

Master data file

ESRC Council Ref: ES/W001039/1

Project Name: UKRI Covid BAME Highlight: Religious community organisations' interventions around the impact of Coronavirus on Muslims in Birmingham in post-Covid Britain

Call: UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Agile Response to COVID-19 – Special BAME Highlight

Principal Investigator: Dr Damian Breen (School of Social Sciences, Birmingham City University)

Co-Investigator: Prof Imran Awan (School of Social Sciences, Birmingham City University)

Questionnaire data was collected anonymously and the final Qualtrics report is provided here with no participants being identifiable

Qualitative transcripts have been anonymised and where appropriate descriptions of individual's and their roles are provided. This also applies with organisations which are discussed in the qualitative transcripts.

Default Report

The impact of Coronavirus on Muslim communities in Birmingham

March 13, 2023 7:37 AM MDT

Q1 - COVID-19 BAME Special Highlight project - Religious community organisations'

interventions around the impact of Coronavirus on Muslims in Birmingham in post-Covid

Britain You are invited to take part in a questionnaire on the impacts of COVID-19 on

Muslims living in Birmingham, and community-led responses to support those throughout

the pandemic. The research is being conducted by Dr. Damian Breen and Professor Imran

Awan from the School of Social Sciences, Birmingham City University, and is funded by

UK Research and Innovation and the Economic and Social Research Council. CONSENT

FORM We use this document to check that you have understood the information that has

been provided relating to the research and that you agree to voluntarily participate in this

research. Before we begin, we would like to briefly go over some of the key things you

need to be aware of. These are listed below and you will be able to click on each one of

them to give your consent to take part. You will need to give consent for all of them in

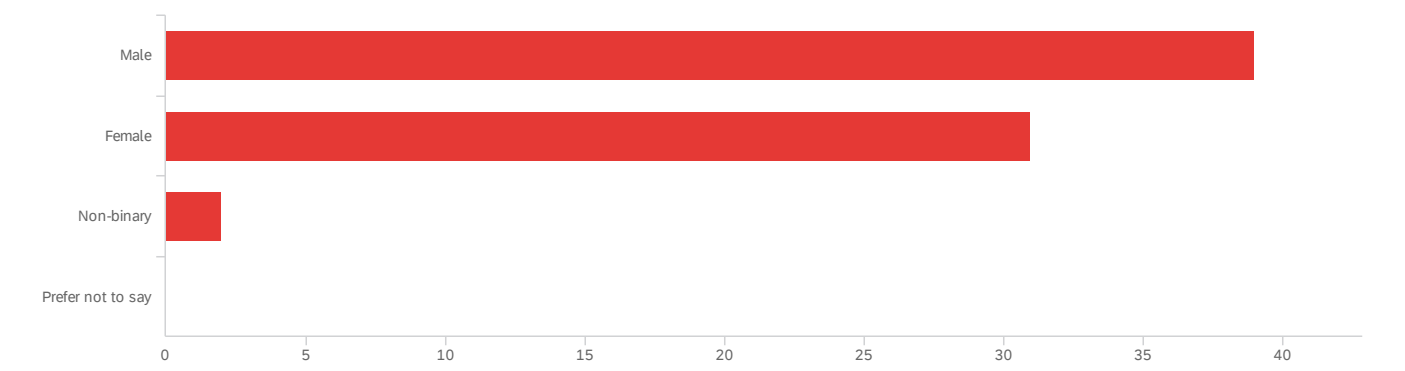
order to access the questionnaire. If you have any questions you can contact the research

team at the email addresses provided in the information sheet which is available here:

Questionnaire information sheet Please make sure you have read the attached

information sheet before giving consent to take part in the questionnaire

Q2 - Gender



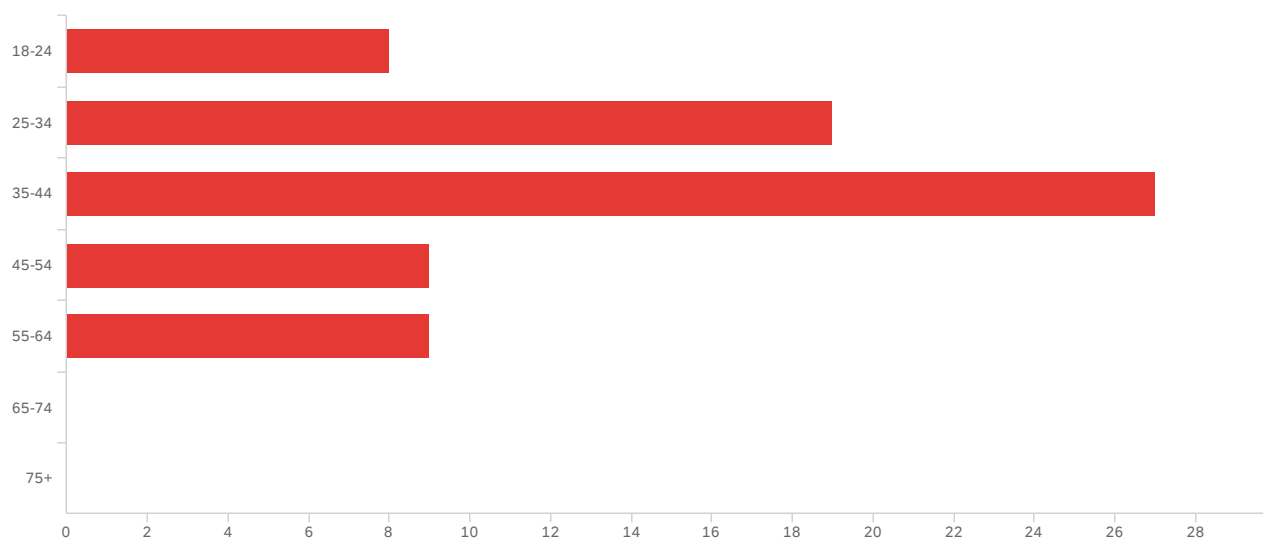
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Gender	1.00	3.00	1.49	0.55	0.31	72

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Male	54.17% 39
2	Female	43.06% 31
3	Non-binary	2.78% 2
4	Prefer not to say	0.00% 0

