Title

A 'strategy of resistance'? How can a place-based empowerment programme influence local media portrayals of neighbourhoods and what are the implications for tackling health inequalities?

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Abstract

Place-based stigma is linked with health and social harms, but few studies have assessed what actions may reduce these. Area-based programmes are one potential strategy but may exacerbate stigma by targeting disadvantaged neighbourhoods. We reviewed newspaper coverage in two stigmatised neighbourhoods to identify whether a programme funded in these localities influenced reporting. While both areas were dominated by negative coverage, the progamme provided an impetus for some positive stories over time and enabled community activists to articulate alternative narratives about where they lived, countering negative external portrayals. The involvement of residents should be central to strategies to tackle place-based stigma.

Keywords

Social stigma; health inequalities; neighbourhoods; media coverage; community empowerment

Highlights

- Explores how two stigmatised places in England were portrayed in local newspapers

- Found that negative reporting (e.g. crime) dominated coverage of both areas

- The programme enabled residents to have a voice in shaping more positive local news coverage

Introduction

Place-based stigma and health inequalities

Much has been made about the ways in which physical and social characteristics of places shape health and wellbeing. However, the case has been made that the symbolic dimensions of places should also be considered important to health (Keene and Padilla, 2014; Popay et al., 2003), including the consequences of living in a neighbourhood that is stigmatised (Garthwaite and Bambra, 2018; Keene and Padilla, 2014; Pearce, 2012; Thomas, 2016). Although this topic is relatively underresearched compared to other social determinants (Halliday et al., 2018), researchers have draw attention to the relevance of place-based stigma for addressing health inequalities (Keene and Padilla, 2014; Pearce, 2012). Living in a stigmatised neighbourhood has been found to have a negative impact on residents' self-reported health (Kelaher et al., 2010) and on reports of depressive symptoms and mental illness diagnosis (Tabuchi et al., 2012). In other studies, place-based stigma has been associated with physical health outcomes including poorer sleep quality and hypertension (Duncan et al., 2016; Ruff et al., 2018).

Lois Wacquant's thesis of 'territorial stigma' (Wacquant, 1996, 2007) has increasingly been utilised as a framework to research and understand how residents living in neighbourhoods that are 'vilified' in public, policy and media discourses, manage this stigma in their daily lives (August, 2014; Jensen and Christensen, 2012; Kirkness, 2014; Slater and Anderson, 2012). Initially, Wacquant's (2007) work emphasised the ways in which residents may 'submit' to the stigma. This may include internalising the stigma, retreating from other residents (social distancing) or physical spaces within a neighbourhood (physical distancing), blaming others (othering) for the area's poor reputation, or wanting to exit the area. More recently, Wacquant (2014) has updated this original thesis, with his framework also acknowledging the ways in which residents may reject or resist labels of stigma as well.

These various coping strategies are evident in qualitative studies of residents' experiences of living in stigmatised places. Researchers have observed strategies of 'submission', with distancing from others (Thomas, 2016; Warr, 2005), as well as othering (Arthurson, 2013; Zaami, 2015), often cited. In a study in the north east of England, for example, distancing from neighbours and physical environments as well as blaming others for the area's poor image was a means of avoiding further stigmatisation (Garthwaite and Bambra, 2018).   Earlier research in north west England also showed that residents' decisions to distance themselves from those they perceived as 'improper people' in their neighbourhoods was a strategy used to construct positive identities in the context of living somewhere stigmatised (Popay et al., 2003).   In contrast, other studies point to the ways in which residents may also reject the label of the stigma or adopt indifference to the area's defamation (Jensen and Christensen, 2012) as well as defend their neighbourhood (Arthurson, 2013; Kirkness, 2014; Thomas, 2016; Williams et al., 1995). Similarly, Slater and Anderson (2012) found that residents, rather than internalising stigma, articulated a strong sense of collective pride in where they lived.

'Intervening' to address place-based stigma

Area based initiatives (ABIs) have a long policy history in efforts to address socio-economic deprivation, typically involving a range of measures to improve physical, social and economic outcomes within a specific locality (Thomson, 2008). While such initiatives are, in theory, a means through which place-based stigma may be addressed – by improving the social determinants of health in disadvantaged neighbourhoods - as we outline below, there is also the possibility that such programmes could exacerbate stigma as well.

Firstly, where particular localities are repeatedly targeted, ABIs could contribute to stigmatising these areas and their residents (Lorenc and Oliver, 2014; Parry et al., 2004).

This is because the process of ranking neighbourhoods as 'deprived' and targeting them for intervention is, arguably, a stigmatising label. Secondly, ABIs aspiring to transformational regeneration (e.g. mass demolition and rebuilding programmes) and gentrification could also exacerbate stigma attached to existing residents, but in turn, place-based stigma may also serve the policy justification for demolishing an area in the first place (Kallin and Slater, 2014; Paton et al., 2017).

Yet a further challenge is that the nature of ABIs are in themselves complex with multiple pathways to impact and potential for a range of outcomes (both positive and negative). In theory, this may mean that an ABI is successful in achieving positive impacts in some domains (e.g. improving employment prospects through skilling up residents) in spite of the stigma. Yet the presence of stigma may serve to dampen positive effects, for example, residents then experiencing postcode stigma by potential employers.   As outlined earlier, studies have also now demonstrated an association linking spatial stigma to health. This means place-based stigma may have a direct impact on health of individuals and local populations, as well as being mediated through other pathways.

Despite this, only a small number of studies have evaluated whether ABIs influence the portrayals of areas, either positively or negatively.   Evaluations of the New Deal Communities programme (one of England's largest ABIs) demonstrated some success in improving how residents perceived their neighbourhood as a place to live (Lawless, 2012; Popay et al., 2015). Positive improvements were more likely to be reported in neighbourhoods where local regeneration approaches focused on visible physical improvements (such as street lighting) and actively involved the community, compared to approaches favouring major neighbourhood redevelopment, where residents had limited control over regeneration plans (Popay et al., 2015).

