

Can Intersectionality Help with Understanding and Tackling Health Inequalities? Perspectives of Professional Stakeholders

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Abstract

Background: The concept of 'intersectionality' is increasingly employed within public health arenas, particularly in North America, and is often heralded as offering great potential to advance health inequalities research and action. Given persistently poor progress towards tackling health inequalities, and recent calls to reframe this agenda in the UK and Europe, the possible contribution of intersectionality deserves attention. Yet, no existing research has examined professional stakeholder understandings and perspectives on applying intersectionality to this field. In this paper we seek to address that gap.

Methods: drawing upon a consultation survey and workshop undertaken in the UK. The survey included both researchers (n=53) and practitioners (n=20) with varied roles and levels of engagement in research and evaluation. Topics included: familiarity with the term and concept 'intersectionality', relevance to health inequalities work, and issues shaping its uptake. Respondents were also asked to comment on two specific policy suggestions; targeting and tailoring interventions to intersectional sub-groups, and evaluating the intersectional effects of policies. 23 people attended the face-to-face workshop. The aims of the workshop were to: share examples of applying intersectionality within health inequalities research and practice; understand the views of research and practice colleagues on potential contributions and challenges; and identify potential ways to promote intersectional approaches

Results: Findings indicated a generally positive response to the concept and a cautiously optimistic assessment that intersectional approaches could be valuable. However, opinions were mixed and various challenges were raised, especially around whether intersectionality research is necessarily critical and transformative and, accordingly, how it should be operationalised methodologically. Nonetheless, there was general agreement that intersectionality is concerned with diverse inequalities and the systems of power that shape them. Conclusions: In the UK health inequalities policy and practice context there are a number of potential ways forward for intersectionality in helping to understand and tackle such inequalities.

Full Text

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