

What role do visual cues have in promoting emotional connections to the sense of belonging and wellbeing in the West African diaspora of the UK

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Background

'Wellbeing' is closely linked to a people's health. The WHO definition of health in 1984 revised 'Health' to incorporate 'the extent to which an individual or group is able to realise aspirations and satisfy needs and to change or cope with the environment...'

In this study, we explore visual cues that trigger a perceived sense of belonging as a means to gain insight on how this relates to medical students from the West African diaspora wellbeing in relation to their new environments.



Research aim

To identify the common themes that relate to wellbeing and a sense of belonging for participants (UK medical students from the West African diaspora)

Objectives

- To explore the themes that emerged in the data from the 10 participants
- To investigate how promotion of themes could impact wellbeing of wider population of West African diaspora
- To dissect the importance of culture to the dynamic relationship of belonging and wellbeing

Study design

Using a method called photovoice to elicit and analyse themes in the data and to conduct a literature review of scientific and fiction writing from the West African diaspora

Methods

Photovoice:

1. Photographs taken by participants
2. Focus group discussions (FGD) to discuss photos
3. Clarke and Braun method of thematic analysis of photos and FGDs

This was done so to enable people to express their own story through a literal snapshot of their chosen surroundings.

Provides a methodological advantage over interviews because it captures the environment surrounding the participant as well as their spoken word.

Photovoice promotes problem solving through providing a reflective lens.



Results

Three main themes emerged:

1. **A journey to connect to ethnic routes:** participants felt the need to seek out their culture and felt a sense of 'pride' when they eventually discovered something they could use to connect their sense of belonging with their wellbeing.

This theme centred around 3 sub themes:

- a. the need to **"rectify a sense of loss"** being from the diaspora having lost touch with their ethnic language. This rectification process was done so with food and music that were of their ethnic origin.
- b. **"Nostalgia"**, and because the wellbeing of the participants were well connected to their culture, some described their ethnic food as a "time capsule", being able to transport them to memories of their West African home land.
- c. **"Belonging through a familial lens"**, displayed how family cloth and pass downs were able to shift space itself, making participants feel their culture comparable to as if they were in their ethnic county.

2. **Representation:** encompasses the struggle that participants face being black and from the diaspora, with art and pictures they felt was familiar, giving them peace of mind despite mainstream media stereotypes.

3. **Faith:** participants framed their peace and culture around their faith. Due to the integration of West African culture in religious practices, faith could achieve a stronghold of family and peace in their lives, a stability to always come back to in times of need.

Discussion



- Participants used their photos as a conduit to connect their sense of belonging to their wellbeing, which in turn influenced their mental health in a positive manner.

- The deep connection between wellbeing and sense of belonging was found to be bridged by the cultural influences participants have had based on their connection with the west African diaspora.

- There is a need to revisit and correct outdated integration theories of how the diaspora indeed integrate with their environment; it seems like the nostalgia the participants felt through photos formed new connections between them and their environment that was beneficial to their health. These new connections are the basis of further research to be done to understand and promote the health of this particular group of people.

Monday, June 13th 2022, in-person exhibition of research in Brighton; contact k.darko1@uni.bsms.ac.uk for more information