Other intervention studies measuring area reputation have produced mixed results and have also not set out to compare the relative impact of addressing stigma against other social determinants. The SHARP study in Scotland found that rehoused social housing tenants reported improvements to their area's reputation, one year after relocating to a new home in the neighbourhood (Petticrew et al., 2009). An evaluation of a major multi-site regeneration programme in Glasgow found evidence that over time, residents of areas undergoing regeneration became more likely to have a positive view of their own neighbourhood (internal reputation) – but also became more likely to think that their neighbourhood had a poor reputation among people who did not live there (perceived external reputation) (Mason and Kearns, 2017).

Media coverage of socio-economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods

While a range of actors (including researchers, politicians, urban planners) may play a role (Hastings, 2004), media coverage often emerges as a significant transmitter of poor reputation for socio-economically disadvantaged areas (Arthurson et al., 2014; Kearns et al., 2013a; Kullberg et al., 2010). Journalistic practices that exacerbate stigma include reliance on a limited range of external sources such as local politicians and officials, whose opinions about an area may be more negative than residents (Devereux et al., 2011), and the selection and prioritization of negative stories for commercial interests (Brian et al., 2011; Hastings, 2004). The accumulation of dominant negative area narratives may also lead to journalists uncritically reporting negative stories about a neighbourhood (Kearns et al., 2013a), with crime featuring overwhelmingly in this coverage (Brian et al., 2011; Devereux et al., 2011; Kearns et al., 2013a; McLaren et al., 2005).

Exacerbating these processes has been the limited opportunity that residents have had to challenge media representations (Conway et al., 2012; Devereux et al., 2011; Palmer et al.,

2004). Within the literature, only a few examples are documented of efforts by residents to challenge place-based stigma perpetuated by news reporting. One substantive example is a major regeneration programme in Dublin involving residents engaging with media providers to achieve positive change in how newspapers and a local radio station framed their residential estate (Conway et al., 2012; Devereux et al., 2011). Central to this success, the authors suggest, was an investment in media capacity building for residents, and the presence of community activists engaged in the estate's regeneration developments (Devereux et al., 2011). Participatory action research approaches, while not directly targeting media coverage, have also sought to give voice to residents' narratives of their neighbourhoods as a means of countering negative external discourses in the public domain (Byrne et al., 2016; Cuny, 2018; Thomas et al., 2018).

Drawing on qualitative findings from an evaluation of an ABI in England – the Big Local programme - we report on a comparative review of local newspaper reporting about two neighbourhoods funded by the programme. We firstly report on the nature and volume of news coverage that both areas received.   We then examine whether Big Local through its focus on resident led decision making was influencing how the areas and communities living there were portrayed during Big Local's early delivery phase. The potential for the programme to exacerbate stigma through its targeting of neighbourhoods for funding is also considered. The implications of the findings for public health policy and practice are then discussed, highlighting the need for strategies to consider place-based stigma more explicitly as part of local efforts to reduce health inequalities.

Study design and methods

Background to study

Big Local is a neighbourhood programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund (previously Big Lottery) and managed by Local Trust (https://localtrust.org.uk/).   Under the programme, 150 English areas (including urban residential estates, rural villages and seaside towns) with populations that average 7500 people, have each been allocated around £1 million. The funding was allocated on the premise that it could be spent over a ten to fifteen year period at the community's own pace. The funding for these localities was announced between 2010 and 2012. All Big Local areas are relatively disadvantaged and were allocated funding on the premise that they had historically 'missed out' on their fair share of Lottery funding. The programme is also underpinned by an ethos of 'asset-rich communities making their own decisions on what is best for their area'.

In order to draw down the funding, residents were required to organise themselves into Partnership Boards comprising a majority of residents. Across the 150 areas, Big Local Partnerships are delivering projects related to improving economic and environmental conditions, organising community activities (e.g events and festivals) or investing in physical spaces (e.g. community hubs). Alongside this, Big Local Partnerships across all areas have to varying degrees deployed publicity activities (social media, newsletters, press releases) including the employment of paid press officers/volunteers to raise awareness and promote what is happening as part of Big Local and to encourage local people to get involved.

The Communities in Control study (CiC) is a large multi-method and multi-site study evaluating the impact of Big Local on the social determinants of health inequalities and on health outcomes. The study is funded by the National Institute for Health Research. The media analysis reported here, formed a component of longitudinal qualitative fieldwork in 15 Big Local areas, which comprised one work package within the study's second phase

(2016/2017). Details of the ongoing CiC study and its findings to date, are reported elsewhere (Lewis et al., 2019; McGowan et al., 2019; Orton et al., 2017; Ponsford et al., 2018). Ethics approval for the study was obtained from Lancaster University Faculty of Health and Medicine Research Ethics Committee (3 February 2014).

Study sites

Based on analysis of fieldwork interviews and a review of Big Local Partnerships delivery plans, place-based stigma was observed as an issue for one third of the 15 fieldwork sites involved in the CiC qualitative fieldwork; with the media cited as one of the key actors shaping how areas were portrayed (Ponsford et al., 2018). Two of these areas were then selected for the media review based on their geographical location (the neighbourhoods were in different parts of England) and because the Big Local partnerships were taking different approaches to address place-based stigma.

Located in North West England, the first area is in a coastal town and has a population of around 5,550. Based on a weighted average of lower super output area (LSOA) Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015 scores (IMD 2015), we estimate this Big Local area had an average IMD 2015 score of 61.96. This score would make the area comparable to LSOAs ranked within the second most deprived decile in England. The majority of the population (96%) self-identify as being from White ethnic groups. There are a large number of Victorian houses in the area that at one time served as boarding houses or hotels; many are divided into privately rented apartments frequently of poor quality and some streets have several houses lying derelict. Local residents interviewed described a significant stigma attached to the area, with the perceived notoriety of the area also reaching national coverage in the media. Due to a greater focus on tackling reputational issues (described below) we have named this area 'Higher-focus area'.

The second area is located in the London region. We estimate this Big Local area had an average IMD 2015 score of 33.11, which is comparable to areas ranked within the third most deprived decile in England. It has a larger population of 10,810, and 72% of the population self-identify as from White ethnic groups.   Although the area has good links into the capital it was not at the time a major commuter town, with many residents working and/or conducting their daily lives very locally. In this area, resident perceptions locally were mixed, with many praising the area for its community spirit and 'village like' feel. Reducing the fear of crime among local residents, however, was highlighted as a significant issue and a negative external perception of the area was referred to frequently in fieldwork. Interview participants described a pervasive external perception of the area as rough and crime filled, with significant social problems.   We have named this area 'Lower-focus area' because compared to the Higher-focus area, the Big Local Partnership placed less direct emphasis on addressing reputational issues.

