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Hasan, S and Netto, G

Abstract

Despite the accelerated digitalisation of social housing services, there has been a lack of focused attention on the impact of these processes of digitalisation on diverse communities. The harms that are likely to arise through the systemic inequalities encountered by minoritised ethnic (ME) communities in the UK. Digital poverty, digital literacy and lack of English proficiency have been identified as key barriers to ME communities' access and use of digitalised social housing services. More attention to this area is needed in the light of recent tragedies involving the management of the social housing system which have disproportionately impacted minoritised ethnic communities, coupled with persistent racial inequalities within the context existing power dynamics which shape the regulation and practice of social housing services. In this paper, we adopt a critical realist, intersectional approach to understand the experiences of minoritised ethnic communities within the institutional structure of social housing services. We draw our findings from 100 interviews with ME individuals in Glasgow, Bradford, Manchester and Tower Hamlets for extracting vulnerabilities in the access and use of digitalised social housing services, and desk-based research on housing management, policy and regulation. Our analysis explores the ways in which minoritised ethnicity intersects with age, gender, socio-economic status, varying levels of proficiency in English and digital literacy to exacerbate persistent racialised inequalities in the access and use of digitalised social housing services. We call for greater attention to the development of anti-racist processes and outcomes, along with an intersectional approach to engaging with applicants and tenants of social housing as part of wider equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives in the digitalisation of services. This would involve more effective engagement with minoritised ethnic communities in the design and delivery of the digitalised housing services, greater transparency and accountability in the allocation of social housing and sensitivity to racialised power imbalances between social landlords and tenants. This includes re-examining the tenancy language, policies and management to allow the regulatory space and obligation for community engagement and ME representation.

330 words

Key words: digital, social housing, minority ethnic, discrimination, racial equality.