72

Showing rows 1 - 5 of 5

Q3 - Age

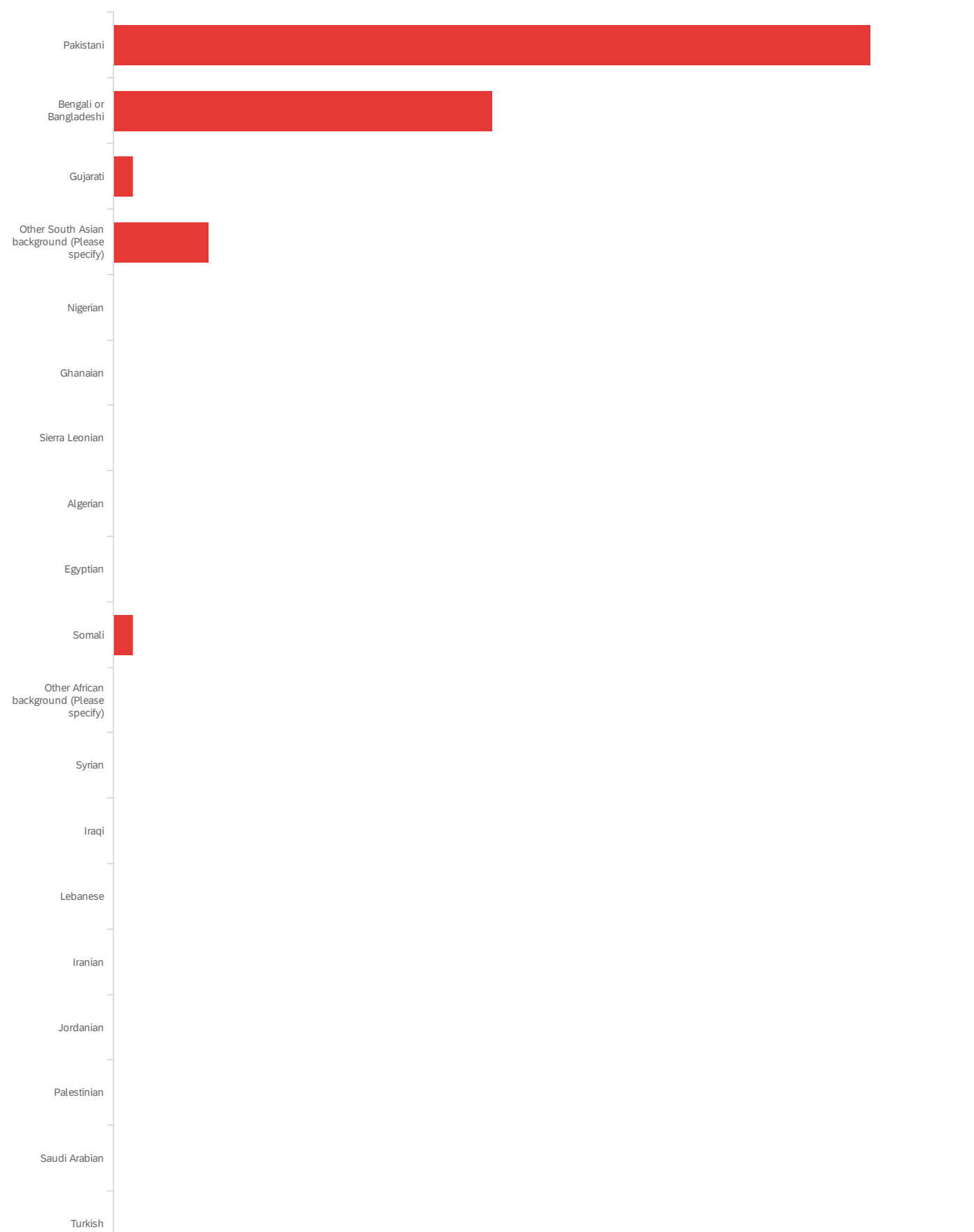


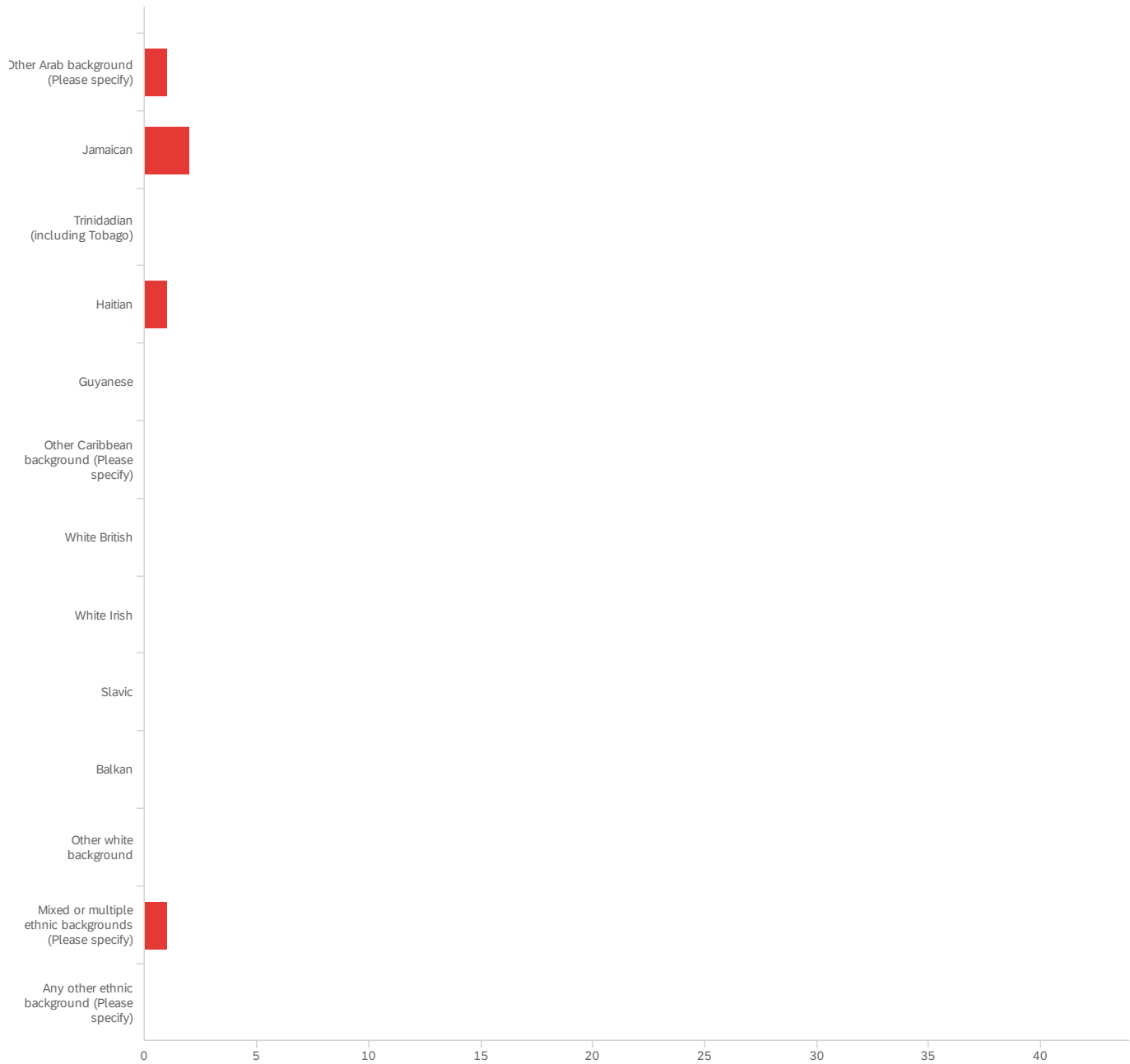
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Age	1.00	5.00	2.89	1.15	1.32	72

#	Field	Choice Count
1	18-24	11.11% 8
2	25-34	26.39% 19
3	35-44	37.50% 27
4	45-54	12.50% 9
5	55-64	12.50% 9
6	65-74	0.00% 0
7	75+	0.00% 0
		72

Showing rows 1 - 8 of 8

Q4 - How would you best describe your ethnicity?





#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How would you best describe your ethnicity? - Selected Choice	1.00	31.00	3.18	5.72	32.68	72

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Pakistani	55.56% 40
2	Bengali or Bangladeshi	27.78% 20
3	Gujarati	1.39% 1

#	Field	Choice Count
4	Other South Asian background (Please specify)	6.94% 5
5	Nigerian	0.00% 0
6	Ghanaian	0.00% 0
7	Sierra Leonian	0.00% 0
8	Algerian	0.00% 0
9	Egyptian	0.00% 0
10	Somali	1.39% 1
11	Other African background (Please specify)	0.00% 0
12	Syrian	0.00% 0
13	Iraqi	0.00% 0
14	Lebanese	0.00% 0
15	Iranian	0.00% 0
16	Jordanian	0.00% 0
17	Palestinian	0.00% 0
18	Saudi Arabian	0.00% 0
19	Turkish	0.00% 0
20	Other Arab background (Please specify)	1.39% 1
21	Jamaican	2.78% 2
22	Trinidadian (including Tobago)	0.00% 0
23	Haitian	1.39% 1
24	Guyanese	0.00% 0
25	Other Caribbean background (Please specify)	0.00% 0
26	White British	0.00% 0
27	White Irish	0.00% 0
28	Slavic	0.00% 0
29	Balkan	0.00% 0
30	Other white background	0.00% 0
31	Mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds (Please specify)	1.39% 1
32	Any other ethnic background (Please specify)	0.00% 0

#	Field	Choice Count
		72
Showing rows 1 - 33 of 33		
Q4_4_TEXT - Other South Asian background (Please specify)		
	Other South Asian background (Please specify)	
	Kashmiri	
	Kashmiri British Asian	
	Kashmiri	
	Kashmiri	
	Kashmiri	
Q4_11_TEXT - Other African background (Please specify)		
	Other African background (Please specify)	
Q4_20_TEXT - Other Arab background (Please specify)		
	Other Arab background (Please specify)	
	Yemeni	
Q4_25_TEXT - Other Caribbean background (Please specify)		
	Other Caribbean background (Please specify)	
Q4_30_TEXT - Other white background		
	Other white background	

Q4_31_TEXT - Mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds (Please specify)

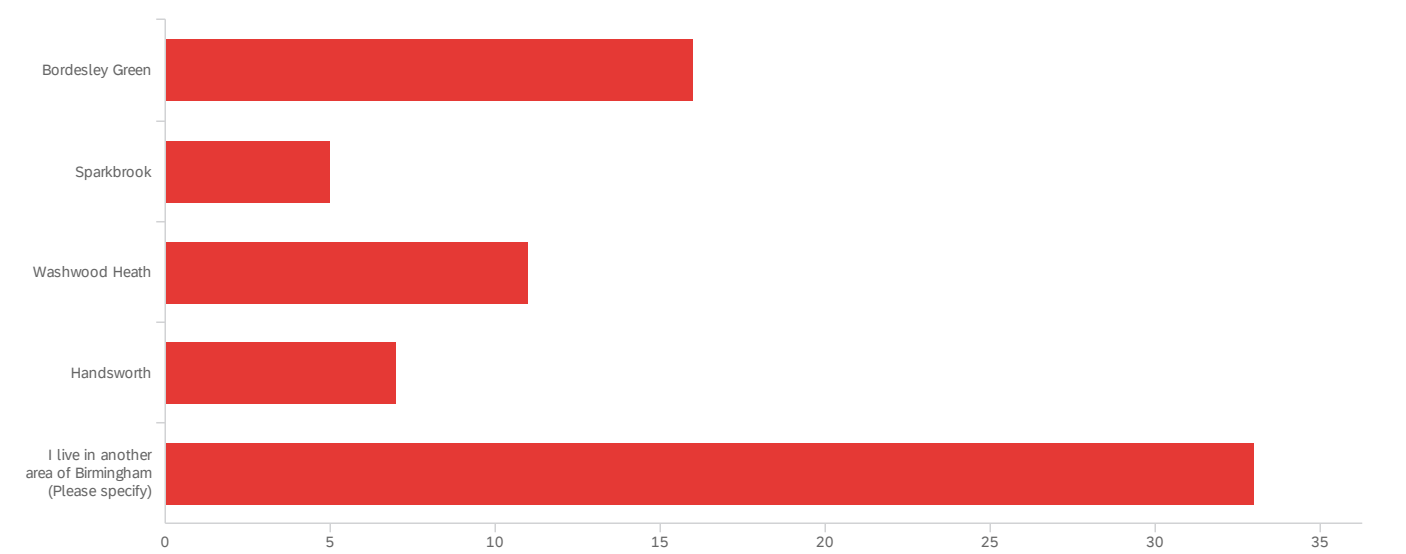
Mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds (Please specify)

Pakistan/Tanzania

Q4_32_TEXT - Any other ethnic background (Please specify)

Any other ethnic background (Please specify)

Q5 - Which area of Birmingham do you live in?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
---	-------	---------	---------	------	---------------	----------	-------

1	Which area of Birmingham do you live in? - Selected Choice	1.00	5.00	3.50	1.62	2.64	72
---	------------------------------------------------------------	------	------	------	------	------	----

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Bordesley Green	22.22% 16
2	Sparkbrook	6.94% 5
3	Washwood Heath	15.28% 11
4	Handsworth	9.72% 7
5	I live in another area of Birmingham (Please specify)	45.83% 33
		72

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

Q6_5_TEXT - I live in another area of Birmingham (Please specify)

I live in another area of Birmingham (Please specify)
Saltley
Hodge Hill

I live in another area of Birmingham (Please specify)

Edgbaston

Erdington

Yardley

Sparkhill

Stechford

Handsworth Wood

Hodge Hill

hall green

Edgbaston

Moseley

Quinton

Erdington

Hall Green

Sutton coldfield

Sutton Coldfield

Acocks Green

Erdington

Sutton Coldfield

Hall green

South yardley

Sutton Coldfield

Solihull

Boldmere

Sutton Coldfield

I live in another area of Birmingham (Please specify)

Sutton

Streetly

Small Heath

Acocks Green

TYSELEY

Small Heath

Sutton coldfield

Q6 - Do you attend a Mosque? If so which Mosque do you attend most frequently?