We undertook a comparison of the Big Local implementation plan for each site to understand their approach to addressing reputational issues. Firstly, this comparison draws attention to divergence in the visibility given to area reputation in the plans. In the Lower-focus area, no explicit reference is made to reputational issues, although concerns about community perceptions of crime are cited. Reference is also made to a perceived neglect of the area by the council. While the plan itself does not directly refer to area reputation, our fieldwork interviews as part of the wider study explored this issue in more depth. As highlighted above, residents and workers suggested that from the outside, the area had gained a reputation of being a high crime area as well as a '*dumping ground'* for troubled families. In contrast, in the Higher-focus area's plan, several references are made to a *'poor reputation'*, with improving its image cited as one of the priorities for action. Here, addressing reputational issues are perceived to be important not only because of the impact of

stigma within the community. By improving the reputation of the area, it is also thought to

amplify the success of the Big Local programme as well.

Secondly, Table 1 draws attention to features of the local approaches in the two areas,

including a comparison of (i) communications/publicity structures (ii) press activities (iii)

other Big Local funded activities in the plans with potential to improve area reputation.

Table 1 Comparison of implementation plans in two areas

	Higher-focus-area	Lower-focus-area
Structures for communications and publicity	Communications working group established Communications plan outlining strategy using press releases, website, social media, community magazine, newsletter. Employment of a press officer	Project worker employed, but not stipulated if press and communications is part of role Residents in the locality receive regular leaflet distribution and also updates provided via social media
Press coverage	Positive press coverage included as a marker of reputational change in the implementation plan Local monitoring reports 39 press releases have been issued by 2018	Number of press releases unknown No monitoring of press coverage reported
Wider Big Local activities in plans with potential to improve area reputation	Delivery of high impact projects (using creative arts) to enhance visibility of Big Local within and beyond the locality. Promote the locality as a tourist location and improve the retail experience, in order to attract shoppers and visitors Programme of local festivals	Improvement of green and open spaces, to encourage greater use by residents, and enhance pride Programme of local markets to develop local economy in the area Activities to improve community and others' perceptions of area, in terms of crime

In the Higher-focus area, the Big Local Partnership took the decision to deliver direct action

to improve publicity of the area, including the establishment of a communications working

group and development of a communications plan, as well as employment of a press officer.

Additionally, the active monitoring of press coverage is also arguably an indicator of the

greater emphasis that this site placed on tackling the area's negative image in the press. At the time of the research, the Big Local Partnership had also funded plans for a series of community festivals and creative art projects and invested in neighbourhood improvements. These activities aimed to help project a more positive image of the locality, which in turn, was intended to strengthen the impact of Big Local projects in the area, foster a sense of pride, attract visitors as well as support the local economy. In contrast, the Lower-focus area placed less focus on publicity activities beyond communication with residents living in the area (e.g. leafleting homes). Here, emphasis was placed upon improving perceptions through neighbourhood improvements and addressing the fear of crime. These activities were undertaken alongside regular community events to bring residents together, build community pride and keep children and young people occupied.
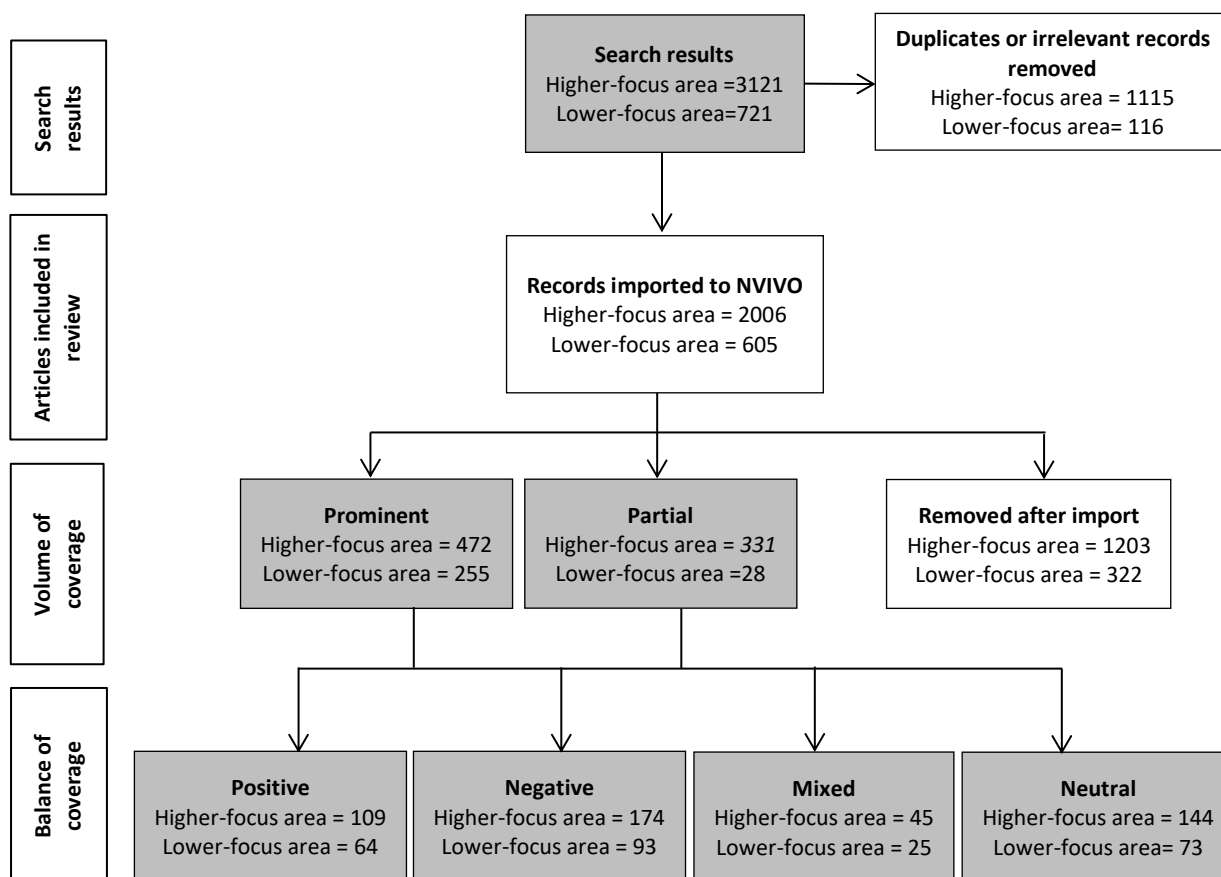
Newspapers and search strategy

