

The Impact of Covid-19 on Muslim Women In Bradford

August 2021

Findings Report



The Think + Do Tank Programme

The programme is aimed at enabling Muslim women to represent their lived experiences and needs within research policy and practice. MWC endeavours, through this programme, to ensure that Muslim women of all backgrounds can seriously influence policy and decision making at all levels. Muslim women have been used by researchers when it has suited their research projects and government agendas, regurgitating the tired and reductive narratives about 'the Muslim woman'. Women we have worked with over the years have increasingly expressed their frustration with being used as 'subjects' for research agendas framed by others and now want their unmediated voices to be heard.

We aim to enrich and correct the knowledge landscape by ensuring that new relevant research is produced directly by Muslim women on issues that they feel are important to them & their communities, building trust between communities and research institutes. The evidence, recommendations and solutions generated by them will be used to show how the government and both the public and private sectors can help create conditions that allow Muslim women to thrive.

Through creating an army of community researchers who themselves have full awareness of the issues within their communities, women are being empowered to be authors of solutions that bring about societal change. We are creating a legacy of future leaders, community researchers and advocates who will inspire others around them.

By establishing a 'Think + Do Tank' we are creating a valuable hub that engages Muslim women on their lived experience of social and community issues they face. It offers both a process and space that enables and encourages the exploration of new approaches, and for presenting alternative community practices outside of an existing system.

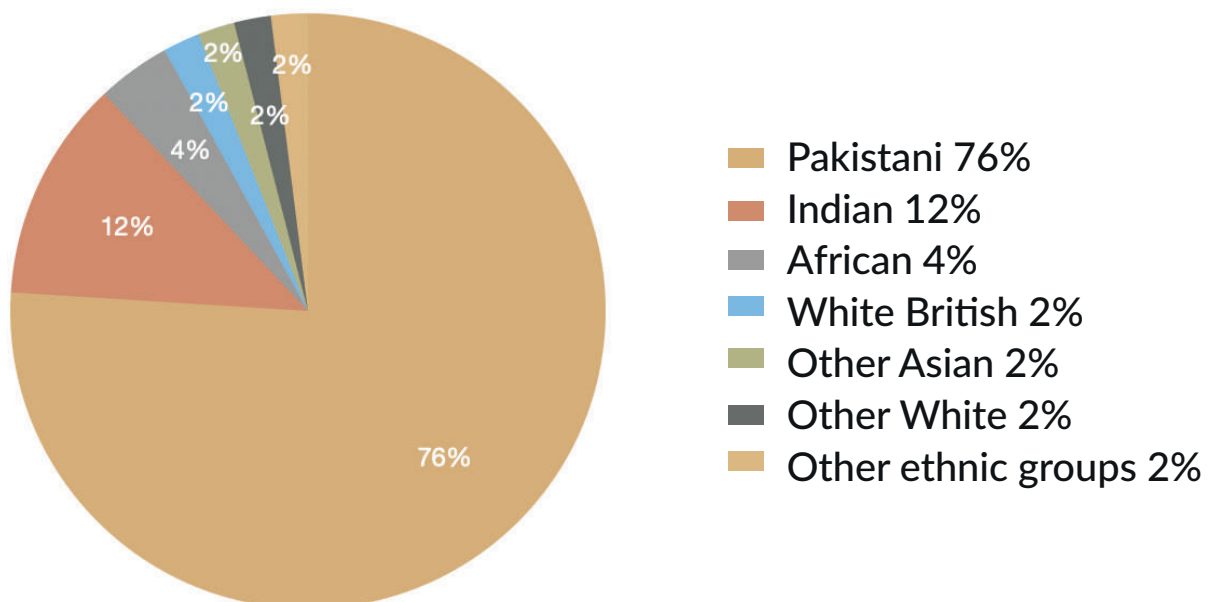
What This Study Covers

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a massive impact on our lives. Since the start of the lockdown in the UK in 2020, a national debate is constantly taking place amongst the political parties & public on how the pandemic has been controlled by the government. This has sparked local debates about the existing councils. This study looks at how the pandemic has affected the local communities and how the decisions that were made on a national level affected Muslim women in Bradford.

