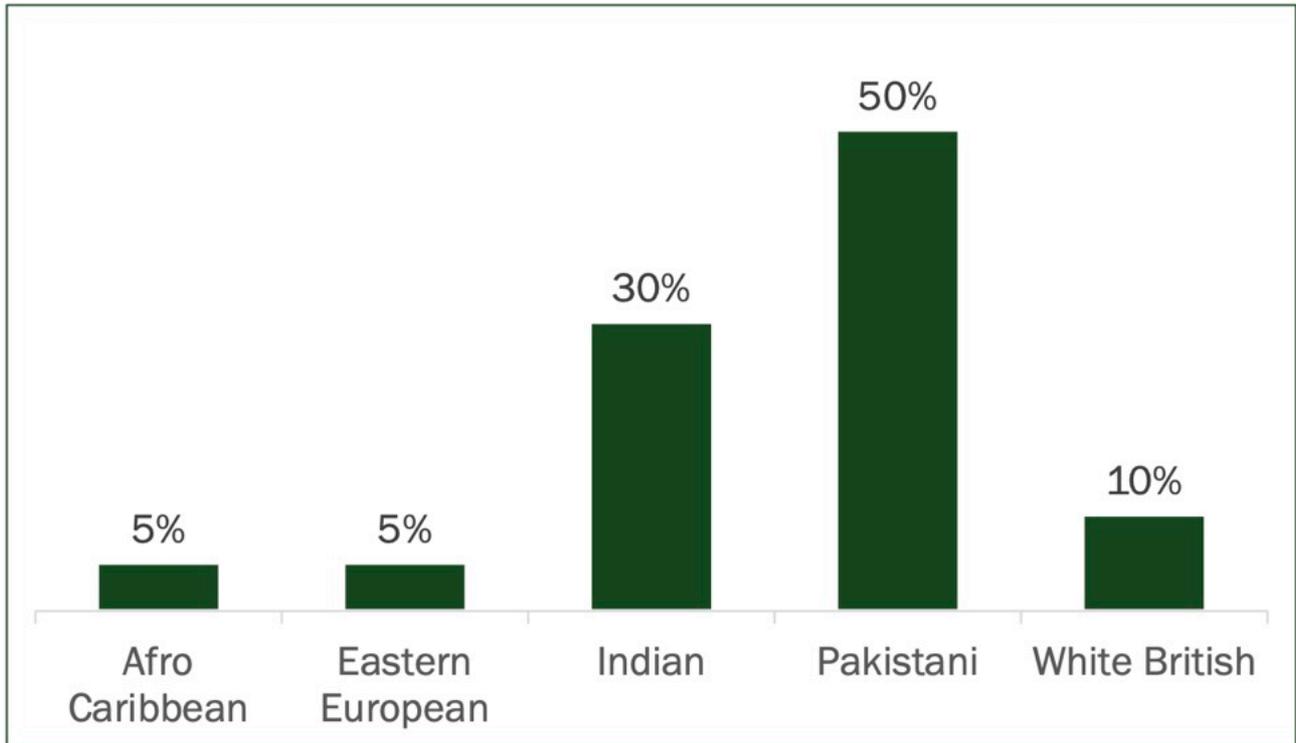




**EVENT REPORT: TEA & CHAT
– HOW TO SUPPORT
FAMILIES DEALING WITH
CANCER**

MAY 2024

Ethnicity of Participants



Overview

This session was part of our ongoing “Tea & Chat” community wellbeing initiative, designed to create safe, culturally sensitive spaces for women to access support and information on topics affecting their families and mental health. Led by experienced counsellor **Shabana Khan**, who brings over 20 years of practice in therapeutic counselling, the session addressed the multifaceted challenges families face when a loved one is diagnosed with cancer.

With warmth, compassion, and cultural awareness, Shabana guided a powerful and practical discussion focused on emotional resilience, caregiving strategies, and accessing appropriate services.

The session aimed to:

- Provide emotional and practical strategies for supporting families affected by cancer.

- Address the unique needs of caregivers and children within the family unit.
- Share resources and signpost support services.
- Encourage open dialogue and reduce stigma around cancer in the community.