News stories from four local newspapers with a print and online presence were sampled (two newspapers from each area). Newspaper A and B in the Higher-focus area are daily newspapers with print copies published five days per week (Monday-Friday). In the Lower-focus area, Newspaper C also publishes daily but Newspaper D is a weekly publication coming out on a Thursday. Information about circulation figures are not available in the public domain, however, all are long established titles and have been running for several decades. The newspapers were selected according to local knowledge about appropriate publications and following an inspection of the highest number of hits returned in Lexis Nexis: a searchable database for local, regional, national and international newspapers. All article types were included (e.g. letters, news articles). Insights from the fieldwork (e.g. key street names and terms associated with the Big Local programme) informed the search strategy. EH conducted the searches between November and December 2016.

The original search time frame was between 1st July 2011 and 31st October 2016. The start date for the searches had aimed to provide a baseline of several months' coverage before the Big Local initiative got underway in both areas. However, when screening the articles, it became evident that indexing issues in the Higher-focus area meant no hits were being returned from either newspaper for 2011. So that it was possible to report using a comparable database across both areas, only the results from January 2012-December 2016 were included in the review. This timeframe covers the initial five years of the Big Local programme (including its launch), which is due to run until 2026.

Search results were exported from Nexis into Excel. Rapid title screening and Excel's duplicate filter was used to screen further for duplicate records. At this stage we identified n=2006 potentially relevant records for the Higher-focus area and n=605 for Lower-focus area. The Excel spreadsheets were then imported into NVivo 11 for coding.

Figure 1 Flowchart of search results

| Search results | Search results
Higher-focus area =3121
Lower-focus area=721 | → | Duplicates or irrelevant records removed
Higher-focus area = 1115
Lower-focus area= 116 |

Search results
Higher-focus area =3121
Lower-focus area=721

Duplicates or irrelevant records removed
Higher-focus area = 1115
Lower-focus area= 116

Records imported to NVIVO
Higher-focus area = 2006
Lower-focus area = 605

Prominent
Higher-focus area = 472
Lower-focus area = 255

Partial
Higher-focus area = *331*
Lower-focus area =28

Removed after import
Higher-focus area = 1203
Lower-focus area = 322

Positive
Higher-focus area = 109
Lower-focus area = 64

Negative
Higher-focus area = 174
Lower-focus area = 93

Mixed
Higher-focus area = 45
Lower-focus area = 25

Neutral
Higher-focus area = 144
Lower-focus area= 73

(Left-margin labels: Search results | Articles included in review | Volume of coverage | Balance of coverage)

Data analysis

Table 2 below sets out the coding framework used to guide the overall review process, which drew on previous studies investigating newspaper reporting (Devereux et al., 2011; Kearns et al., 2013a; McLaren et al., 2005). Figure 1 above shows the results of the search and screening process. After removing irrelevant items, articles were firstly screened to identify whether they featured the area, or residents living there, in a prominent or partial way (termed *volume* of coverage). At this stage, further articles were removed if they were not relevant on full screening or if the geographical location being described was unclear. As a result, a large number of articles were removed for the Higher-focus area. This primarily arose from a lack of sensitivity in the searches. One search term in particular (the name of a major road that cut through the area and the wider town) generated a large number of articles where it

was unclear if the story was specifically about the area. Furthermore, the area also shared a place name with another well-known locality elsewhere, generating many irrelevant hits. All prominent articles for both areas were then categorised according to whether articles were positive, negative, mixed or neutral in tone (termed *balance* of coverage). The prominent articles were also coded according to the nature of their coverage (e.g. housing, crime) using categories identified by Kearns et al. (2013a) and Devereux et al. (2011). Due to capacity and time, articles categorised as partial coverage were excluded from the analysis (see limitations for further discussion).

Table 2: Coding Framework

Category	Nodes	Description
Volume (Kearns et al., 2013a)	Prominent	The area or its resident(s) feature as a main focus of the news article
	Partial	Where reference is made to the area but it is not a sole focus of the article
	Not relevant	Records irrelevant (i.e. not about the area) or geographical coverage unclear
Balance of coverage (Kearns et al., 2013a; McLaren et al., 2005)	Positive	For example: - text conveying a particular image - wording and tone of the text
	Negative	
	Mixed	
	Neutral	area is mentioned or discussed but no evaluative image is conveyed (e.g. a traffic report)
Nature (Devereux et al., 2011; Kearns et al., 2013a)	For example, community activity, housing, public services, transport or crime and anti-social behaviour	Coding by topics that appear as the subject of the article

In order to understand how the presence of Big Local in each area could be shaping media representations of the areas, we subsequently conducted an analysis of articles that made specific reference to Big Local in the two areas (n= 37 articles). Using Nvivo 11 we generated a coding frame, investigating types of actors (e.g. residents, local politician, national funder) who were quoted directly in the article and whether this coverage was positive or negative in its portrayals of the areas. This coding frame was applied through a close line by line reading of all the articles.

Double Coding

A 'negotiated agreement' approach (Campbell et al., 2013) was adopted to double coding of a sub-sample of stories for the volume and balance categories in our coding schema. This was undertaken by EH, CS, MC and RP and also involved 4 residents living in the Higher-focus area (see public involvement). The purpose of the double-coding activity was to check the discriminant capability of our coding framework. Double-coding also helped explore the assumptions that underpinned how the research team were categorising news articles and develop an elaborated understanding of category boundaries. All members of the research team were involved in a series of discussions about coding decisions, which were designed to help us achieve consensus about assigning articles to categories and to develop a shared understanding of the categorisation process (Campbell et al., 2013).