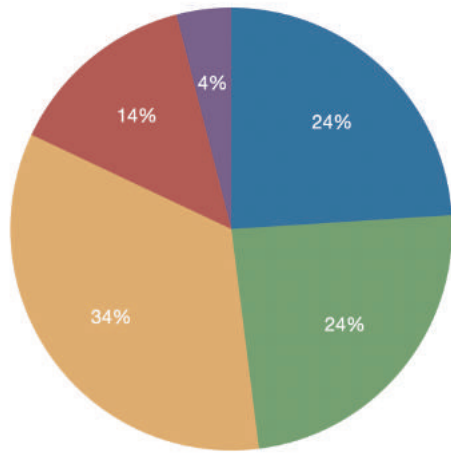
Our aim was to understand the experiences of the Muslim women in the Bradford district during the lockdown, on issues ranging from the vaccine rollout, home-schooling children and the impact on mental and physical health, to finances, views on the handling of the crisis by the government and the local council, and challenges to civil liberties.

With many pieces of research currently being undertaken about the impact of COVID-19 on the general population, the women researchers felt it was imperative to examine the impact of the pandemic on their lives as Muslim women, in a timely and relevant manner. The researchers formulated questions around distinct themes relating to the impact of the pandemic, ensuring questions were both easy to understand and open, to allow participants to express as many views as possible.

We published the online survey on our social media platforms, website and by direct emails to our members. The survey was available to complete between 3 February and 24 May 2021, during which time 50 Muslim women undertook the survey from across the Bradford district. We also visited a local community centre and helped the women complete the surveys online. The participants were aged between 20 and 69, with the three most common ethnic backgrounds being Pakistani (76%), Indian (12%) and African (4%).

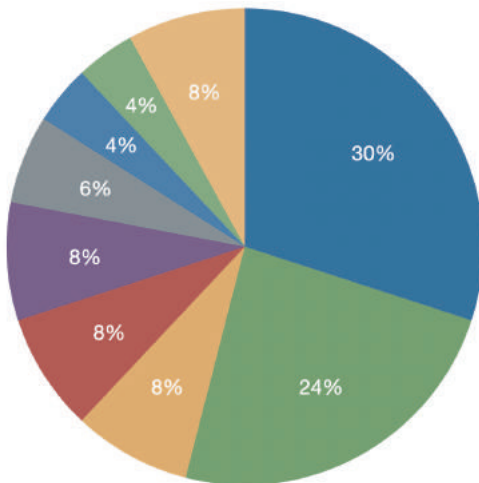


Ethnic background



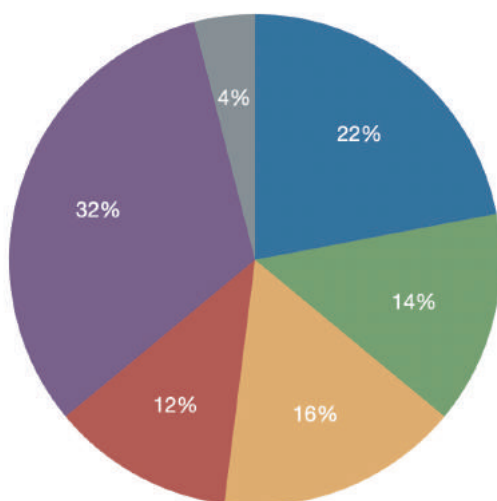
Age

20-29	24%
30-39	24%
40-49	34%
50-59	14%
60-69	4%



Area of residence

BD8	30%
BD9	24%
BD7	8%
BD15	8%
BD3	8%
BD5	6%
BD1	4%
BD18	4%
Other areas	8%

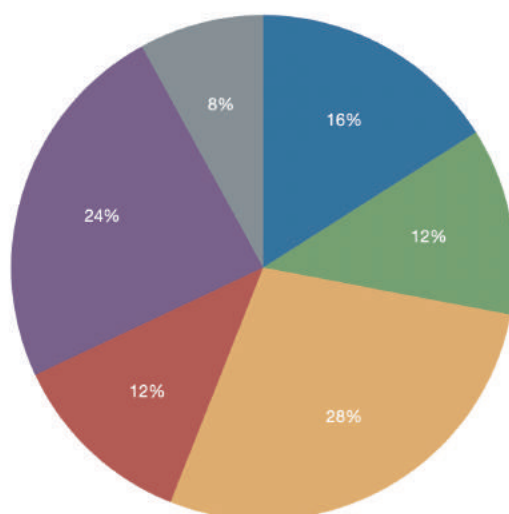


Profession

Administration	22%
Education	14%
Student	16%
Health/social care	12%
Homemaker	32%
Finance	4%

Highest qualifications

● GCSE's ● A-Levels ● Bachelor's Degree ● Master's Degree ● Other ● No qualifications



Key Findings

Mental, physical and emotional wellbeing

One of the major findings of the project was the impact the pandemic had on mental, physical and emotional wellbeing.

