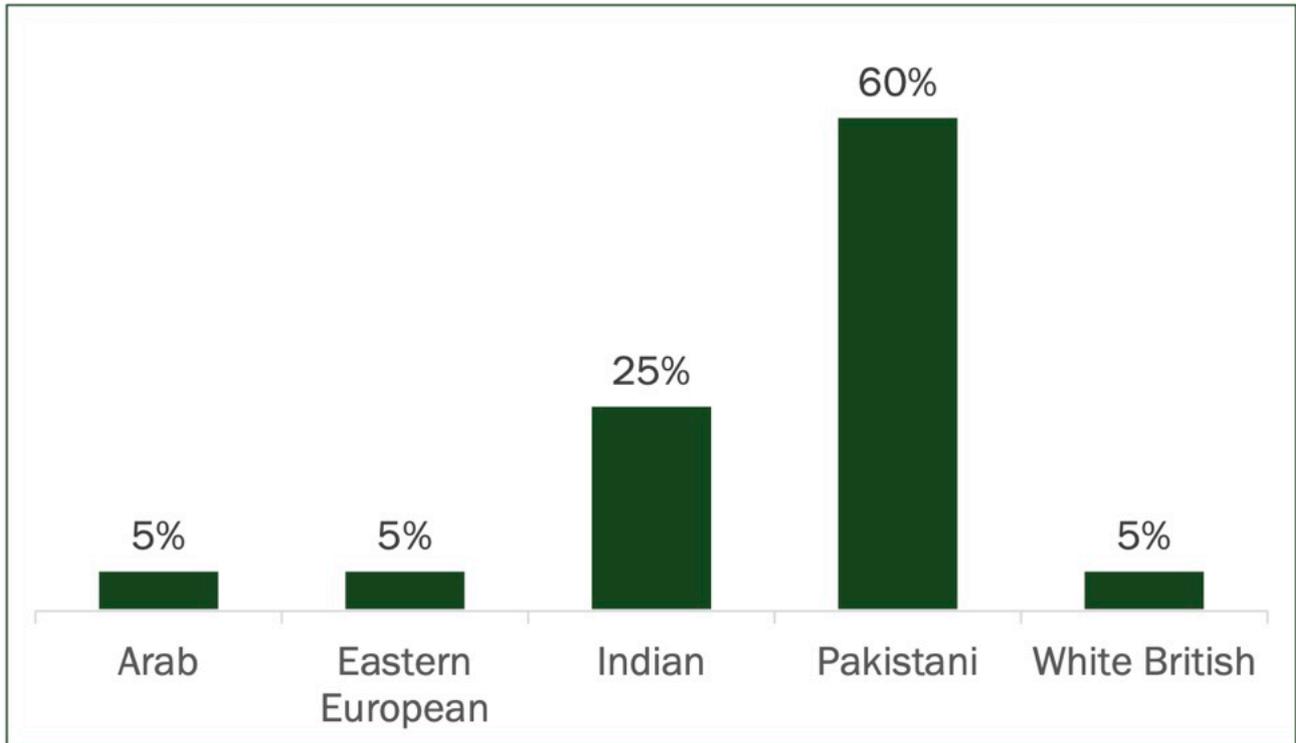


A close-up photograph of a woman wearing a blue hijab, smiling warmly. She is holding a bouquet of tulips, with yellow and orange flowers visible. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

# **EVENT REPORT: TEA & CHAT – END-OF-LIFE CARE FOR ELDERLY MUSLIMS**

**APRIL 2024**

## Ethnicity of Participants



## Overview

This “Tea & Chat” session, led by Salima Iqbal, Salima is a dedicated care homeowner with a strong background in public service. Formerly a magistrate and charity director, she brings a wealth of experience in leadership, justice, and community support. Her passion for care and commitment to social impact continue to shape her work in the healthcare sector.

The session brought together women from across Bradford to explore the sensitive and often overlooked topic of end-of-life care for elderly Muslims in the UK. The session was led by Salima Iqbal, a respected educator and practitioner with a background in palliative care and community health. Salima has worked extensively with families navigating the complexities of ageing, illness, and bereavement within a faith and culturally sensitive framework.

