

Hearing the needs and concerns of Folkestone's Nepalese elders

Community researchers, Norbu, Bijendra and Kanchan, from the Folkestone Nepalese Community (FNC) Centre examined the [impact on the cost-of-living crisis on the Nepalese community in Folkestone](#). The community centre serves to combat loneliness and promote wellbeing through education, training and recreational activities. The centre also supports integration into the wider community and works to preserve Nepalese culture, tradition, ethos, and community identity.

Many beneficiaries of the FNC Centre live in poverty. For Gurkha veterans and their families this is due to historical challenges. They have long fought to receive the same army pensions as their British counterparts. Many veterans also had low literacy and numeracy skills, making it hard to find work after retirement. As a result, pension credit is often their only income.

The research

The community researchers collected data from their community members through a survey of 103 people and video interviews with 7 participants with a focus on older community members. The survey was conducted face-to-face in Nepalese because of limited proficiency in English. This also enabled the researchers to explain the cost-of-living crisis as there is no direct translation in Nepali. The research showed four main areas of impact of the cost-of-living crisis:



Participants of the survey at the FNC Centre

1. Impact of the cost-of-living crisis

- **Financial struggles:** Over 62% of beneficiaries reported changes in their spending habits, with 69% struggling to pay at least one bill, and 18% unable to pay all their bills.
'I sometimes borrow from [my] relatives due to the decrease in disposable income.'
- **Food choices:** Rising costs forced beneficiaries to make difficult choices:
'I want to buy healthy foods, but they are the most expensive.'
- **Housing:** 80% live as private tenants due to affordability and long waits for social housing. Additionally, 64% receive housing benefits.

2. Mental and emotional well-being

Over 50% said their mental health had deteriorated over the past year, often due to aging, isolation, and family separation. The pandemic exacerbated feelings of isolation and heightened the negative effects of the cost-of-living crisis.

'I am getting older, and my children are still in Nepal and unable to live with me, which makes me sad.'

3. Supporting dependents in Nepal

Despite their financial struggles, 80% of participants send money to relatives in Nepal, with 32% supporting three or more dependents.

'Supporting relatives is a necessity due to the economic situation in Nepal.'

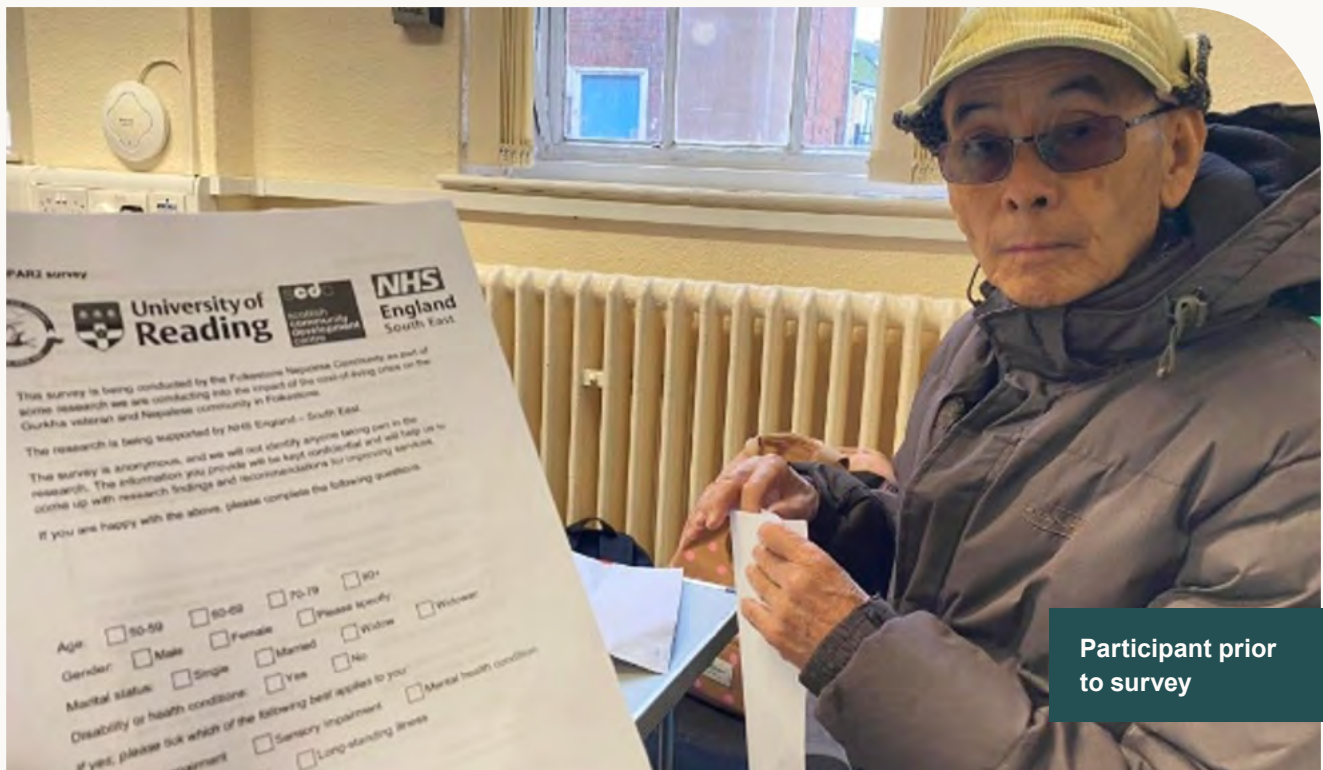
Many hope to bring their children to the UK but face barriers. A participant expressed frustration, saying:

'My child's application has been rejected four times. I feel disregarded by the country [I] fought for as a Gurkha.'