- ▶ Of the 58% of women who had been tested for COVID-19, 20% had tested positive for the virus. All of those that had been tested experience noticeable symptoms. Some suffered from more severe symptoms than others. Two thirds of those who tested positive have underlying health conditions.
- ▶ Over half of the women (56%) had family members who were affected by the virus, with 38% of them experiencing severe physical impact and loss of life.
- ▶ Carers of the vulnerable felt that the impact had a negative effect on their wellbeing as they were unable to get any respite.
- ▶ 44% of the women reported a significant negative impact on personal relationships during this period.
- ▶ The lockdown impacted the mental and emotional wellbeing of nearly two thirds of the participants (64%), with the most common effects being anxiety, depression and stress resulting from isolation and not being able to socialise with family, friends and loved ones.

- ▶ A similar number of participants (68%) saw a negative impact on their physical wellbeing, the main issue being weight gain. Some women spoke about how they comfort ate to rise above the boredom or how they would lack energy to cook and opt for the easier option of ordering a takeaway. Others spoke of how they accessed social media to try different recipes.
- ▶ Out of the 22% of women who searched for religious guidance during the pandemic, all found it to be useful.
- ▶ 18% of the cohort were first time mums. This impacted on their emotional wellbeing. Restricted access to health visitors increased anxiety levels. The quality of care and support was compromised which made the whole experience nerve racking rather than enjoyable.



The lockdown has affected us all. School and college became remote. My elder child lost his social life and it became harder to get help. It was impossible to get a GP appointment. He died by suicide at age 18 in November. I'm sad I had to limit numbers attending the funeral due to COVID.

My son works in a supermarket. He became unwell, had time off work and his employer was getting very pushy with contract and being threatening.

Meltdowns, argumentative, lack of confidence and support, loneliness, feeling pressurised to do housework and keep it completed at all times.

Both my children & myself have struggled with being cooped up indoors for months on end. This was particularly prominent during the first lock down last year as there was an element of fear and it took some getting used to, in terms of schooling from home.

It has been really difficult for us all. My children are very active & not being able to play football, visit family friends etc was indeed very challenging. Also being out of a routine & more screen time!!

We've had challenges like other families but have had to adapt to this.

It's impacted my parents and now I have become their part time carer.

Strained relationships.

It's brought us closer as we have time to spend together and do activities together.

Had time to spend with & understand each other. Struggling with autistic child, he likes to be outside so he didn't like being inside. He's quite a sociable person, so he would like to go out and hug people.

Children are always home, so in a way it's quite nice because there's more family time, compared to before when it would only be a weekend thing.

Doing more reading and listening to audio lectures which has helped my well being.

Being stuck at home does not help, I need to socialise with friends at uni. I prefer going into uni because personally I feel like I struggle with online lectures. It would have been beneficial for me to attend on campus that way I would have been able to talk to tutors face to face about my essays for my degree.

I'm fed up that everything else apart from COVID is being ignored. Suicides and depression have increased, domestic violence has increased, cancer is still here and so are all the other illnesses. The lockdown is causing more damage in my opinion.

First time mum, no classes for my baby. No visits from health visitor. Questioning my son's growth and development but no one to come and reassure.

Mental strain on family life and emotionally drained of being the supporter. Regular income gives you a place within the family unit but the lack of it puts a strain on life and the holder of duties.





I think being cooped up is affecting both my mental and emotional well-being.

Difficult not seeing loved ones, more anxious.

Bereaved and can't find any Muslim organisation to turn to.

My levels of anxiety have increased due to close friends passing away with covid. The worry of catching it as I am vulnerable!

It's been a struggle dealing with your own emotional well being and also having to support family and friends.

Everything is too much, especially with so many children in the house doing their online classes, no space for me.

I quite enjoy being home with the children. But, the way the schools are, and the way the health cares have changed, have been quite a nuisance.