Public Involvement

Residents of the two areas, operated as public representatives, supporting the media review at different stages. They advised on the development of the search strategy and enhanced researchers' understanding about how place-based stigma had a bearing on Big Local areas. Four residents living in one of the fieldwork sites (Higher-focus area) also double coded a sub-sample of articles. The residents' coding of the articles was broadly in line with our

coding but one or two interesting differences were raised, informing discussions about category boundaries. For example, one article which researchers initially categorised as negative, reported on community frustrations with a regeneration programme due to ongoing delays with its delivery. However, residents' perspectives on the article suggested this was 'mixed', because the regeneration itself was symbolically viewed as a positive development, despite the delays encountered. This involvement activity enabled decisions made about categorising articles to be more accurately rooted in lived experiences.

Findings

Volume of coverage

Overall, the Higher-focus area generated a much higher volume of coverage compared to the Lower-focus area (see table 3). Over double the number of articles categorised as prominent or partial coverage were identified for the Higher-focus area (n-803) compared to the Lower-focus area (n=283).

Table 3: Volume of prominent and partial coverage by area and newspaper

	Higher-focus area (n=articles)		**Lower-focus area (n=articles)**	
	Newspaper A	Newspaper B	Newspaper C	Newspaper D
Prominent	315	157	192	63
Partial	214	117	21	7
Total	529	274	213	70

In the Higher-focus area there also was a largely upward trend between 2012-2016 in the number of articles published in which the area or its residents were featured (see figure 2 below). In the Lower-focus area the volume of coverage was on average lower in each year and appeared to show a slight downward trend over time. Some caution is needed in

interpreting this result. One possible factor influencing differences in the overall volume of

coverage between the areas is that Newspaper D in the Lower-focus area was a weekly

publication whereas both publications in the Higher-focus area were daily. Additionally,

interrogation of the results found no articles about the Lower-focus area being returned in the

search results for Newspaper D for the years, 2015 and 2016.   This decline in coverage

appears to coincide with a merger of three regional newspapers (including Newspaper D).

One likely explanation is that the merger of these local newspapers, vastly increased the new

newspaper's geographical footprint, which may have reduced the likelihood of the area

receiving coverage in the weekly press. Yet why the locality received no coverage at all in

this newspaper after 2014, remains unclear.   Even without these limitations, the overall

coverage nevertheless suggests a marked difference in the overall volume of coverage

between the two areas.

Figure 2 A comparison of prominent articles by areas between 2012 and 2016
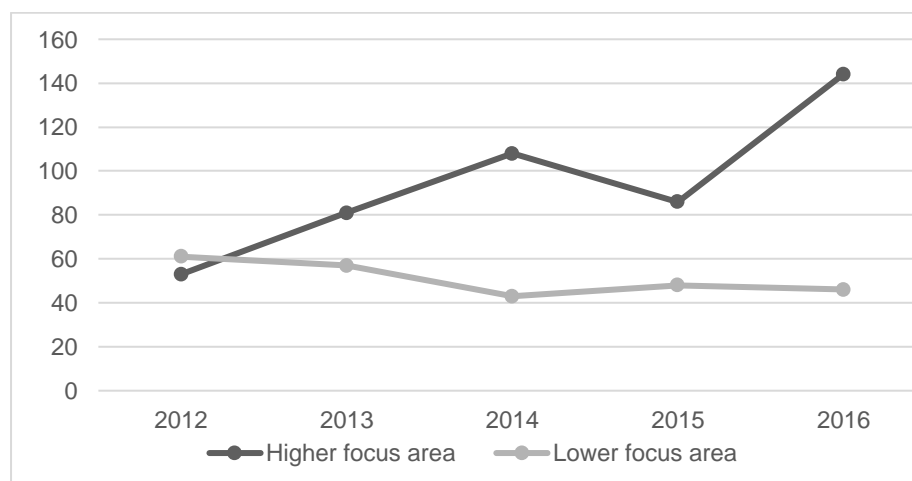
Portrayals of areas (balance and nature of coverage)

All prominent articles from both areas (n=727 articles) were coded for their balance of

coverage (see table 4 below). In both areas, negative coverage accounted for the largest

category of coverage but table 5 shows some differences in the balance of coverage between

the newspapers. While Newspapers A and B (Higher-focus area) were broadly similar in

their coverage of positive or negative stories, Newspaper C in the Lower-focus area
generated a higher volume of negative coverage and lower proportion of positive coverage
compared to Newspaper D. Given the issue with Newspaper D described above, it is possible
that the decline in this newspaper's coverage may have also reduced the amount of positive
coverage that the area received.

Table 4 Balance of coverage in prominent articles for each area

	Higher-focus area (%)	**Lower-focus area (%)**
Positive	23	25
Negative	37	36
Mixed	10	10
Neutral	31	29
Total	100 (n=472)	100 (n=255)

Table 5 Balance of coverage by newspaper and area (2012-2016)

	Higher-focus area (%)		**Lower-focus area (%)**	
	Newspaper A	Newspaper B	Newspaper C	Newspaper D
Positive	25	18	21	37
Negative	33	44	42	19
Mixed	11	6	10	8
Neutral	30	32	26	37
Total	100 (n=315)	100 (n=157)	100 (n=192)	100 (=63)

In both areas, positive stories were linked with coverage of community activities (e.g.
fundraising), the work of community organisations and groups as well as features on

residents e.g. a Lottery windfall (see Figure 3). Coverage of local activities (e.g. fun family days, festivals) featured frequently in positive coverage for both areas but more so in the Higher-focus area. Here, the positive coverage focused in particular, on community festivals and events organised by a community arts organisation located in the neighbourhood.

Crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) was overwhelmingly associated with negative portrayals in both areas. Similar to Kearns et al. (2013a), reporting in some instances was linked to clustering around particular incidents. In the Higher-focus area, for example, a peak in crime reporting occurred when both newspapers ran a number of articles over several months about a spate of vandalism incidents. This coverage also shaped how residents in the area were portrayed, with several articles using descriptors of young people as 'running riot' or in 'roving gangs'.