Do you attend a Mosque? If so which Mosque do you attend most frequently?

Zia-UL-Qur'an, St Saviour's Road, B8

No

No

No

Any Mosque within the Sparkbrook ward

Any when I get a chance mostly when there is a funeral to attend

No

No

Green Lane Masjid

Salafi Masjid, Wright Street

AICP Centre

Masjid Ali

Naseby road

Jamia Masjid Naqshbandia Aslamia

no husband does green lane

Anwar ul madinah

Central Mosque

Masjid Ali

Muslim Student House

No

Zia Ul Quran

Yes

Do you attend a Mosque? If so which Mosque do you attend most frequently?

Wright street

Gree Lane masjid

Any near by

Manarat foundation

Green Lane Masjid

Green lane masjid

Sutton Coldfield Mosque

Hall green

The salafi masjid

Any conveniently located

None

Sutton

Sutton coldfield

Green lane

My local mosque

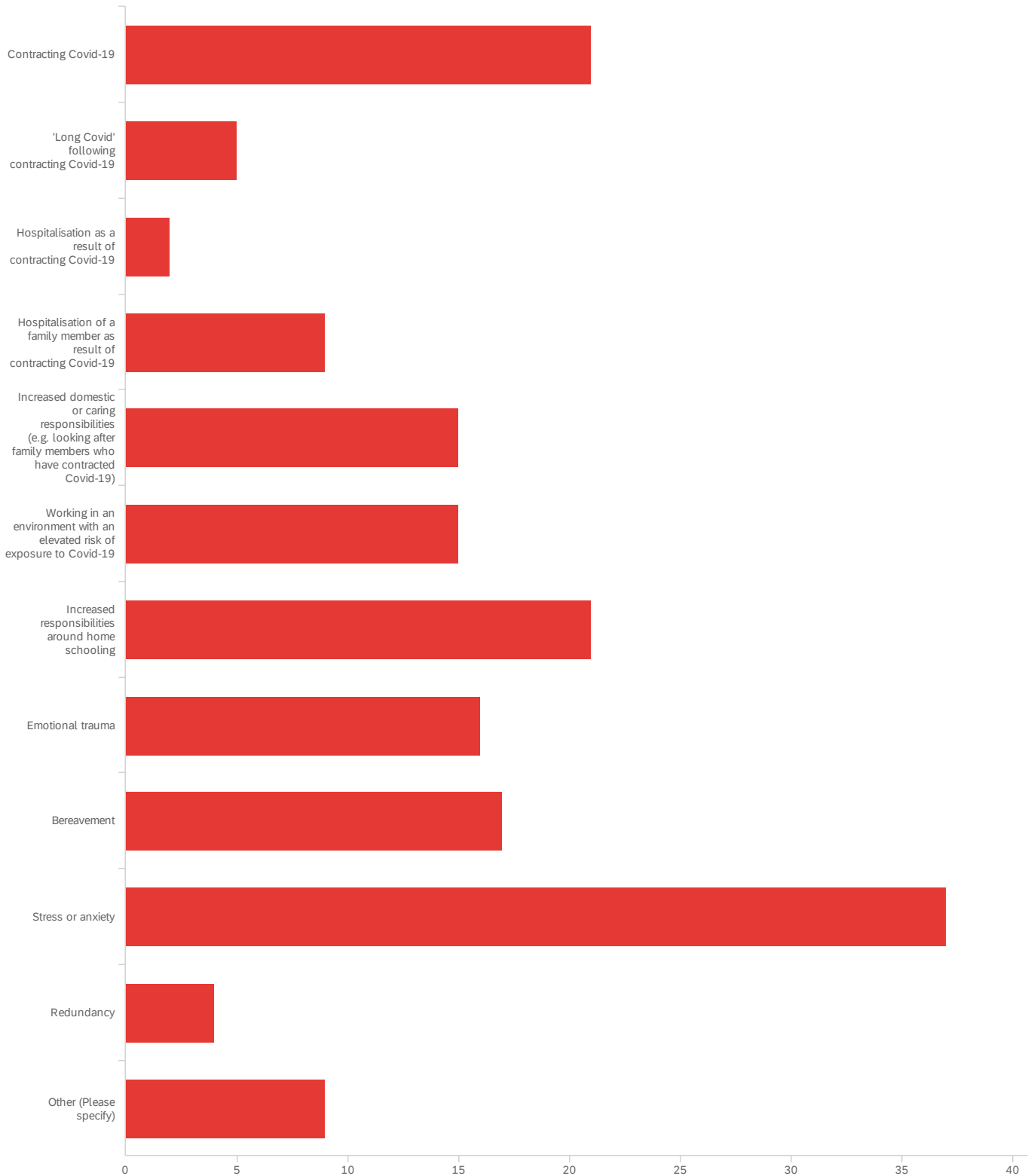
Wright Street

Ghamkol shariff

Ahlus-sunnah wal jama^aah

Green Lane Mosque

Q7 - Which of the following impacts have you experienced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic? (Please select as many as are relevant to you)



#	Field	Choice Count
1	Contracting Covid-19	12.28% 21
2	'Long Covid' following contracting Covid-19	2.92% 5
3	Hospitalisation as a result of contracting Covid-19	1.17% 2
4	Hospitalisation of a family member as result of contracting Covid-19	5.26% 9
5	Increased domestic or caring responsibilities (e.g. looking after family members who have contracted Covid-19)	8.77% 15
6	Working in an environment with an elevated risk of exposure to Covid-19	8.77% 15
7	Increased responsibilities around home schooling	12.28% 21
8	Emotional trauma	9.36% 16
9	Bereavement	9.94% 17
10	Stress or anxiety	21.64% 37
11	Redundancy	2.34% 4
12	Other (Please specify)	5.26% 9
		171

Showing rows 1 - 13 of 13

Q8_12_TEXT - Other (Please specify)

Other (Please specify)
Online learning in college and Teacher Assessed Grades for GCSE
Hospital visits access
Studying MSc during Covid
No support
furlough
None
Due to lockdown, less physical activity had an impact on appearance, confidence and health. Also daughter is really shy and not used to being around other people due to being born in lockdown. Could not go to hospital scans with wife during second baby pregnancy. Restricted visiting when new child was born.
Mental health impact from restrictions
Family members passed away

Q8 - Which of the impacts you identified above has been most difficult for you? Please explain why

Which of the impacts you identified above has been most difficult for you?...

Balancing home-schooling with own employment

Emotional trauma and anxiety when family member was hospitalised.

Long Covid, it affected my daily life.

Receiving Teacher Assessed Grades in the final year of GCSEs as they did not show full potential

Stress and anxiety

I went to Pakistan and the Covid lockdown began. I was trapped in isolation for more than the time originally planned. Suffered anxiety, relationship breakdowns, heart ache really!

Other - having to do lectures online and my dissertation and data collection/analysis alone with supervisor support via Teams. Assignments - Affected by being stuck abroad - internet being cut off so missing deadline (late submission) & being penalised. Delayed graduation after two years.

Contracting covid- I was feeling congested and tired all day

Bereavement of community members

Stress with uni

Contracting covid

Long covid support no access to a doctor

Anxiety with being unable to work, adhering to online school schedules and completing set school tasks

death of sister from covid

Home schooling while working was difficult

Fear of losing family members and friends. Unsure how to move forward in employment and get into the job market.