Employment /finances

- ▶ 18% of women experienced a change in their employment status, with two thirds of that group seeing a negative impact with redundancy, job losses and less work available.
- ▶ Just over a third of the participants (34%) have seen their finances suffer due to the pandemic.
- ▶ Over half of the women that were employed and had to work from home spoke about how stressful the situation was. Trying to manage time whilst having to meet deadlines, attend online meetings and support the children to access distance learning proved to be a difficult task.
- ▶ A minority spoke of how working from home was never an option prior to the lockdown, and since having the opportunity to do so it has worked to their advantage. It has proven to be a more desirable way of working, as they were able to spend more time with their family and children.
- ▶ The women felt financial support, mental health support and assistance with shopping would make it easier for people to self-isolate for longer.

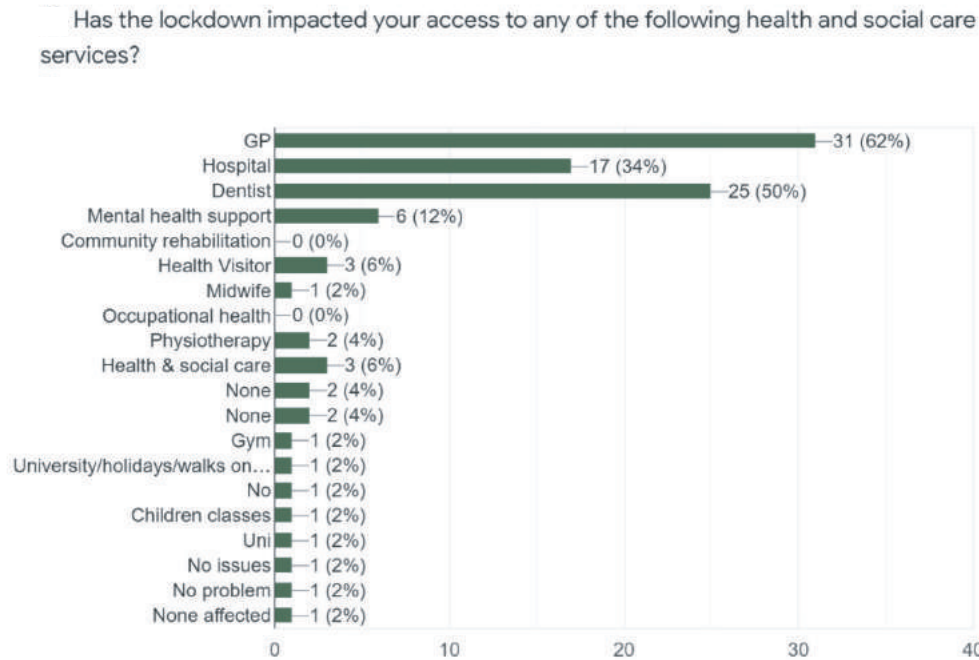
Impact on children and education

- ▶ Of the 78% of participants with children, the areas that presented the most challenges were homeschooling/education (52.9%), keeping children occupied (47.1%), physical wellbeing (44.1%) and emotional wellbeing (41.2%).
- ▶ The parents struggled with issues such as having children in exam years and the impact the stress had on their mental health. Some of the children suffered from panic attacks and anxiety.
- ▶ Some women spoke about having children that required support when in school and felt that their children had fallen behind.



Challenges

Impact on access to services as perceived by women:



- ▶ There was an increase in dependency on medical care (16%), mental health services (8%), financial support services (4%) and food banks (2%).
- ▶ 13% of the women raised concerns around the impact of the pandemic on members of the community who were suffering from a terminal illness. Being unable to access treatment or it being put on hold resulted in a very challenging time.
- ▶ Over 75% agreed that the pandemic challenged the women in the Muslim community as they were expected to juggle everything. This included working from home, supporting the children with accessing distance learning, cooking, cleaning, tending to elderly family members, having to incorporate a routine whilst multi-tasking were some of many tasks that were mentioned.
- ▶ Maintaining relationships without facing conflict was a big issue. 65% of the women mentioned how spending too much time together on a continuous basis took its toll. This was not just with partners but with children, siblings and even parents as many women live in multi-generational households.



Vaccination

- ▶ Of the 58% of participants that were offered the COVID-19 vaccine, 80.6% agreed to taking it.

I have seen first hand the impact covid and long covid has on individuals. As someone who has pre existing degenerative conditions, I didn't want to risk being exposed to covid & having to deal with the subsequent consequences.

