different ethnic groups and experiences of young people. The timeframe for the publication of these articles will depend on being able to pool a sufficient number of responses across waves to be able to draw robust conclusions.
- We are also exploring an analysis of workers and occupations that require the closest proximity to other people and therefore could be at higher risk of Covid-19 infection. We will look to publish analysis on these occupations by a range of protected characteristics. We are also looking to publish an article on the population and characteristics of key workers, including their protected characteristics where possible.
- More broadly we will continue to release labour market statistics and will be able to consider the impact of Covid-19 on different groups and their labour market status. We are also looking to produce analysis on those who could be considered key workers, including their characteristics and demographics.
- We will publish analysis on access to outside space and, separately, analysis on household composition and type of accommodation people are living in, including housing types, living conditions, tenure and cramped accommodation. Both pieces of work will include breakdowns by protected characteristic groups where possible.

⁷ [Coronavirus and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019](#)

⁸ [Coronavirus and the social impacts on disabled people in Great Britain](#)

⁹ [Statement of upcoming analysis on deaths and coronavirus, 21 April 2020](#)

- We are exploring the possibility of using provisional data from our suite of household finance surveys to understand the impact on incomes during the early stages of the coronavirus emergency. With a focus on changes in income inequalities for those groups most impacted by changes in employment status alongside different household characteristics.
- By the end of May, the first estimates from the Online Time Use Survey will be available covering the period from 28 March to 4 April, which will explore how respondents in different protected characteristic groups spent their time over a 2-day period.

Alongside our immediate analytical plans, we also have plans in relation to new survey data sources, which include:

- Working with Oxford University, Manchester University and IQVIA, we have begun a Covid-19 prevalence/incidence of infection survey. Analysis will present a measure of population prevalence of infection, which will include breakdowns for protected characteristic groups where data allow.
- During May, we will be starting a telephone version of the Crime Survey for England and Wales, which will provide information on a variety of topics across a range of protected characteristic groups. Alongside questions on criminal victimisation, topics are likely to include; violence in a domestic setting, hate crime, experiences of threats or harassment and perceptions of the police and crime and will capture the period before the introduction of measures to tackle the Covid-19 outbreak as well as since then.
- ONS is working with NHS Digital and NatCen Social Research to develop a study of children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 outbreak. Subject to funding, this proposed online study in England will interview children and young people who took part in the 2017 Mental Health of Children and Young People study¹⁰. It will collect information on children's mental health and wellbeing and allow some basic breakdowns by ethnicity and sex.

As more data become available, we will continue to explore the impacts on different protected characteristic groups at a greater level of granularity, not only during the pandemic itself, but also investigating the equalities impacts in the longer term. We would welcome exploring with the Committee the potential to collaborate and contribute to this evidence base and are keen to take into account the Committee's priorities when developing our future workplans in these areas.

I hope the Committee finds this evidence to be helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any further assistance.

Yours sincerely,



Iain Bell

¹⁰ [2017 Mental Health of Children and Young People survey](#)