The session covered 9 key topic areas:

1. Emotional Support – this focused on helping families manage the emotional toll of cancer by being present, validating emotions, and encouraging professional mental health support. Participants learned about:

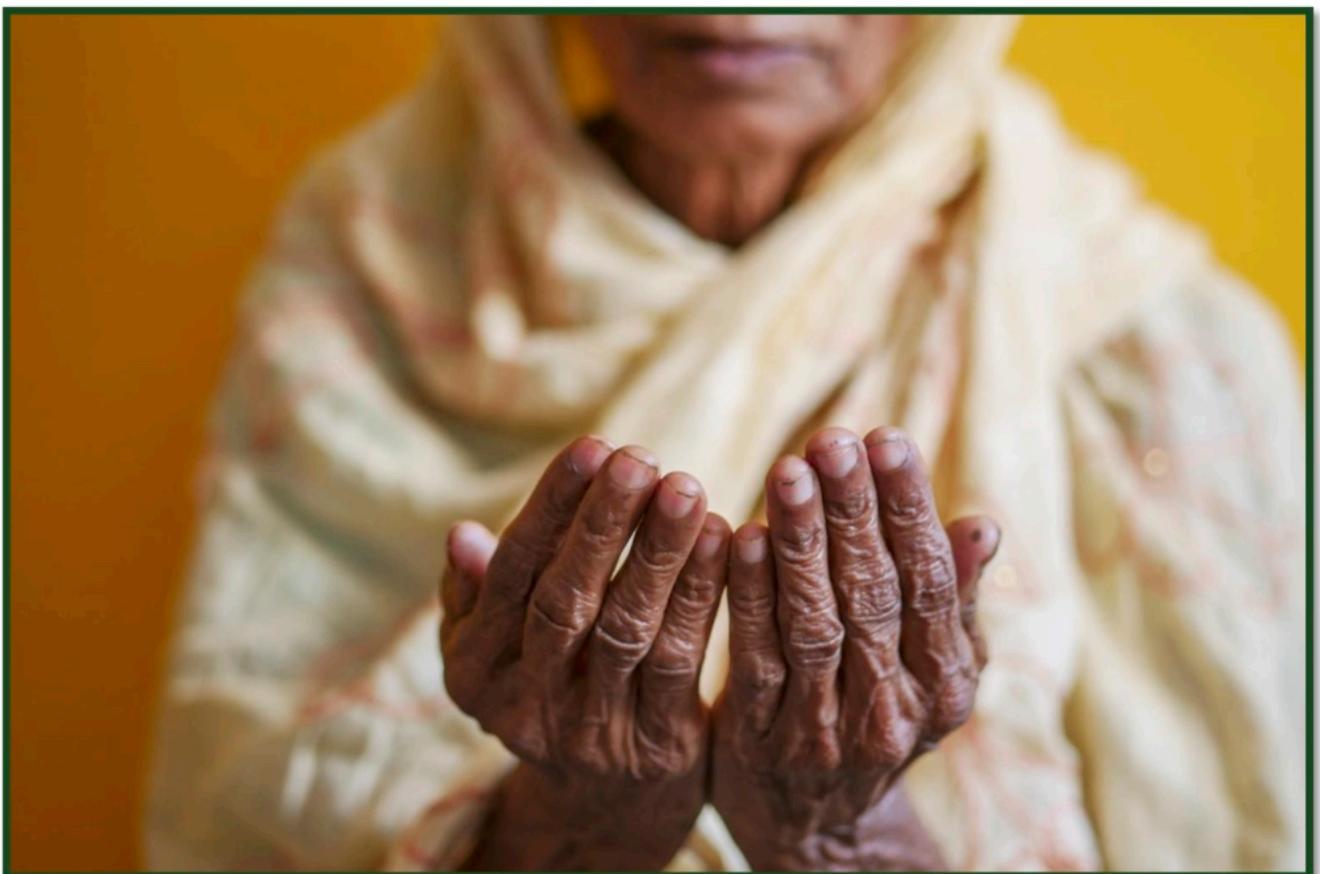
- Being emotionally present without offering solutions can be deeply comforting.
- It's important to validate all emotional responses, fear, anger and sadness as normal.
- Counselling and support groups are valuable tools for both patients and family members.

“I always thought I had to stay strong for everyone. Today I learnt it’s okay to cry and ask for help too.”