I took the vaccine so I can travel again.

To help fight the virus and play a part in reducing it.

- ▶ Only 20% of the women had decided they did not want to get vaccinated or were not sure about it.

I don't trust the ingredients-halal or not. Not sure if it will work.

I understand the urgency but the lack of trialing of the vaccine makes me unsure of wanting to be vaccinated.

Affects future pregnancies, people are still getting ill.

- ▶ The most common reasons for not taking the vaccine are lack of trust, being unsure about the long-term effects and the risks. It is evident from the answers that the community lacks awareness of the different types of vaccinations and the science behind taking it. Some of the women spoke about how the media and false news have put people on edge. They are unsure of who and what to believe. One of the participants spoke about a news report on the side-effects of the Astra Zeneca vaccine and how it has affected several elderly people in Europe. The lack of awareness within this area increases the uncertainty and worry.

The Government & Local Authority's handling of the crisis

- ▶ 7 out of 10 women felt dissatisfied with the way the Government has handled the crisis, and more than half (55.1%) felt dissatisfied with the response from Bradford Council:



When it came to Eid in August, the day before he announced there was a lockdown the following day

They should have stopped people just coming into the country at the start of the pandemic. There was too little done too late. The things the government says contradicts other things. Government officials have been breaking the lockdown rules. I do not trust this government. The eat out to help out scheme was a stupid thing to do in the middle of a pandemic.

Confusing messages from the government has not helped the pandemic.

New rules don't make sense. Late and last-minute notice of regional lockdowns. Open for Christmas which saw the increase in case numbers and deaths. Schools open for 1 day then went into lockdown.

I think the crisis could have been better managed and a lot of the taxpayers' money has been wasted unnecessarily. Unfortunately, the lack of faith that people had in the government had a direct impact on my work because as a team we were involved in the vaccine trials, we've had to deal with numerous conspiracy theories and we have tried our utmost to reassure the public that getting inoculated is the best way out of this pandemic.

Bradford Council are trying their best under what little guidelines they get.

I don't feel they have looked into all the effects on people as more suicide, vulnerable people left on their own. Effectiveness of masks, social distancing etc is not looked at properly. They are exaggerating figures, people dying of natural causes or other



causes are registered as dying of COVID, so they are lying to us. I feel its all blown out of proportion.

Under the circumstances although slow service initially, the Council have begun to work with the community.

The Council can only follow government rules.

More needs to be done by Bradford Council.

How is the council communicating with everyone and informing ppl about covid-19, especially the disadvantaged communities?

Listen to the people and make sure research is accurate and transparent for all to see. This will enable the wider public to make the informed choices they need to make. They need to give consistent and true data to reflect the true impact of what is actually happening. Too often it seems like everyone is playing around with numbers which are inaccurate.

Well done for trying to get people vaccinated, as for lockdown it should have been earlier done in September time instead of delaying it.

It's too late for my family now as I've lost my son, but they need to stop the lockdown, massively invest in mental health services, and extra resources in the NHS to catch up on a year of missed dental appointments, cancer screenings, etc. Treat people as individuals and actual humans, not just numbers.

Learn from your mistakes and stop grouping people by ethnicity etc.

Think about the policy thoroughly and the impact it will have.

Act promptly, listen to the science, most importantly support the most vulnerable.

Help the disadvantaged, the vulnerable, ethnic minorities, single parents, children from troubled family.

Stop misleading the public and saying you're doing something when you're not.

Let's stamp out corruption and dishonesty from the top of the government. These individuals need to be held to account and punished accordingly regardless of their wealth and status.

Do more for the NHS and our keyworkers that have been working through the pandemic.

Look at the risk & take precautions accordingly. Look at impact on citizens, jobs etc. Most people are recovering from COVID, but nobody is offering advice on improving immune system long term.

Provide more services and opportunities to the youth and young adults - 20+.

Value the minorities more.