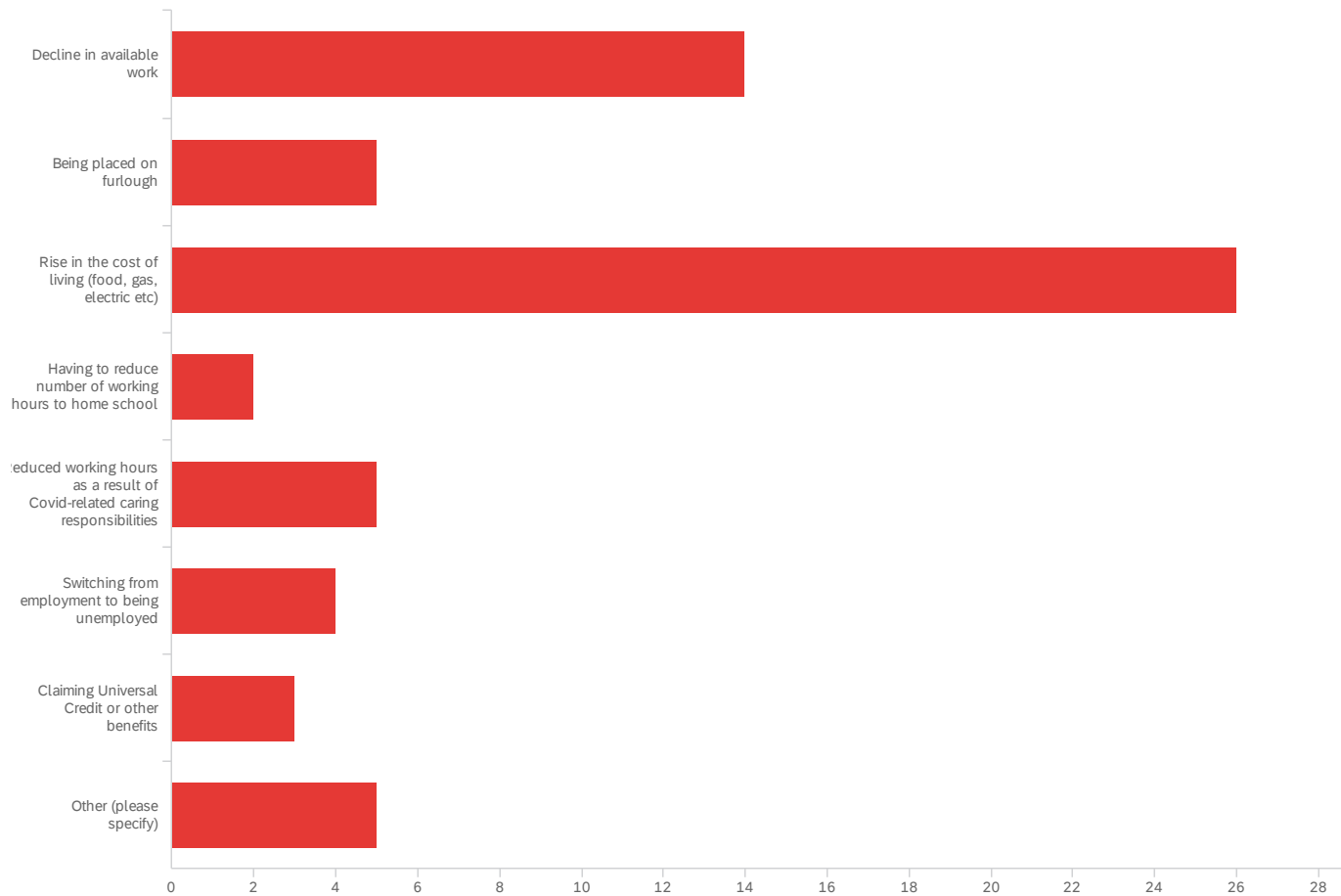
Contracting covid

Stress and anxiety as I lived back from Qatar with my family during the pandemic. Trying to arrange work and children's schooling was heighten by restrictions in travel and being able to attend institutions such as the mosque or meeting in family gatherings.

Government, police, media, big tech, SAGE, NHS, covid facism.

Bereavement & financial stress Lost about 5 relatives in 1 year and also suffered from loss of trading

Q9 - Have you felt any economic impacts as a result of the pandemic? Please tick any that apply.



#	Field	Choice Count
1	Decline in available work	21.88% 14
2	Being placed on furlough	7.81% 5
3	Rise in the cost of living (food, gas, electric etc)	40.63% 26
4	Having to reduce number of working hours to home school	3.13% 2
5	Reduced working hours as a result of Covid-related caring responsibilities	7.81% 5
6	Switching from employment to being unemployed	6.25% 4
7	Claiming Universal Credit or other benefits	4.69% 3
8	Other (please specify)	7.81% 5

Which of the impacts you identified above has been most difficult for you?...

During lock down I was unable to go out anywhere or even visit my family which really stressed me out.

Not seeing family

Living with elderly and vulnerable parents has been very stressful as my actions can negatively impact their health

Home Schooling

Hospitalisation of family member with long covid.

Getting covid

Increased responsibility around home with kids home school looking after family members who got covid

Alhumdhulillah contracting covid itself did not have a huge effect however all other mentioned have impacted my life. Physically and mentally.

Increase in responsibility

Having to balance remote working with school drop offs.

Restrictions in day to day activity and interest, work life balance being reduced

Stress and anxiety. Couldn't go out anywhere to relieve stress.

Working in the NHS

Remotely working when I started a new job

Redundant

Hospitalisation was very scary after having covid

Stress and anxiety

Stress and anxiety of the unknown and the scaremongering

Lack of Friday prayer was a huge miss

Members of the family or some one you know and you cannot go or attend the funeral

Working in Pharmacy with greatly increased workload due to other Healthcare institutions such as GP surgeries being shut

Emotional trauma

Losing my mother and looking after my eldest sibling at home. I am unable to work.

Stress and anxiety

Q10_8_TEXT - Other (please specify)

Other (please specify)

In debt

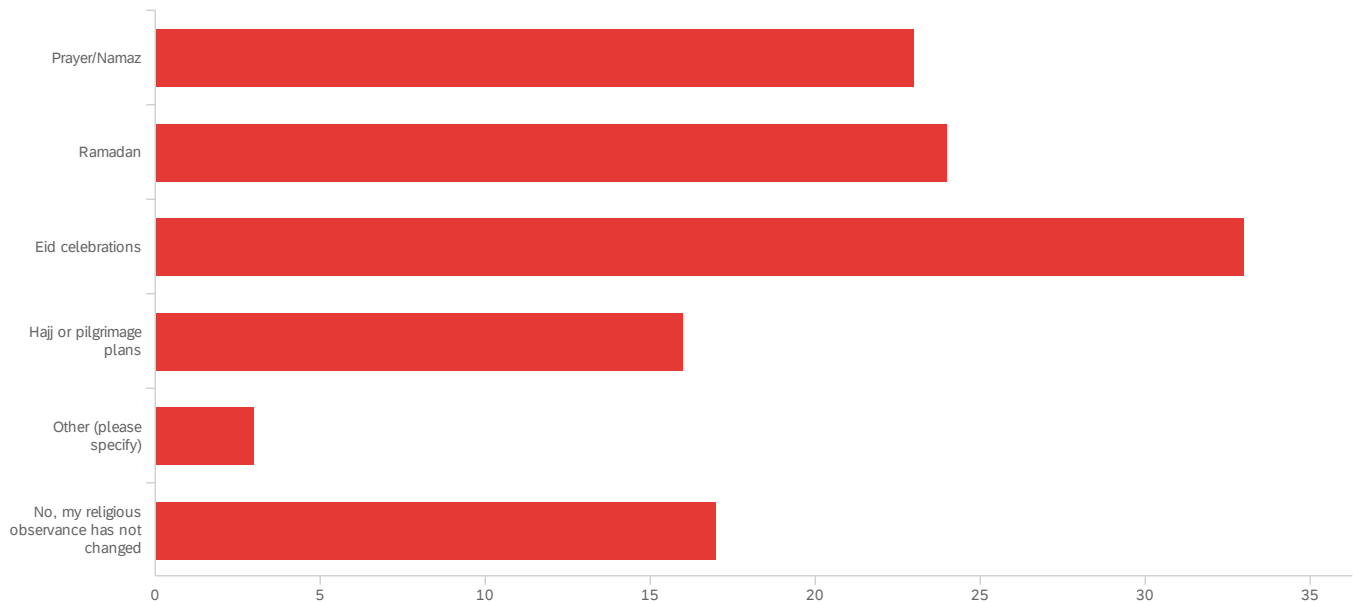
Money from prostitution

Quit the NHS

Reduced salary

None

Q10 - Do you feel that your religious practice or observance has had to change as a result of pandemic restrictions? Please tick any that apply.



#	Field	Choice Count
1	Prayer/Namaz	19.83% 23
2	Ramadan	20.69% 24
3	Eid celebrations	28.45% 33
4	Hajj or pilgrimage plans	13.79% 16
5	Other (please specify)	2.59% 3
6	No, my religious observance has not changed	14.66% 17

116

Showing rows 1 - 7 of 7

Q11_5_TEXT - Other (please specify)