*Figure 3 Nature of coverage by positive and negative articles for both areas (2012-2016)*
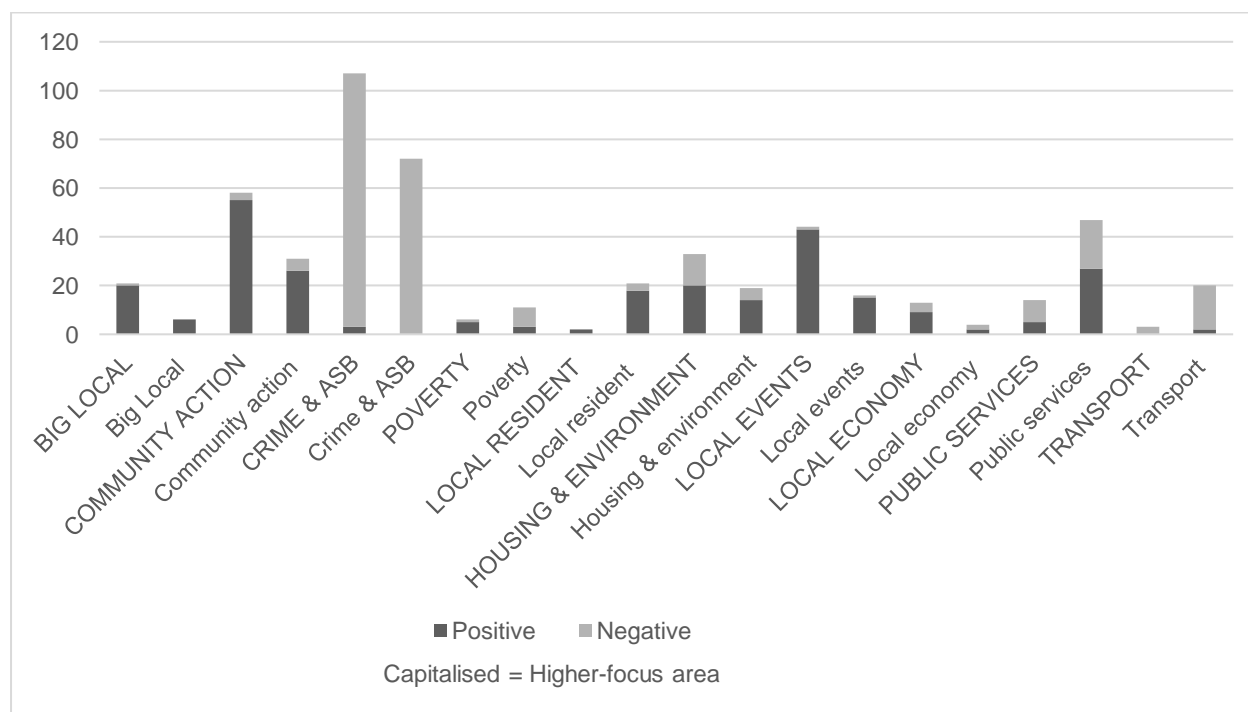
Coverage generated by Big Local

The research team theorised that Big Local could influence the portrayals of the areas and residents in local newspaper reporting through two pathways. Firstly, the targeting of the areas for Big Local funding, and subsequent reporting of the initiative's presence would generate attention to the areas, which could be positive or negative. Secondly, the resident led ethos of the Big Local programme offered the potential for groups of residents linked to Big Local to articulate more positive narratives about their areas within reporting. Each of these pathways are considered in turn.

Volume and balance of coverage of Big Local

Figure 3 above showed the volume of Big Local related stories in both areas compared to other topics reported on. Although the overall of number of articles was relatively modest for both areas (n=37), the volume of coverage generated about Big Local was broadly equivalent to coverage of issues such as transport or housing/environmental concerns and more substantive than coverage of deprivation or poverty related issues. Figure 4, however, shows that while the volume of reporting was relatively similar in the initial period following the launch of Big Local, coverage began to differ between the two areas over time. In the Higher-focus area, the number of Big Local stories published in the two newspapers increased between 2012-2016, after a relatively slow start. By contrast in the Lower-focus area, despite some coverage surrounding the launch of Big Local in 2012-2013, coverage decreased after 2014. Although the decline in Newspaper D's coverage needs to be considered, Big Local stories were not generated in Newspaper C either, suggesting a lesser engagement with/interest from the media. In the Higher-focus area, in comparison, an increase in coverage was timed with public consultation activities by the Big Local Partnership and the launch of its delivery plan, which included funding for a programme of community festivals and events.

Figure 4 Volume of Big Local articles by area over time (2012-2016)
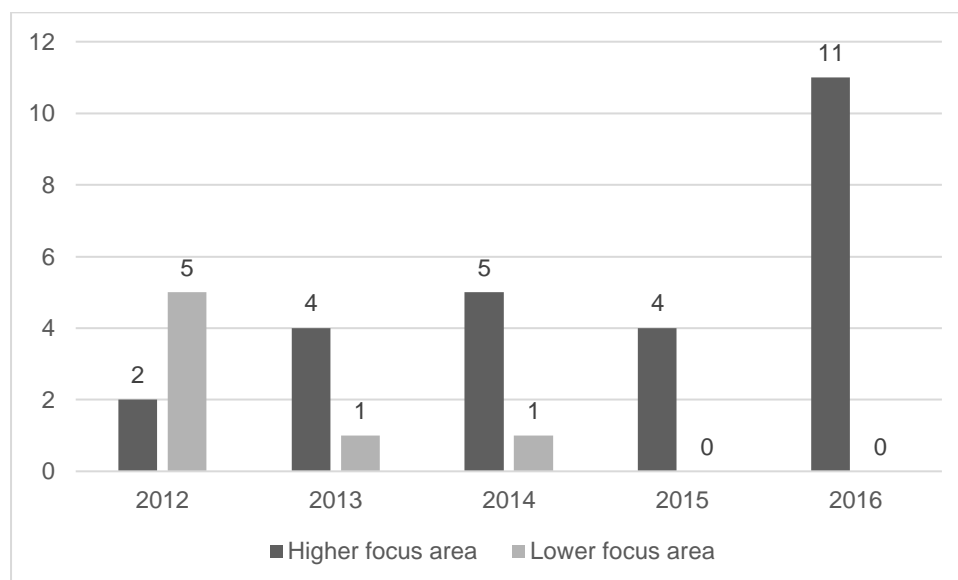
Next, table 6 shows the coverage of Big Local stories by the balance of coverage.

