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Impact of a community empowerment programme in disadvantaged UK neighbourhoods: results of a survey

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Background: A community empowerment programme in the UK aims to enable people to have greater collective control over area-based decision making, improved health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities, by providing small grants to support residents of deprived neighbourhoods and communities of interest to come together to take action on issues of importance to them.

Methods: A survey was conducted at 4 6-month intervals as part of a mixed methods evaluation, to collect data about participant demographics, level of involvement, opinions of the project, and impacts. The survey was self-completed online or on paper, and distributed by local project leads. Outcome questions were adapted from the UK Government Community Life Survey to facilitate comparison with national statistics. Data were analysed using SPSS to produce descriptive statistics, supported by inferential statistical tests where appropriate. Regression analysis using multi-level modelling was used to estimate the conditional correlation between health outcome and Local People project participation.

Results: 1053 people from 29 local areas responded to the survey over the 4 time points; only 93 responded more than once. 43% took part in project activities, 36% were local project committee members and 19% were volunteers. The analysis found positive impacts on confidence, control, friendships, skills, happiness, life satisfaction, feelings of worth ($p < 0.05$), and that greater length and degree of involvement in the projects were associated with greater positive impacts on all of these outcome

Conclusions: The survey provides tentative evidence that participation in a community empowerment initiative may result in improved wellbeing, feelings of power and control, sense of belonging and trust. People who are involved for longer or more deeply involved are more likely to see these impacts. More community-based survey research is needed to gather people's views on neighbourhood initiatives.

Key messages:

An evaluation of a community empowerment programme found positive impacts on control, wellbeing, belonging and trust.

Greater length or degree of involvement were associated with greater impact.