With the UK's Muslim population now exceeding 3.9 million (2021 Census), and the number of Muslims aged 65 and over projected to rise from 110,000 in 2011 to over 450,000 by 2036, the session addressed the need for culturally and religiously appropriate care has never been more urgent. This session aimed to raise awareness, share lived experiences and explore practical solutions.

The session focused on:

- Understanding Islamic principles around death, dying, and elder care
- Identifying gaps in mainstream healthcare provision
- Exploring community-led responses and good practice
- Recommending improvements to policy and service delivery

The session was divided into 4 theme areas, which were discussed by all those attending. Salima opened the session by grounding the discussion in Islamic teachings. She reminded the group: "In our faith, caring for our elders is not just a responsibility, it's a blessing. But we must also ensure they receive the dignity and support they deserve at the end of life."



**1. Religious and Cultural Needs** - where everyone discussed the importance of:

- Modesty and gender sensitivity in personal care
- Halal dietary requirements in care homes and hospitals
- Spiritual needs, including access to prayer, Quran recitation, and Islamic chaplaincy

**2. Barriers in the System** - the women shared personal stories of navigating the healthcare system with elderly relatives. Common challenges included:

- Lack of cultural awareness among care staff
- Language barriers, especially for first-generation elders
- Limited Muslim-specific care homes or hospices
- Stigma around using professional care services, with many families feeling guilt or shame
- Lack of training in Islamic practices such as washing, shrouding, and timely burial.

A 2019 report by the Muslim Council of Britain found that 38% of Muslim women aged 65 and over reported having bad or very bad health. Despite this, many elderly Muslims do not access available services due to fear of being a burden, lack of information, or cultural expectations.



*“When my mother was in hospital, I had to explain everything, from wudu to ghusl. It was exhausting,”* one woman shared.

### 3. What’s Working - Salima highlighted positive developments, including:

- Islamic chaplaincy services in some NHS hospitals
- Community-led care homes designed around Islamic values
- Training initiatives by organisations like the Muslim Council of Britain
- Family-centred care models, which remain the preferred approach for many families

### 4. Recommendations for Change - the group proposed several practical steps:

- Mandatory cultural competency training for healthcare staff
- Improved language support, including interpreters and translated materials
- Expansion of Muslim-specific care homes and hospices
- Policy integration of religiously sensitive care protocols in NHS guidelines
- Community outreach to reduce stigma and raise awareness

## **Feedback from Attendees**

The session was described as “eye-opening,” “comforting,” and “long overdue.” Many women expressed relief at being able to speak openly about a topic that is often kept behind closed doors.

*“I’ve been carrying this worry alone for years. Today I felt heard.”*

*“Salima explained things with such compassion. I feel more prepared to support my parents now.”*

*“I didn’t realise how many others were facing the same struggles. It’s comforting to know we’re not alone.”*

*“We need more spaces like this, where we can talk about death without fear or shame.”*

*“This session should be offered to healthcare workers too; it would make such a difference.”*

*“Salima explained things so clearly. I feel more confident now about speaking up for my mum’s needs.”*



*“We talk so much about birth and marriage in our culture, but death is still a taboo. Today gave us permission to speak openly, and that’s powerful.”*

*“I’ve always worried about what will happen when my father’s time comes. This session helped me realise we can plan with dignity and faith, not fear.”*

*“It was comforting to be in a room where everyone understood the importance of ghusl, du’a’, and burial rites. I didn’t have to explain or justify anything.”*

## Key Takeaways

- The UK's ageing Muslim population is growing, and services must adapt to meet their religious and cultural needs.
- End-of-life care must go beyond medical treatment, it must include spiritual, emotional, and cultural support.
- Community-led initiatives are already making a difference but need more recognition and funding.
- Open conversations within families and communities are essential to break stigma and plan ahead.

## Conclusion

This session highlighted the urgent need for more inclusive, respectful, and faith-sensitive end-of-life care for elderly Muslims in the UK. Through shared stories, expert insight, and practical recommendations, attendees left feeling more informed and empowered. The Muslim Women's Council remains committed to continuing these vital conversations and advocating for change at both community and policy levels.

Report created by the Tea & Chat participants  
supported by the MWC Team