Table 6 Volume by balance of Big Local coverage (n)

	Higher-focus area	**Lower-focus area**
Positive	20	6
Negative	1	0
Mixed	5	1
Neutral	0	0
Total	26	7

Negative or mixed coverage associated with Big Local mainly featured around the time when

the initiative was launched. Such articles typically presented Big Local as a positive

development, however, this coverage also dwelled on why areas were targeted for funding,

citing social and economic challenges. Negative characterisations included the use of

descriptors such as 'much maligned' or 'most deprived' or 'an area with needs'. In one article, for example, the local councillor commented of the Lower-focus area:

> *It's one of the most deprived wards in London. Any money is welcome.* (Elected
>
> Member, Lower-focus area, Newspaper C, 03/03/2012).

Some difference was observed in the framing of deprivation and inequalities associated with coverage within these articles. This was seen, for example, when comparing viewpoints of two officials working for the national funder. In this first quote below, the official refers to the driver for the programme as related to structural challenges faced by areas, whilst also emphasising community strengths:

> *These areas have for many years been overlooked and have missed out on vital*
>
> *funding and resources – they have people who are high on aspiration but until now*
>
> *have been low on opportunity.* (National Big Local representative, Higher-focus area,
>
> Newspaper A, 10/12/2012)

In contrast, in this second quotation by a different official, reference is made to residents living in Big Local areas as having low aspirations:

> *As a starting point we look at where hasn't done well out of Lottery funding in the*
>
> *past, and we look at things like high unemployment and low aspirations.* (National
>
> Big Local representative, Lower-focus area, Newspaper D, 01/03/2012)

Overall, however, Big Local stories were more likely to generate positive coverage than negative. This was associated with Big Local activities being delivered locally, which resulted in portrayals of the areas in a more positive light. Firstly, the use of positive descriptors worked to emphasis the area as an attractive place to visit:

> *The park becomes a really vibrant place to spend the afternoon, a great celebration*
>
> *for the [the area] and the people who live here.* (Community organisation, Higher-
>
> focus area, Newspaper A, 02/08/2014).

Secondly, articles sought to draw attention to the assets within the neighbourhood. As this quote from a resident member of a working group responsible for organising a Big Local event told a paper:

> *"The [name of event] will highlight the quirky and curious businesses thriving in the area and the unique shopping opportunities they provide.* (Big Local resident, Higher-focus area, Newspaper A, 08/09/2016)

Thirdly, Big Local events such as festivals and community galas helped demonstrate social connectedness in the area:

> *Organiser [name] said: "I am really pleased that so many people came along to enjoy themselves. It was wonderful to see young and old working together …* (Festival organiser, Higher-focus area, Newspaper A, 15/08/2016)

Finally articles promoted optimism and positivity about what the programme could offer for the future:

> *It aims to present a positive and uplifting message of hope and cheerfulness … that will bring multiple improvements and increased collaborative working to the area.* (Journalist, Higher-focus area, Newspaper B, 03/12/2015)

Generating resident-led narratives of the area

Within the body of articles related to Big Local, a range of actors were quoted directly ranging from residents actively involved in Big Local as members of the Partnership Board, community organisations and other representatives (e.g. the local elected councillor).

On the few occasions when local residents unconnected to Big Local were quoted, this tended to reflect a more negative view of the areas. This was particularly the case where people were quoted in correspondence to the newspapers around the time of the funding announcement:

> *The area is a hotspot for crime and anti-social behaviour - I know because I live there*
> (Local resident, Lower-focus area, Newspaper C, 11/07/2014).

> *Spending any more cash on infrastructure projects anywhere in [the Area] is a total*
> *waste of money.* (Local resident, Higher-focus area, Newspaper A, 20/06/2013)

Overall, however, and particularly in the Higher-focus area, where a greater volume of Big Local coverage was generated, Big Local residents and representatives from local community organisations were more likely to be referenced than those not involved in Big Local. These stories offered more positive narratives of the areas, than those told by residents not involved.

Several stories where residents and community organisations linked to Big Local were cited focused attention on the ways in which residents had control over how funding could benefit the neighbourhood. This resident, active in Big Local in the Higher-focus area, was quoted describing the potentially transformational power of the funding in conjunction with the community's control in deciding how to spend it:

> *I've heard one councillor after another say what they think [Higher-focus area]*
> *wants. But with this Lottery money, it really does feel that we, the people, are in*
> *charge. So, come on, everybody, let's grab this chance with both hands and make [the*
> *area] a better place for all of us* (Big Local resident, Higher-focus area, Newspaper
> A, 05/06/2013)

Occasionally, residents from the Big Local Partnership group were also called upon as a source of authority about where they lived. In coverage of a planning application for a major retail development, for example, a spokesperson from the Big Local Partnership was quoted as saying:

> *We see that the creation of jobs locally will have a beneficial effect on the economy of*
> *[the area].* (Higher-focus area, Newspaper A, 02/09/2014)

Community and voluntary organisations within the area when quoted, also acted as champions for the resident led ethos of the programme. In the quote below, the representative emphasises the importance of local people having a greater say in neighbourhood decision making.

> *[Name] of the voluntary service, said: "It's very important that people in the area decide how the money will be spent because it will be local people who will benefit* (Community organisation, Lower-focus area, Newspaper D, 17/05/2012)

Finally, this coverage also provided the opportunity for community organisations to express more positive representations of the areas, as seen in the quotation below:

> *This isn't just about the £1 million. Ideally the grant money will show that [the area] is a vibrant area which just needs some investment which will hopefully see more cash injected into the area.* (Community organisation, Lower-focus area, Newspaper D, 17/05/2012)

Discussion

Similar to other studies (Kearns et al., 2013a; McLaren et al., 2005), this review confirmed that local newspaper coverage contributed to the circulation of negative area portrayals, which were observed in our neighbourhood fieldwork. Our findings add to these existing studies, providing new evidence on how an area-based programme with a strong participatory ethos of involving residents in decision making, positively influenced local media coverage.

