

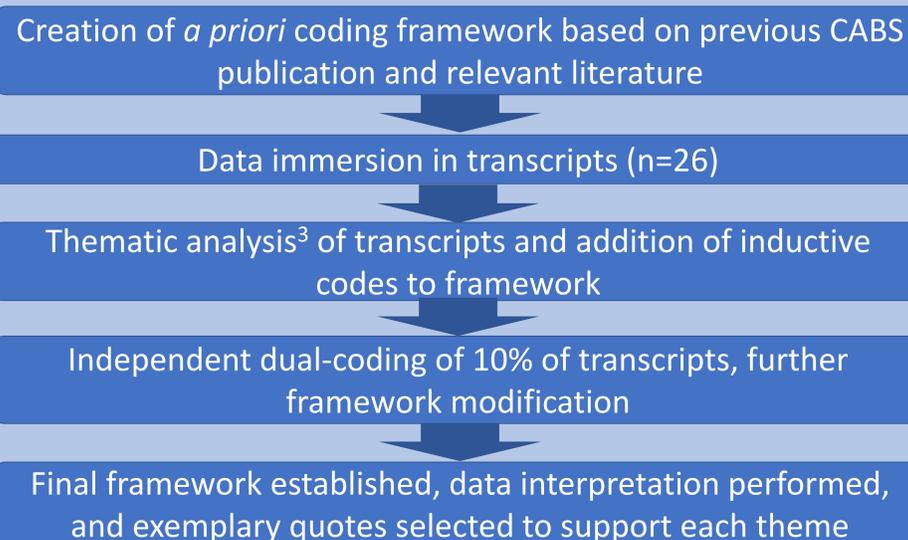
Experiences and beliefs relating to healthcare contacts during the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK: a thematic analysis of qualitative interviews

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Introduction

- “Stay home, protect the NHS, save lives” narrative may have led people to avoid seeking help for urgent medical needs¹
- The COVID-19 Cancer Attitudes and Behaviours Study (CABS) used surveys and interviews in August/ September 2020 (“Phase 1”) and February/ March 2021 (“Phase 2”) to investigate the UK public’s healthcare interactions during the pandemic²
- Project aim: *To conduct a secondary qualitative analysis of CABS Phase 2 interview transcripts to explore the public’s help-seeking behaviours during the COVID-19 pandemic*

Methods



Results: major themes and determinants of help-seeking

“Pandemic medicine” – remote consulting and help-seeking delays

“I would be more than happy [to have a remote consultation]... but I think with some issues then I'd like to speak to my GP face to face, especially when it comes to mental health... over the phone they're not seeing the real you...”

PID 63984570 [female, aged 50-59, Wales]

“We’ve got an email address that we can send photos or enquiries... if you’re elderly and you haven’t got the use of a computer that’s not going to be possible...”

PID 63963321 [female, 60-69, Wales]

“Obviously with everything going on with COVID, I know they are much busier than usual, and I didn’t want to be wasting people’s time for something that might have cleared up on its own after a few weeks.”

PID 64027453 [male, 30-39, Wales]

Fear of COVID-19 and perceived severity of the pandemic in the UK

“I’m definitely less concerned about myself getting COVID [since last CABS interview]... just because it feels like it’s more of a known entity that I’m not significantly at risk of”

PID 64054578 [female, 20-29, England]

“The hospital’s... a terrible place to get an infection, so in these circumstances you stay away from them... if I had to go to hospital now, that would be very concerning”

PID 63968088 [male, 60-69, Wales]

External influences on healthcare help-seeking behaviours

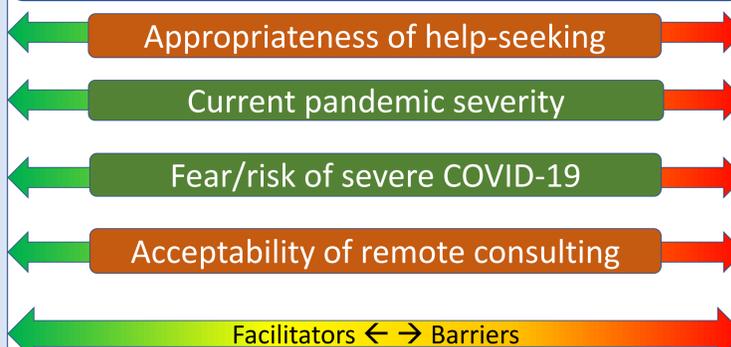
“I would be slightly nervous [attending hospital]. There’s plenty of stuff in the news about COVID cases breaking out in hospitals ... It surprises me that people catch it in hospitals. They ought to be the best protected.”

PID 63984503 [male, 60-69, Wales]

“I don’t go to A&E unless it’s major... Cos some people will turn up for stupid things, they’re just wasting the hospital’s time when they shouldn’t be.”

PID 64018114 [female, 40-49, Wales]

Beliefs or perceptions held by participants could either encourage or discourage help-seeking:



For example, *high* COVID fear could be a help-seeking barrier, whereas *low* fear may be a facilitator

External influences informed participants attitudes to the safety and suitability of help-seeking:

1. Friends and family healthcare experiences
2. Media coverage
3. Attitudes to others
 - E.g., others seeking help excessively

Conclusions

1. Perceptions such as COVID-19 threat may act as barriers or facilitators to help-seeking.
2. Existing measures of perceived COVID threat do not adequately assess the range of experiences.
3. Next steps: Quantify demographic patterning and changes in perceived barriers to help-seeking during the pandemic.

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