- ▶ The consensus around the government handling of the situation is one of confusion. Many people agreed that the government acted too late. They had no policy or procedure in place for dealing with a global pandemic in the 21st century. The government did not execute its decisions articulately which then implemented a sense of fear amongst the local community. The women spoke about how messages from the Government and Council around the covid rules were mixed and unclear, for example the members of households meeting up inside and outside the home. Some did not understand the rules.
- ▶ The local authority did not utilise the local organisations to spread awareness. More work should have been carried out around prevention in various languages to educate the community in Bradford about the virus and its dangers. Many women highlighted the 'eat out to help out' scheme as being a disaster. Bradford is one of the most sought-after places for dining out in the Yorkshire area due to its diverse culinary options. This scheme attracted thousands of people from outside of the city. There were queues outside popular restaurants with no one policing socially distant measures. This will have contributed to the spread of the virus in the Bradford area.
- ▶ Some participants mentioned that the local authority did not contribute enough to the enforcing of the government rules, whilst a minority did think that the Bradford Council did not have the power to do anything else.

Challenges to human rights & civil liberties

- ▶ Nearly two thirds of the women (64%) either felt their human rights/civil liberties were being challenged at this time by Government policy, or were unsure about it:



We should be left to make our own choices and not allow governments to make it compulsory. Each individual should be at liberty to do just that. I'm afraid our liberties are being stripped away without even realising the bigger picture.

Unable to lead the life we want with their restrictions but at same time not relevant changes being made.

I don't think there is an easy way to handle a pandemic on an island with a dense population. However, I do think there were some stupid decisions made by the government which has then perhaps indirectly affected our civil liberties.

I don't adhere to scaremongering, common sense should rule.

The Government's Policy are contrary to The Human Rights Act.

They are capable of using Covid as a way of controlling even more with fear. If only they were more sensible and planned better.



Trying to control people, restricting movements.

Freedom to travel restricted with expensive quarantines for some countries with no end date in sight.

Harder to book appointments, delay or cancellation to appointments due to covid. Refusal to enter supermarkets without face covering.

It is a challenge but they're doing it for own good, for our own safety.

They have taken the right decision. We have already lost so many. The 'Eat out to help out' scheme was a mistake.

Restrictions have caused many issues to us and are unfair.

Not affected, we can still access essentials.



New skills and perspectives

Most people fall somewhere in the middle of being pessimistic or optimistic when it comes to perspectives on difficult situations. Many took on the initiative to optimise their time to gain new skills in different areas they would not have had the opportunity to do so if they were not in isolation.



Learning how to be active on social media



Video conferencing apps



Making iMovies



Islamic classes



Math and English courses



Knitting



Embroidery



IT courses



Calligraphy



Sewing



Learning Arabic

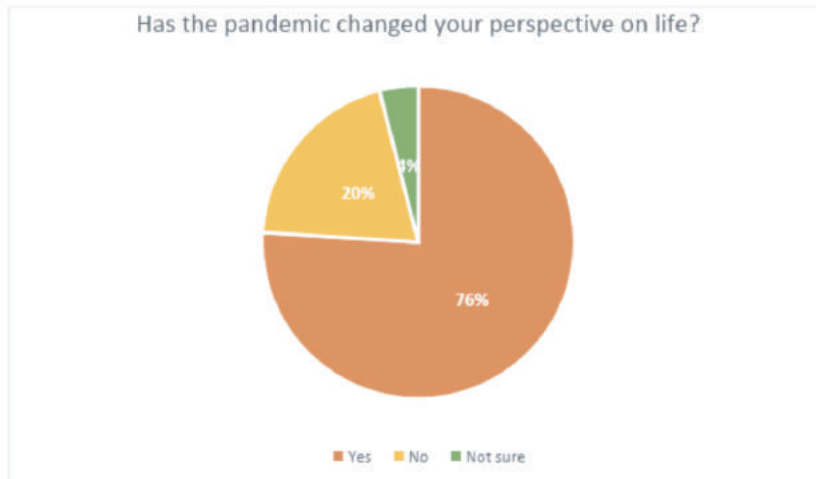


Gardening



Cooking

Changing perspectives on life



A large majority of women (76%) agreed that the pandemic has changed their perspective on life. Many believed that life is too short and there should be more focus on spending more time with loved ones and making the most of each day.



Just grateful for all the blessings in our lives. Appreciate, cherish and value life and not to take things for granted.

Simply that life is short and important to ensure we do everything we can to make it fulfilling

I lost my son which has changed my perspective on life.

Don't take things for granted and appreciate especially loved ones

Live for the now and spend time with close family and friends.

Life is too short. Learn to love your family and dearest friends. Talk and communicate regularly. Give moral support. Increase self-confidence as well as praise and boost confidence in others

It hasn't changed my perspective on life but it has helped me focus on the things that are important to me



Going forward



Daily reflections on how to become a better human being and to act on benefitting others in the best way possible. Important to reach out to those who are finding it difficult.