4. Access to healthcare

More than 60% found it hard or very hard to access NHS services. Key challenges included language barriers and reduced in-person consultations. Participants noted that face-to-face interactions with health professionals were more effective before the pandemic.

'There should be someone who can translate face-to-face and is easy to access.'



Responding to research with shifting priorities

The research helped the FNC centre to prioritise their services and activities to better support their community.

'From the research findings, I could understand our beneficiaries in a better way, their priorities, their concerns. I was able to plan where we need to focus more, where we need more volunteers or staff to look after their issues and concerns and how we provide a service.' – Maha, Folkestone Nepalese Community (FNC) Centre

Fundraising

FNC centre works with an external fundraiser to apply for funding and with the research findings they have been able to apply for funding to support the needs of their community members based on the evidence. This is supporting the centre to implement their recommendations.

Strengthening relationship with Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board

Through their involvement in the CPAR programme, the community researchers have developed research knowledge and skills to conduct research in their community. One of the ways that they work closely with the Kent and Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB) is through commissioned reports and so, their bolstered research skills has helped to strengthen their relationship with the ICB. This enables their research findings to feed directly into local health services.

More language and digital classes

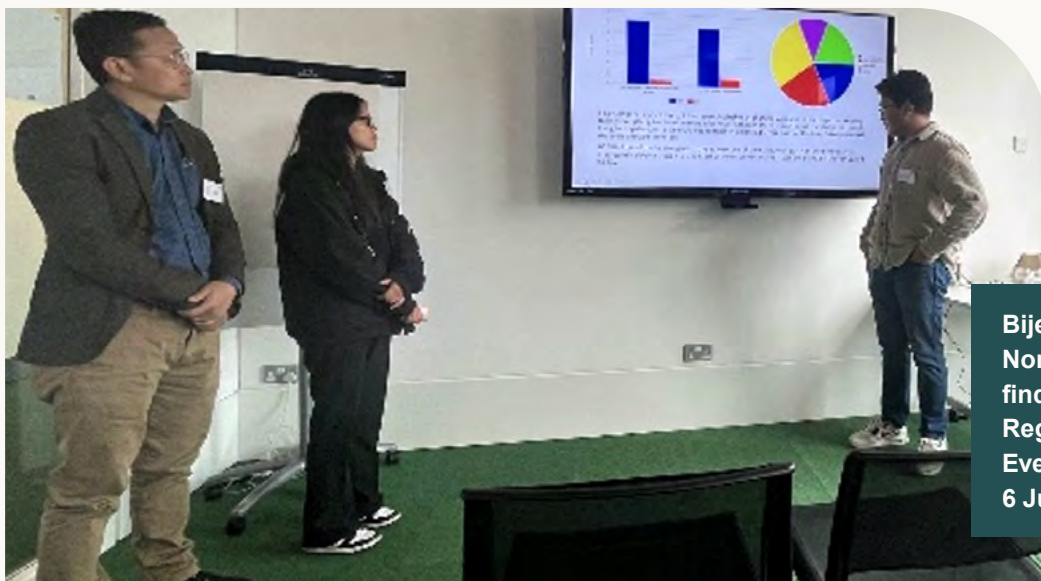
In direct response to the research findings the FNC centre have increased the number of classes they provide to community members. They realised that one of the major barriers to accessing GP services was poor digital literacy and so they now provide digital referrals five days a week to help community members make appointments and support with e-visas. As part of this work, they are also offering more English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classes, maths and digital classes every week.

Reflections from researchers

The community researchers are younger members of the community and conducting the research helped them to understand the community and many of the cultural traditions. The research enabled the researchers to connect with the community and bridge the generational gaps.

'My journey started with anxiousness and hesitations as I had never taken part in a research group before. When I first read about the project, I found the purpose of the research project wonderful. I was able to gain deeper insight into the concerns and struggles of the senior citizens of the FNC. I was also able to meet and learn about different communities from all over England through the other researchers from the cohort.' – Kanchan, Community Researcher

'Although it might take some time for the results to arrive, the participants in the research were happy that there was finally someone willing to listen to their unique issues regarding the crisis. Therefore, I'm proud to have at least given them a chance to relay their concerns to those who can tangibly improve their lives.' – Bijendra, Community Researcher



Bijendra, Kanchan and Norbu presenting their finding at CPAR 2 Regional Showcase Event Programme on 6 June 2024

About Community Participatory Action Research

Between April and October 2024, the Institute for Voluntary Action Research (IVAR) worked with 29 community researchers from South East England to identify how their research could shape priorities, policies and the development of health services for marginalised communities in the region. The researchers were the second cohort of the Community Participatory Action Research (CPAR) programme led by the NHS South East School of Public Health. This story is one of a collection that shares the journey that community researchers have travelled. Their narratives are a testament to the dedication and resilience of individuals committed to improving the lives of their neighbours and building healthier, more inclusive communities. You can find more stories [here](#).