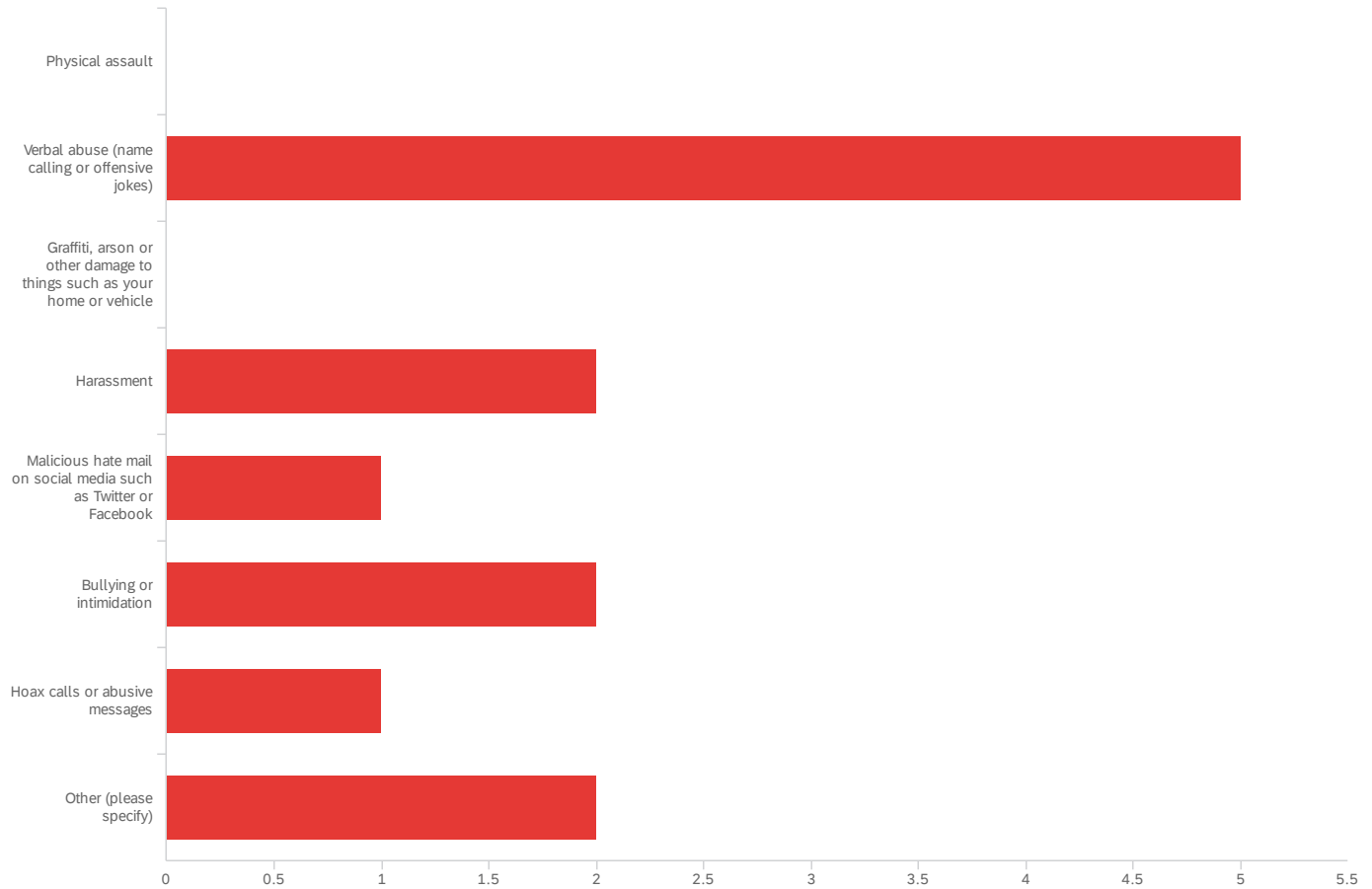
Other (please specify)

Not being able to have family gatherings

This last year has been very difficult to practise my religion

Friday jumma

Q11 - Have you been the victim of any of the following hate incidents as a result of the pandemic? Please tick any that apply.



#	Field	Choice Count
1	Physical assault	0.00% 0
2	Verbal abuse (name calling or offensive jokes)	38.46% 5
3	Graffiti, arson or other damage to things such as your home or vehicle	0.00% 0
4	Harassment	15.38% 2
5	Malicious hate mail on social media such as Twitter or Facebook	7.69% 1
6	Bullying or intimidation	15.38% 2
7	Hoax calls or abusive messages	7.69% 1
8	Other (please specify)	15.38% 2

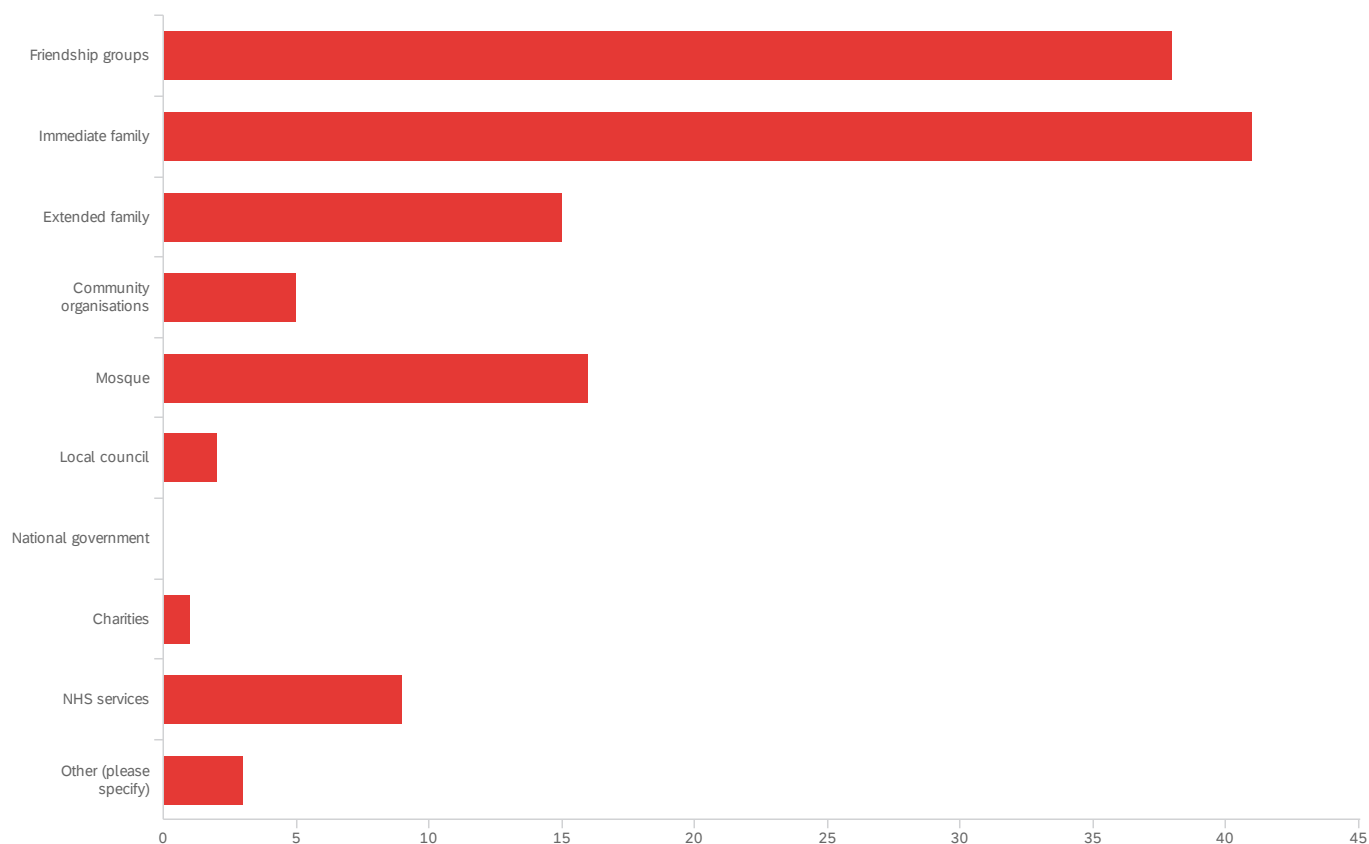
Q12_8_TEXT - Other (please specify)

Other (please specify)

Felt conscious that people were frowning due to colour of my skin

Bullying from the u.k government into taking the vaccine.

Q12 - Which of the following have you found helpful in providing support during the pandemic? (Please select as many as you wish)

