

The impact of the COVID-19 epidemic and anti-epidemic measures in the Roma neighborhood in Bulgaria

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Introduction:

COVID-19 is becoming an indicator of inequality in societies. Due to the difficult socio-economic situation, Roma in Bulgaria face a higher risk of suffering and death due to COVID-19 than general population. The aim of the report is to analyze the impact of the epidemic of COVID-19 and the anti-epidemic measures applied among the Roma community in Sliven district, Bulgaria.

Material and methods:

An exploratory qualitative study design was adopted, combining focus group discussion and qualitative interviews. One focus group with 8 representatives of the Roma ethnic group, and 7 in-depth interviews with specialists working with the Roma community were conducted in November 2020. Data were subjected to thematic analysis. 6 priority topics have been formulated and a hierarchical framework of codes has been built through free software. The experts, assessment of 13 university professors of public health was applied. The COREQ - checklist for reporting quality research was used.

Results:

A segregated Roma community of about 20 000 people lives in the Nadezhda neighborhood in the town of Sliven. The impressions of the author from the in-depth conducted interviews with the specialists were compared with the summarized view of the experts, reflecting the information received from the Roma population in focus group. Matching the codes of the author and the experts in relation to 5 of the topics such as: work - work; fear - insecurity; healthcare - doctor; 'closing the neighborhood' - police; despair, pessimistic views, deterioration of the epidemic situation - disease, misery, famine was found. No coincidences were found regarding future measures to reduce the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis.

Conclusions:

The measures taken against the spread of the pandemic further worsen the medical and social situation of the Roma ethnic group in Bulgaria. Our findings pointed to the importance of a multi-sectoral strategy to improve Roma health during and after a COVID-19.

Key messages:

- Due to the socio-economic situation, Roma in Bulgaria face a higher risk of suffering and death due to COVID-19 than general population and multi-sectoral strategy to improve Roma health is needed.

- According Roma ethnic group in Bulgaria the measures taken against the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic further worsen their medical and social situation and lead to disease, misery and famine.