2. Practical Support – this provided tangible, day-to-day help to ease the caregiving burden. The women learned that:

- Offering help with meals, childcare, errands, or transport can significantly reduce family stress.
- Support should be offered in ways that respect the family's boundaries and dignity.
- Even small gestures of practical support can make a big emotional impact.

“Sometimes we don’t need words, just someone to drop off a hot meal or take the kids for an hour.”



3. Understanding Cancer and Its Impact – here women built their awareness of what a cancer diagnosis means and how it affects individuals differently. They learned about:

- How specific types of cancer can improve with love and support.
- How each family member may cope differently; respecting their individual responses is key.
- Avoiding assumptions, ask what is helpful, and follow their lead.

4. Maintaining Normalcy - here we explored the importance of maintaining a sense of routine and joy during difficult times. The women learned about:

- Celebrating small, everyday moments can help families maintain hope and stability.
- Children benefit greatly from consistent routines and inclusion in age-appropriate ways.
- Maintaining a sense of normal life fosters resilience.

5. Self-Care for Patients and Carers – we discussed and encouraged the importance of rest and wellbeing for both patients and those supporting them. With the women understanding that:

- Self-care is essential, not selfish, especially for long-term carers.
- Hydration, nutrition, rest, and emotional check-ins are crucial.
- Carers must also prioritize their own health to avoid burnout.

6. Connecting with Resources – we raised awareness of available services and the importance of culturally relevant support. The women learned that:

- There are many local and national organisations that can provide financial, emotional, and practical support.
- Services that understand cultural and faith contexts make a significant difference in how support is received and used.

“It helps to know there are organisations that actually understand our values and faith.”

7. Consistency and Follow-Up – we discussed the importance of long-term, dependable support beyond the initial diagnosis phase. Here they realised that:

- Families benefit from ongoing, not one-time, help.
- Reliability builds trust and shows genuine care.
- Following through on promises, even small ones, matters greatly.

8. Respecting Privacy and Autonomy – talked about understanding and honouring personal boundaries in conversations and actions around cancer. We discussed and explained:

- Always ask before sharing someone else’s story or information.

- Respect how much or how little a person chooses to disclose.
- Listening without judgment or pressure builds trust and safety.

9. Emotional Resilience and Supporting Children – this part was dedicated to supporting children within the family. And everyone was reminded of:

- **Validation:** Children’s emotions should be taken seriously and acknowledged.
- **Age-Appropriate Honesty:** Using simple and clear language to explain the illness helps children feel secure.
- **Routine and Stability:** Maintaining daily schedules offers comfort and predictability.



Participant Feedback

The session received overwhelmingly positive feedback:

- Many women shared that this was their first opportunity to speak openly about cancer.
- Participants appreciated the cultural and religious sensitivity, particularly around caregiving roles within Muslim families.
- A strong call emerged for follow-up sessions and further workshops focused on carers and mental health.

“It was refreshing to be in a space where I didn’t feel judged or misunderstood.”

“We need more sessions like this – maybe one focused on how we support each other as carers.”

“Before today, I didn’t know how to help without feeling like I was interfering. Now I feel more confident just offering to be there.”

“Hearing others share their stories made me feel less alone, it reminded me we’re all trying our best.”

“As a carer, I always put myself last. This session reminded me that looking after myself helps me be there for others.”

“I appreciated that the advice today respected our cultural and religious values, it felt relevant to my reality.”

“I now understand that support isn’t just about doing things, it’s about listening, respecting, and just showing up.”

Attendees also raised important questions around respite care, accessing local services, and dealing with anticipatory grief. These were all addressed during the session, with relevant signposting provided.

Conclusion & Recommendations

This session clearly demonstrated a high demand for culturally competent cancer support resources and mental health education among women, particularly within Muslim communities. The open, supportive atmosphere encouraged honest dialogue and community connection, helping reduce stigma and isolation.

We recommend:

- Offering follow-up sessions with a focus on carers, grief, and long-term emotional support.
- Expanding the “Tea & Chat” format to include topics such as palliative care, faith-based coping strategies, and navigating the healthcare system.
- Collaborating with local Muslim organisations to enhance outreach and cultural relevance.

We extend our sincere thanks to Shabana Khan for her compassionate leadership, and to all the women who shared their experiences with courage and honesty.

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