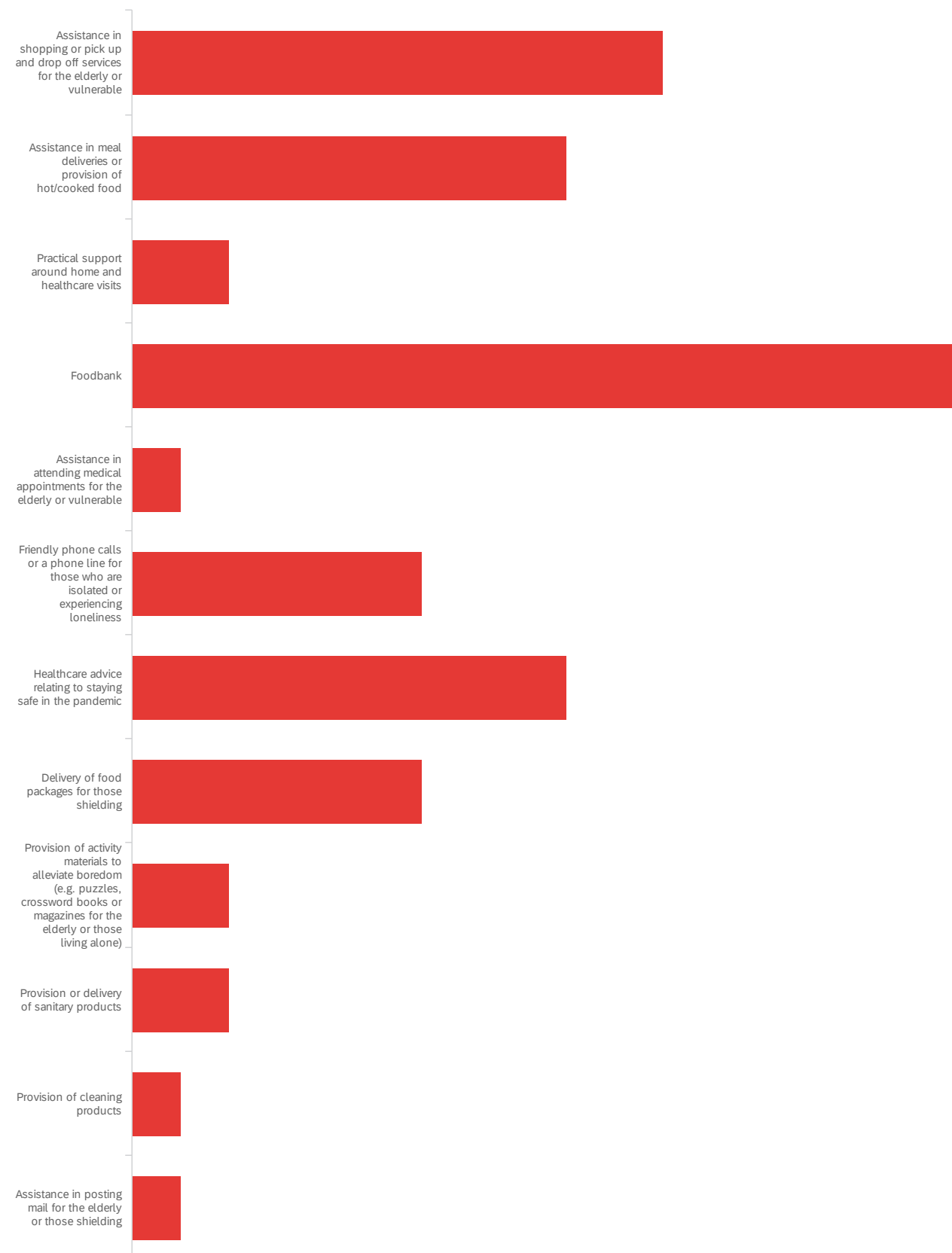


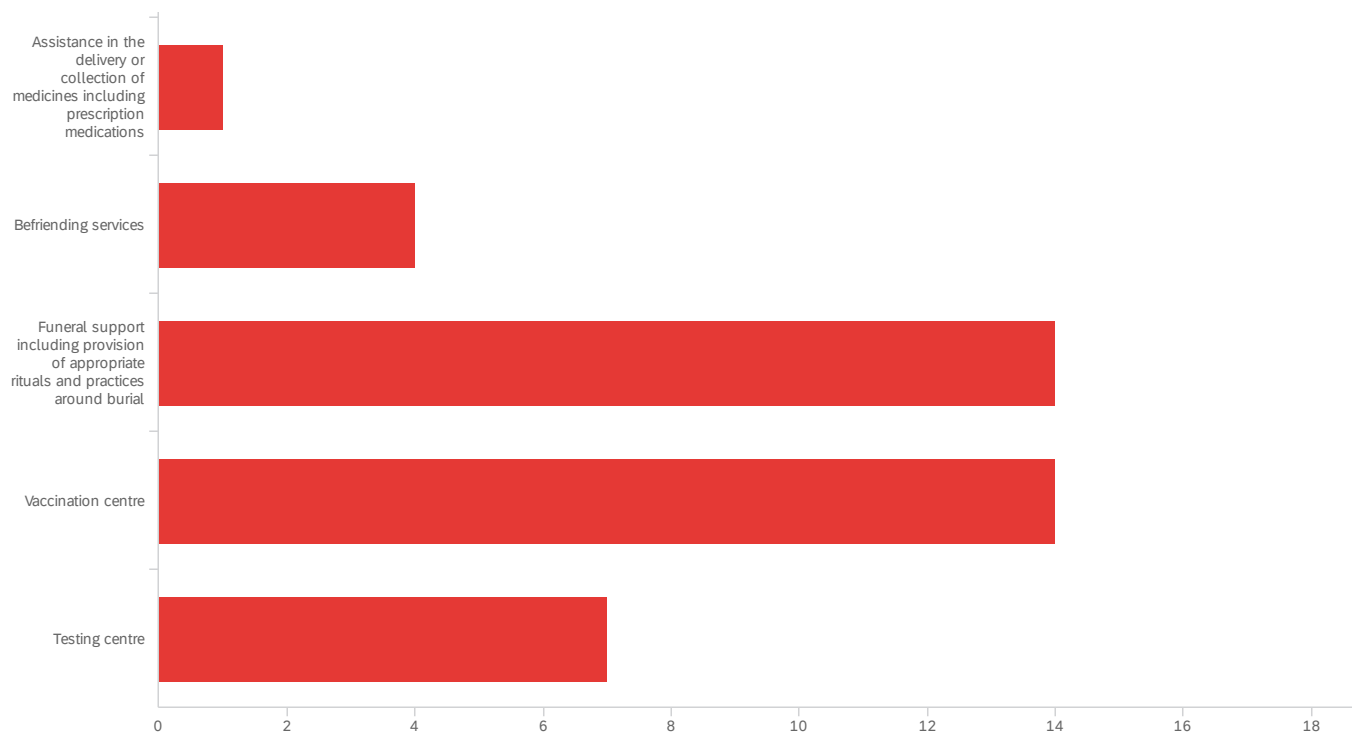
#	Field	Choice Count
1	Friendship groups	29.23% 38
2	Immediate family	31.54% 41
3	Extended family	11.54% 15
4	Community organisations	3.85% 5
5	Mosque	12.31% 16
6	Local council	1.54% 2
7	National government	0.00% 0
8	Charities	0.77% 1
9	NHS services	6.92% 9
10	Other (please specify)	2.31% 3

Q13_10_TEXT - Other (please specify)

Other (please specify)
None as we were in lockdown
Partner
Employers

Q13 - Did your local Mosque help facilitate any of the following services in the community during the pandemic?





#	Field	Choice Count
1	Assistance in shopping or pick up and drop off services for the elderly or vulnerable	10.28% 11
2	Assistance in meal deliveries or provision of hot/cooked food	8.41% 9
3	Practical support around home and healthcare visits	1.87% 2
4	Foodbank	15.89% 17
5	Assistance in attending medical appointments for the elderly or vulnerable	0.93% 1
6	Friendly phone calls or a phone line for those who are isolated or experiencing loneliness	5.61% 6
7	Healthcare advice relating to staying safe in the pandemic	8.41% 9
8	Delivery of food packages for those shielding	5.61% 6
9	Provision of activity materials to alleviate boredom (e.g. puzzles, crossword books or magazines for the elderly or those living alone)	1.87% 2
10	Provision or delivery of sanitary products	1.87% 2
11	Provision of cleaning products	0.93% 1
12	Assistance in posting mail for the elderly or those shielding	0.93% 1
13	Assistance in the delivery or collection of medicines including prescription medications	0.93% 1
14	Befriending services	3.74% 4
15	Funeral support including provision of appropriate rituals and practices around burial	13.08% 14
16	Vaccination centre	13.08% 14
17	Testing centre	6.54% 7

#	Field	Choice Count
		107

Showing rows 1 - 18 of 18

Q14_18_TEXT - Other (please specify)

Other (please specify)

Not sure

I'm not sure

Providing volunteers to wash deceased muslims who died of covid

Don't know

None I am afraid the mosque did nothing to support us in the pandemic

Q14 - Did the Mosque have a role in providing support around death and bereavement in the community as a result of the pandemic? If so, please give as much detail as you can

Did the Mosque have a role in providing support around death and bereavemen...

Not sure

Providing support and place for family members and friends to come to offer their condolences.

Yes, Mosques were the only means of coming together and dealing with death.

None

Their role was substantial both in emotional & practical ways - e.g. providing information on Covid - 19 & roles

I believe Mosques had to step up their role in supporting deaths in families - funerals etc

Our Mosque in Sparkbrook were very helpful as we got to pay our last respects to our father when he passed away and were able to attend his funeral.

Yes, they allowed us women to have a very small corner in the Mosque during my grandfather's funeral.

Not sure

Yes, Covid 19 funeral service included bereavement support and referrals to our free counselling service and listening helpline

None that I am aware off other than funeral services

Not sure

A number of our female volunteers were involved in performing washes on covid relate deaths in the Muslim community.

I feel like the mosques has had no clue and buried there head in the sand . Most mosque commiti members can't even speak English and are mostly likely friends from the same village on Pakistan. What was amazing that ████████ from SMBF oginisation took on a responsibility to support mosque on certifying the gusal

yes help with burial

None

No extra deaths to deal with, fake news.

No

Yes

Yes , funeral arrangements etc

Did the Mosque have a role in providing support around death and bereavemen...

Funeral services, offering financial support for struggling families through the pandemic. Sermons and talks throughout the pandemic to minimize anxiety and offer encouragement to those losing family or those that fear losing family

GLM has a full program surrounding death and bereavement

Yes help with burial service and arrangement

yes but not sure as didn't use the service

Honestly I don't go to just one mosque. But from what I seen there was plenty of support provided in terms of advise some used as testing centres. Also courses available to participate in such as Arabic lessons, tajweed classes etc.

None

Funeral services

Not aware

Yes they done the funerals, gave a comforting speech for the community and provided support for the families.

That would be an ecumenical matter

Not sure

Nil

Not sure

Yes, funeral services and support

Unsure...

I am not aware of

Yes they have.

Q15 - Are there other local community organisations that you have regularly used during the pandemic? If so please list as many as you can by name below

Are there other local community organisations that you have regularly used...

None

No

None

Covid-19 testing centres

No

None

Himaya Haven Ramadan prisoner welfare packs provided Qur'ans, literature, dates, prayer mats, attar bottles for 1300 Muslim prisoners across the West Midlands. Ramadan hampers for prisoner families containing dry foods like pasta, rice, lentils, flour. Xmas hampers - food e goodies for Christmas/family dinner - during first Christmas in Covid - most clients were Muslim. They appreciated it a lot.