Spend more time on my spiritual side.

Spending more time with family.

Not worry about working hard.

I won't take for granted any of my relationships.

I will definitely appreciate everything a lot more.

I hope i won't forget how difficult it was not being able to physically spend time with family and friends and I plan to have lots of fun with my loved ones.

Help the poor with what I have.

Value people and treat everyone with respect.

Take each day as it comes.

Requesting flexible working so I can work from home.

Online grocery shopping is the way forward!

Take more care of hygiene. Alhamdulillah as Muslims we perform wudhu regularly but could still do more.

I will look after my health more as I am on my own and nobody else can do anything.

I want to learn a lot more so I can progress more.

It's been hard staying away from family and friends and have had to explore other ways to stay in touch which has been good and something I will implement in my life.

Take more care of myself.

Exercise more, make the most of your time.

Become closer to Allah, try to keep people happy. Money is nothing, health is most important.



End of Survey reflections



Patience is key. Things will happen when they are supposed to.

Although the pandemic has been a very difficult time for the world, it has also united the world in many ways. It wasn't just something affecting a certain part of the world, everyone was in a similar situation.

The pandemic affected every single person on the planet in one way or another.

It's been tough going but puts things into perspective that the world is actually a small place and death can come at any time so make peace with it.

It was very hard being unable to attend funerals and participate in the family's grief.

It has been a very weird and hard time but also have had time to self reflect and get to know myself a lot better which has been really good.

The government and people should work together rather to understand the issue at hand, rather than the government making all the decisions without listening to the people.



In conclusion it was evident that people wanted to make significant changes post Covid. Many have realised how short life is and how important it is to spend time with loved ones. Others have gained a new set of skills during challenging times. The women have tapped into skills they never knew they had. Time management, routine, communication, learning how to access the internet and much more. Some set up new email addresses to access online shopping for groceries.

46% expressed that they had support within the household and how they would struggle if this support was not available. Some of the women spoke of how the global pandemic developed a sense of unity in the community as members of the community looked out for the more vulnerable.

Recommendations

- ▶ To run a basic IT course which will equip the women to deal with isolation and better prepare them with communicating initiatives. This could be something as simple as learning how to use a mobile phone or how to access video calling apps. The women struggled to communicate with friends and family. Whilst the business world had moved to online video calling platforms, the local women were left to communicate with the outside world using the dated restrictive method of telephone calls.
- ▶ To assess the distance learning model when considering disadvantaged communities. Many families struggled without devices which prevented the students from accessing the education system. To avoid widening the gap there should have been a greater focus on making sure each family had the necessary financial support to create equal opportunities.
- ▶ To educate and raise awareness in the community about the virus and promote health. The symptoms, the dangers, prevention, including the importance of taking the vaccination and the recovery process. Some members of the community did not take this seriously and were still attending gatherings for funerals, weddings and family functions which then resulted in the death of the most vulnerable members in the community. This is down to lack of awareness in how the virus works.
- ▶ To implement flexible working hours for employees. This is a good opportunity for organisations to look at the benefits which flexible working can offer. This approach can retain talented individuals, encourage more Muslim women to gain employment, increase productivity and support wellbeing.

- ▶ The government and local council to invest more funding in mental health and bereavement support, youth opportunities, graduate support in training and jobs, support for minority females in business involving lenders and professional stakeholders alongside mentoring.

Muslim Women's Council

MWC is unique in its local, national, and international reach. We deliver services to the most marginalised members of our communities; the homeless, the excluded and disadvantaged. Our initiatives have addressed community issues ranging from mental health, child sexual exploitation and food poverty.

At the other end of the spectrum, we provide thought leadership and we facilitate and enable change. For example, we have initiated a project to transform and lead discourse on women's access to, presence in, and involvement in Mosques. This initiative has gained national and international support and has been reported globally.

Looking ahead in a context of political turbulence and uncertainty, we have prioritised empowering Muslim women to narrate their lived experiences and make an intervention into policies impacting their lives.

Acknowledgements

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We wish to convey our sincere thanks to our community research teams for their sustained commitment, passionate dedication and insightful input into developing the research themes and questions and implementing cogent and timely studies. We would like to express sincerest gratitude to all our interviewees, without whom this would not have been possible.

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