

Population health in coastal communities in England

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Socio-economic deprivation continues to be a key driver of geographical inequalities in population health at all spatial scales. In England, significant public health challenges faced by coastal communities were highlighted in the Chief Medical Officer's 2021 Annual Report. Poor health outcomes in these coastal communities are driven by multiple social and geographical determinants, including peripherality, poor housing, fragile/seasonal economies, constraints to employment prospects, and provision of/access to services.

However, evidence is also accumulating for the potential health-promoting impacts of living in and visiting coastal environments, through mechanisms including promoting psychological wellbeing and supporting physical activity. Previous analyses of small-area 2001 Census data (Wheeler et al, 2012) found that populations living closer to the coast of England typically reported better general health than their equivalents inland, and a potential 'equigenic' effect, whereby the beneficial association was strongest in the most socio-economically deprived areas. Evidence since then indicates variability in these relationships depending on the place, population sub-groups, and outcomes considered.

In this study, we are using 2021 Census data to revisit and update the 2001 study, and to explore contemporary geographies of population-scale health in coastal and more inland communities of England. We will explore the data in the light of evidence on the challenges and opportunities for public health at the coast, and deepening health inequalities. We will discuss whether and how opportunities for health promotion and protection in coastal areas might be sustainably enacted in a manner that helps to tackle, rather than exacerbate, socio-spatial health inequalities.

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