No

Active well-being society Masjid Al-Falah As-Suffa Outreach Public Health Birmingham

N/A

SMBF Birmingham

no

None

Stupid question all organisations were shut down during covid thought you would have known that!

None

Birmingham City Council

None

Not that I know

No

None

Are there other local community organisations that you have regularly used...

N/a

No

No

No

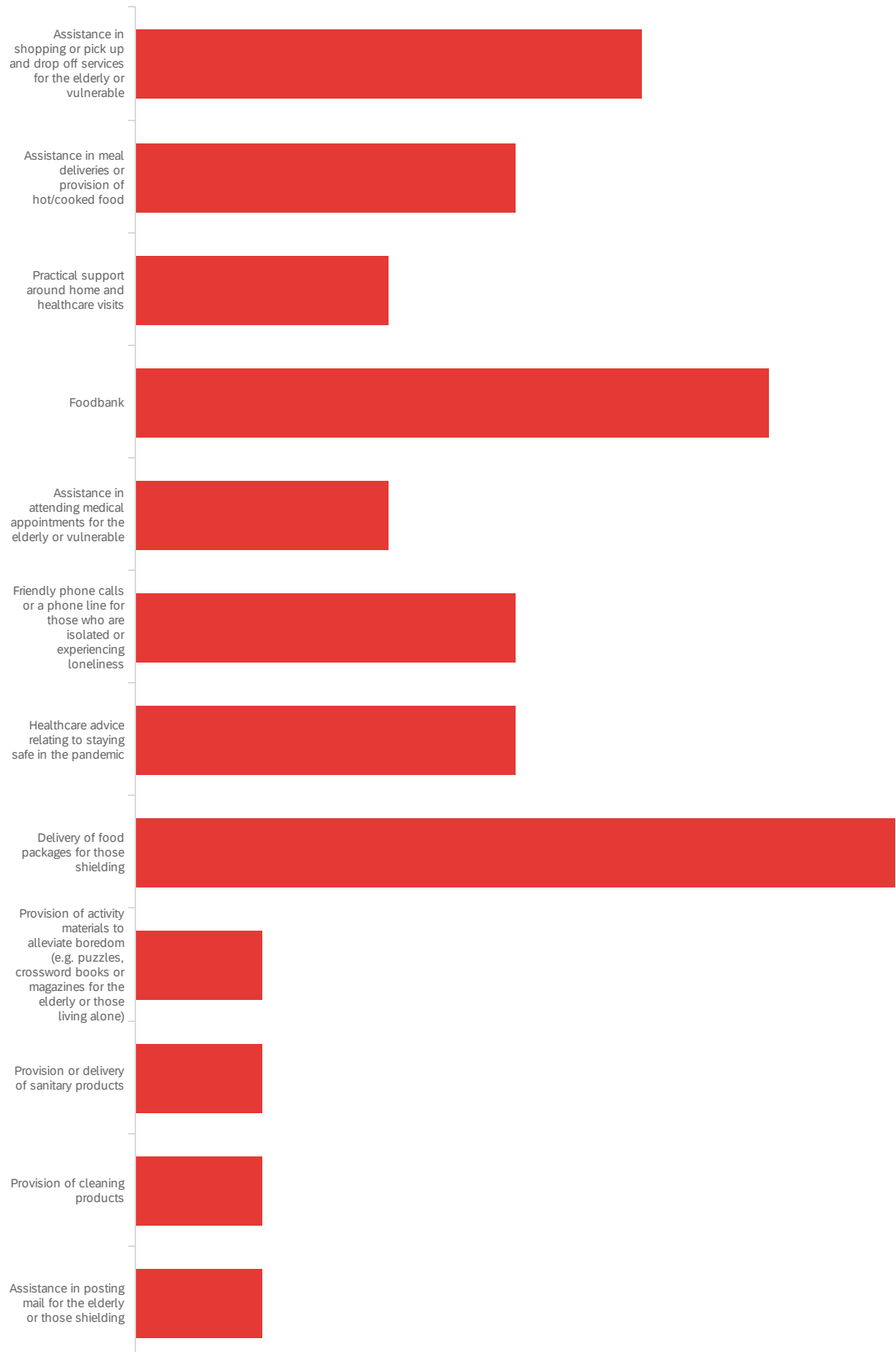
Friends groups

No

Did not use any.

Ipharm pharmacy

Q16 - Did these community organisations help facilitate any of the following services in the community during the pandemic?





#	Field	Choice Count
1	Assistance in shopping or pick up and drop off services for the elderly or vulnerable	6.90% 4
2	Assistance in meal deliveries or provision of hot/cooked food	5.17% 3
3	Practical support around home and healthcare visits	3.45% 2
4	Foodbank	8.62% 5
5	Assistance in attending medical appointments for the elderly or vulnerable	3.45% 2
6	Friendly phone calls or a phone line for those who are isolated or experiencing loneliness	5.17% 3
7	Healthcare advice relating to staying safe in the pandemic	5.17% 3
8	Delivery of food packages for those shielding	10.34% 6
9	Provision of activity materials to alleviate boredom (e.g. puzzles, crossword books or magazines for the elderly or those living alone)	1.72% 1
10	Provision or delivery of sanitary products	1.72% 1
11	Provision of cleaning products	1.72% 1
12	Assistance in posting mail for the elderly or those shielding	1.72% 1
13	Assistance in the delivery or collection of medicines including prescription medications	3.45% 2
14	Befriending services	8.62% 5
15	Funeral support including provision of appropriate rituals and practices around burial	8.62% 5
16	Vaccination centre	12.07% 7

#	Field	Choice Count
17	Testing centre	12.07% 7
		58

Showing rows 1 - 18 of 18

Q17_18_TEXT - Other (please specify)

Other (please specify)
Not sure
Not sure
Unsure

Q17 - What are the most important things that community organisations did for the Muslim community during the pandemic? (Please be as specific as you can, and give examples)

What are the most important things that community organisations did for the...

Our local Masjid did not engage too much into the community.

None

They did nothing in specific just for the Muslim community, however, the Covid testing and vaccination services have been helpful for everyone.

Provide reliable information about Covid. Support during deaths and isolation, supporting the elderly & vulnerable.

Food banks Ramadan packs for prisoners Ramadan packs for families Christmas hampers to BAME families Advice and guidance to our families

Share videos, raised money for charity, campaigns

Food provision Guidance on Covid 19 Spiritual/mental health support

I don't recall any, many had to fend for themselves or supporting each other through charity.

I honestly cannot think of a single thing

Making things available online for the children to continue their religious studies.

Kept us strong with the power of Islam

Funeral service increased capacity at Ghamkol Masjid. Food delivery and befriending services were offered.

When ever has any Muslim community organisation helped the community, they receive government funding and rig the books, we Muslims know all this, the mosque are a money making scam hidden under the disguise of worship!

Nil

Being specific about observing covid rules during prayer etc

Online lessons and sermons by GLM

Vaccination Centre Foodbank Online Classes

advice on shielding and social distancing food packages

Provide advise Provide reassurance Provide instructions on how to stay safe Reached out to people

What are the most important things that community organisations did for the...

Vaccination centres, emotional support, food and clothes

Funeral support

Food banks

Helped the elderly and vulnerable with food and toiletries. Provided support and comfort for families.

Toed the line regarding government public health advice

Not sure if any

Nothing

Online classes/lecture

Helped people specially the elderly and vulnerable with their food and shopping. Helped people stay calm and supportive throughout these difficult times.

Food bank I think was the most important service and making sure the community knew they had help in needed

Letting the mosque to be used as vaccination centre for the community.

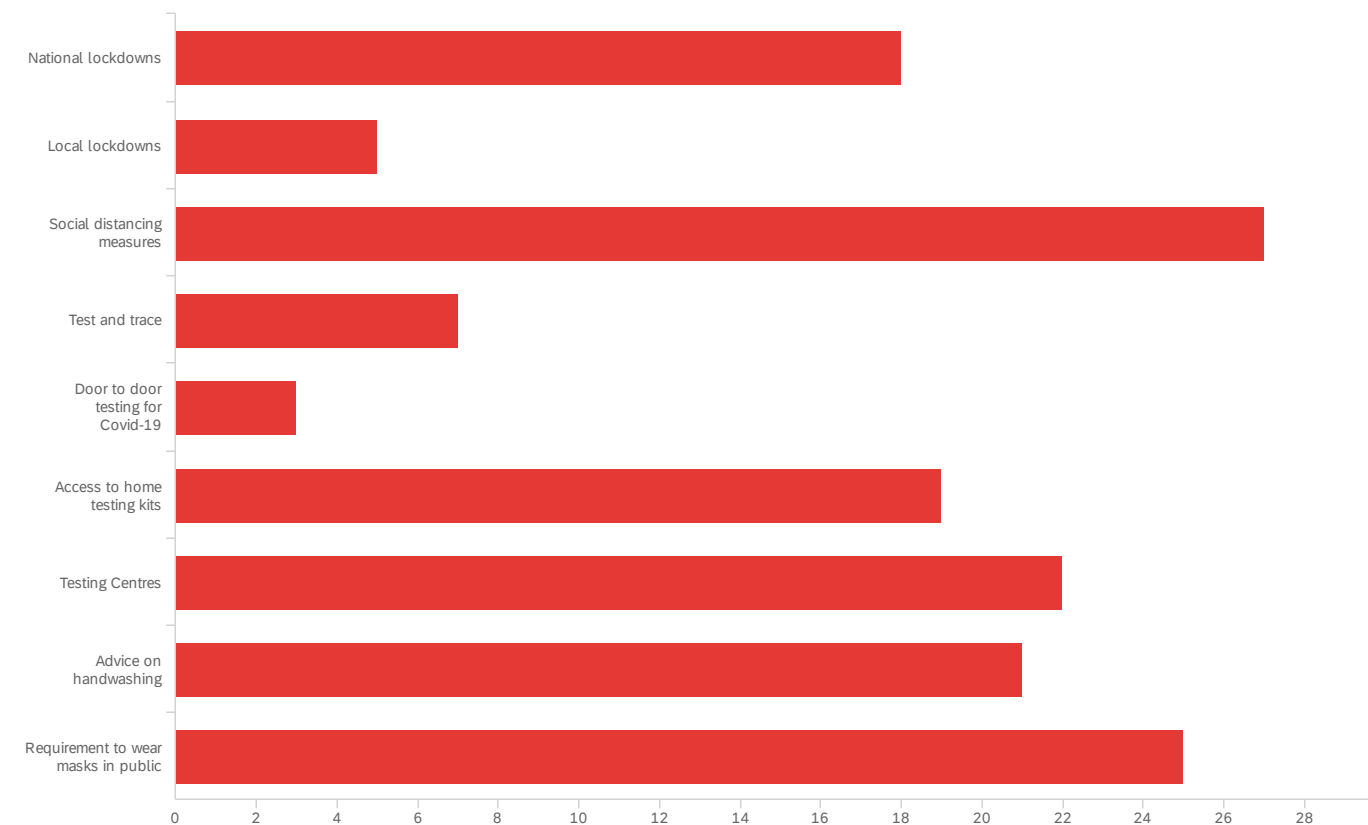
Ghamkol shariff had freezer containers loaded in their car park for those who have passed away which was excellent

