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BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE TO TACKLE HEALTH INEQUALITIES

Using key concepts from the Marmot review to frame covid-19 response

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Marteau and colleagues¹ have helpfully updated the Marmot review,² highlighting “intervention generated inequalities” (IGIs) as unintentional consequences of health inequalities work in parts of the UK since the 1970s. Their discussion of commercial influences seems overly complicated, however. I would argue that the concentration of tobacco retailers, fast food outlets, bookies, pubs, and off licences in more deprived areas is simply an example of IGIs delivered intentionally by the commercial sector.

The concept of IGIs extends the idea of “lifestyle drift” in the original Marmot review. Understanding other key terms from the Marmot review and its updates will be essential in responding to the covid-19 pandemic and recovery.

- Working across the life course: the specific challenges of the pandemic vary by age, including missed nursery and school, furlough and unemployment, and social isolation in the elderly
- Tackling the social determinants of health: the impact of overcrowding and precarious employment on covid-19 transmission are two examples
- Reducing the gradient in ill health rather than just tackling the gap between those at extremes of risk: illustrated by infection and death rates by age and socio-economic status
- Proportionate universalism: while offering vaccination to all adults and running mass immunisation centres, we also need to tailor our approaches for people who need more support
- Control and agency: helping people take control of their own lives was the central ambition of the Marmot review. The pandemic and lockdown have resulted in a loss of a sense of control at a society level, which is likely to be contributing to increased mental health problems.³ Lack of control affects groups that are hesitant about vaccination, for example through a lack of trust in authorities.

As we recover from the pandemic and more than a decade of austerity the importance of identifying successful public health interventions has never been more pressing.

Competing interests: None declared.

1 Marteau TM, Rutter H, Marmot M. Changing behaviour: an essential component of tackling health inequalities. *BMJ* 2021;372:n332. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n332 pmid: 33568384

2 Marmot M, Goldblatt P, Allen J, et al. Fair society healthy lives (the Marmot review). Institute of Health Equity. 2010. www.instituteofhealthequity.org/resources-reports/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review

3 Jia R, Ayling K, Chalder T, et al. Mental health in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic: cross-sectional analyses from a community cohort study. *BMJ Open* 2020;10:e040620. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2020-040620 pmid: 32933965

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