In the Higher-focus area that explicitly sought to challenge negative portrayals, residents involved with Big Local aspired to regenerate a vibrant identity for the area and actively promote good news stories. Here, a greater number of articles were generated through Big Local related activity compared with the area adopting a less intentional strategy. In the Lower-focus area, most articles about Big Local were clustered in the launch stage,

whilst in the Higher-focus area, the volume of positive articles increased over time. This suggests that Big Local was providing an initial impetus for positive stories in both areas but that the presence of the initiative alone was not sufficient to sustain this coverage over time.

Where stories related to Big Local generated more mixed coverage, this coverage focused on the socioeconomic challenges faced by both areas. This coverage occurred primarily at the launch stage of the initiative, highlighting the importance of framing rationales for targeting areas for funding, using structural rather than pathologising language (Hastings, 2004).

In the Higher-focus area, it is plausible that the combination of direct activities by the Big Local partnership (press activity, communications) with a wider programme of work designed to attract visibility and incomers to the area, was achieving some success in generating more positive coverage within newspaper coverage. Yet this is not to say that the strategy adopted by the Big Local Partnership in the Lower-focus area was unsuccessful in addressing reputational issues; rather changes in perceptions may need to be measured in other ways beyond the media, such as understanding shifts in the attitudes of public sector professionals or residents of other neighbourhoods towards the area.

It is also feasible that other major developments taking place in the areas were competing for press attention and might have influenced the amount of coverage which Big Local received. In the Lower-focus area at the time of the research, plans had been put forward by the council to progress a large-scale housing redevelopment. Our analysis of the newspaper coverage indicates this redevelopment did not dominate overall coverage of the area, nevertheless, the reporting of the redevelopment was considerably higher than reporting of the Big Local initiative. In this respect it is plausible that this development may have diverted press interest away from Big Local activities. In the Higher-focus area, while a number of articles similarly dealt with non-Big Local regeneration projects, these reports

were typically of more modest housing improvements and potentially less likely to attract heightened media interest. However, it was also evident that on occasion, Big Local stakeholders in the Higher-focus area were able to use their communications structures, to have a voice about these local developments in the media. In turn, this contributed to the Big Local initiative gaining more coverage rather than knocking it out of the media spotlight.

As Wacquant (2014) points out, the decision as to whether residents submit to, or resist place-based stigma is shaped by their social context and position in the community. Though modest, our review suggests that Big Local was enabling groups of residents and other community stakeholders to enact a 'strategy of resistance' in the following ways. Firstly, such programmes offer the resources and opportunity to increase local capacity to engage with the media and have some influence over reporting, either through developing residents' skills or employing people (such as press officers) who can undertake this work on their behalf (Conway et al., 2012). Secondly, by generating positive news stories that demonstrate resident activists showing their pride in the area, this may theoretically improve other residents' internal perceptions of where they live, with potential benefits for their wellbeing (Kearns et al., 2013b). Thirdly, where communities gain greater collective control over what happens in their neighbourhood and have the means to articulate positive collective narratives about where they live, this may also challenge the power dynamics that typically marginalise lay knowledge (Popay et al., Forthcoming). Finally, where residents are represented publicly as being actively involved in civic activity, this too can help to challenge portrayals of communities as being disengaged or lacking pride in where they live (Palmer et al., 2004).

Yet even where positive news stories can be generated in reporting, this does not necessarily indicate that wider attitudes towards an area will change (Conway et al. 2011). As our findings showed, positive news stories exist alongside negative stories, which may

work to counteract the improved coverage which Big Local generated (Hastings &Dean, 2003). More generally, other researchers have also reiterated the tenacity of place-based stigma (Butler, 2018) and difficulties of achieving lasting change in area reputation (Hastings, 2004; Hastings & Dean, 2003).To date, only limited and mixed evidence exists on whether ABIs can have an impact on addressing place-based stigma. As Mason and Kearns (2017) note, this highlights the need for programme developers to more explicitly consider how intervening will serve to address this determinant of negative health outcomes and for future evaluators to include measures of reputation in their studies. Future quantitative research could also consider the relative impact of reducing stigma compared with tackling improvements in other social determinants. Moreover, given the rise of online technologies, such as social media, there is potential for future research to draw on approaches in the field of obesity/weight stigma, in order to consider how other media outlets perpetuate stigma linked to place (Heuer et al., 2011), or are alternatively deployed as a vehicle to counter and resist prejudices (De Brún et al., 2014).

Limitations

Articles with partial coverage of an area (where an article referred only in part to the area, rather than being the primary focus) were not included in the review, so it is possible that their inclusion could have resulted in a different balance of coverage. Kearns and colleagues found, for example, that newspaper articles reporting partially about areas were more likely to generate more negative than positive coverage (Kearns et al., 2013a). However, our decision to exclude this set of articles, mainly for capacity reasons, is unlikely to have affected the coverage of the Big Local programme, as all Big Local articles were included in prominent coverage. Finally, factors associated with the newspapers themselves such as staff numbers and their circulation patterns may also explain differences in reporting

observed. The observed decline in coverage in Newspaper D described earlier is likely to be reflective of these wider factors at play. In this respect, a limitation is that detailed information about newspapers was not publicly available, nor was it practical to collect this information during the fieldwork period, because we did not interview journalists as part of the study. Reviews of press coverage in future could combine primary fieldwork to gather this contextual information, contributing to a more nuanced analysis of coverage, well as provide insights into journalists' perceptions as to what shapes their reporting about a particular locality.

Conclusion

The link between place-based stigma and health is now established. Given the complex nature of the issue, strategies addressing place-based stigma are likely to require multiple actions including investment in physical regeneration of neighbourhoods, as well as targeting media coverage. Nor is place-based stigma likely to be mitigated without addressing the structural causes of inequalities that are rooted in the unequal distribution of power (Keene and Padilla, 2014; Pearce, 2012). However, where ABIs actively engage residents in shaping local action, this can enable communities of place to construct and voice their own narratives about where they live, in turn, challenging the negative discourses that typically dominant portrayals of 'disadvantaged' neighbourhoods.

Declaration of Interest

We have no interests to declare.

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