Emotional support

Helping the vulnerable and elderly with food and essentials. Also providing support groups during the pandemic

Trying to make aware of the seriousness of the pandemic. Helping the community during the pandemic.

Q18 - Which of the following would you say have worked well in terms of government responses to the pandemic?



#	Field	Choice Count
1	National lockdowns	12.24% 18
2	Local lockdowns	3.40% 5
3	Social distancing measures	18.37% 27
4	Test and trace	4.76% 7
5	Door to door testing for Covid-19	2.04% 3
6	Access to home testing kits	12.93% 19
7	Testing Centres	14.97% 22
8	Advice on handwashing	14.29% 21
9	Requirement to wear masks in public	17.01% 25
		147

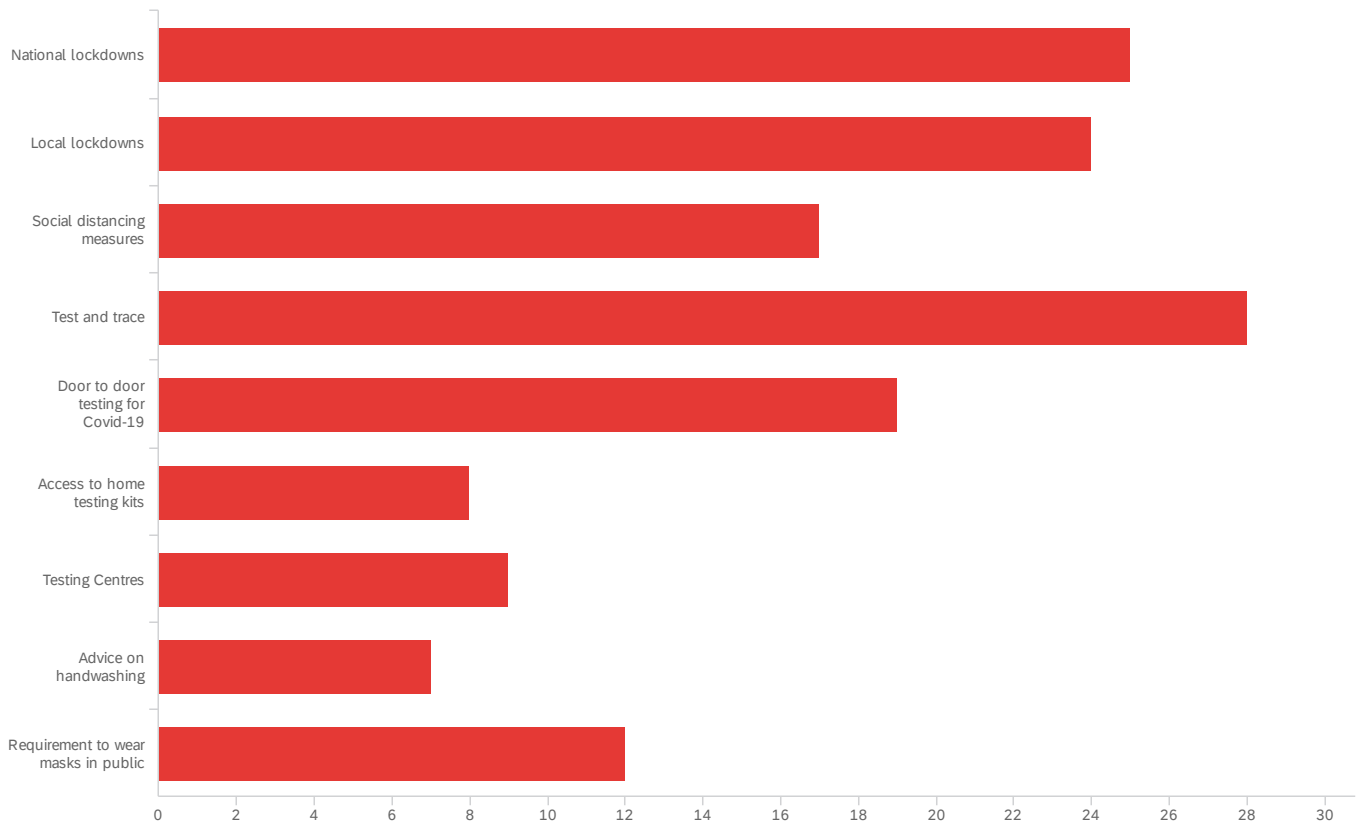
Showing rows 1 - 10 of 10

Q19_11_TEXT - Other (please specify)

Other (please specify)

Watching 24/7 youtube videos saved my insanity.

Q19 - Which of the following would you say have not worked well in terms of government responses to the pandemic?



#	Field	Choice Count
1	National lockdowns	16.78% 25
2	Local lockdowns	16.11% 24
3	Social distancing measures	11.41% 17
4	Test and trace	18.79% 28
5	Door to door testing for Covid-19	12.75% 19
6	Access to home testing kits	5.37% 8
7	Testing Centres	6.04% 9
8	Advice on handwashing	4.70% 7
9	Requirement to wear masks in public	8.05% 12
		149

Showing rows 1 - 10 of 10

Q20_11_TEXT - Other (please specify)

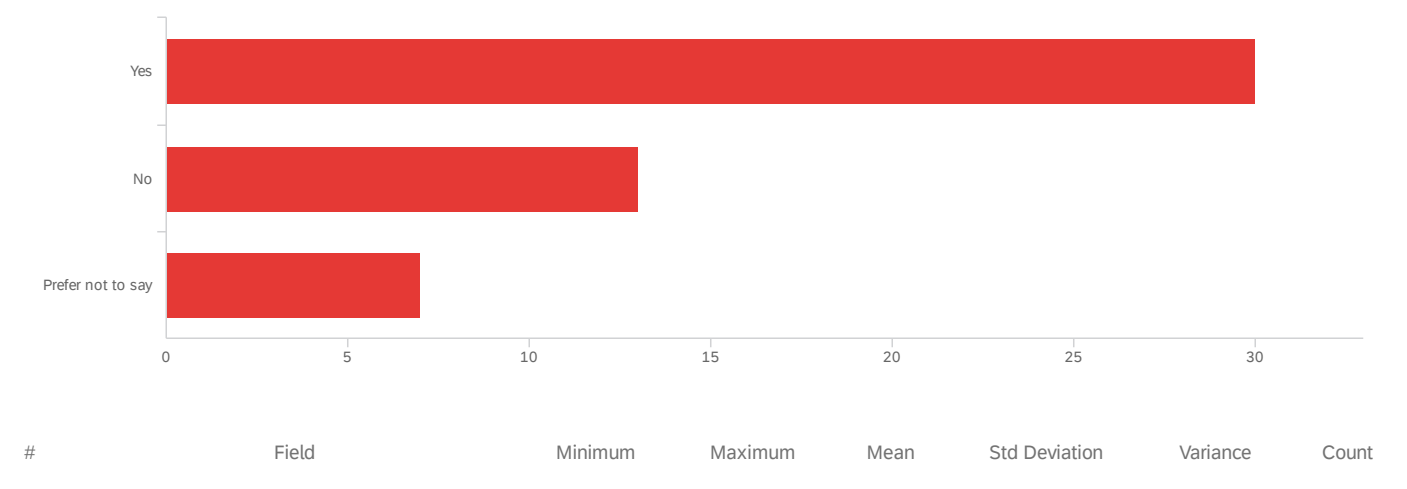
Other (please specify)

Inconsistent, delays, mixed messaging

Government has own agenda.

Distrust of incumbent politicians and waste of resources buying shoddy PPE with jobs for the boys. Endemic corruption in government and the NHS

Q20 - Have you had a Covid-19 vaccination?



#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	60.00% 30
2	No	26.00% 13
3	Prefer not to say	14.00% 7
		50

Showing rows 1 - 4 of 4

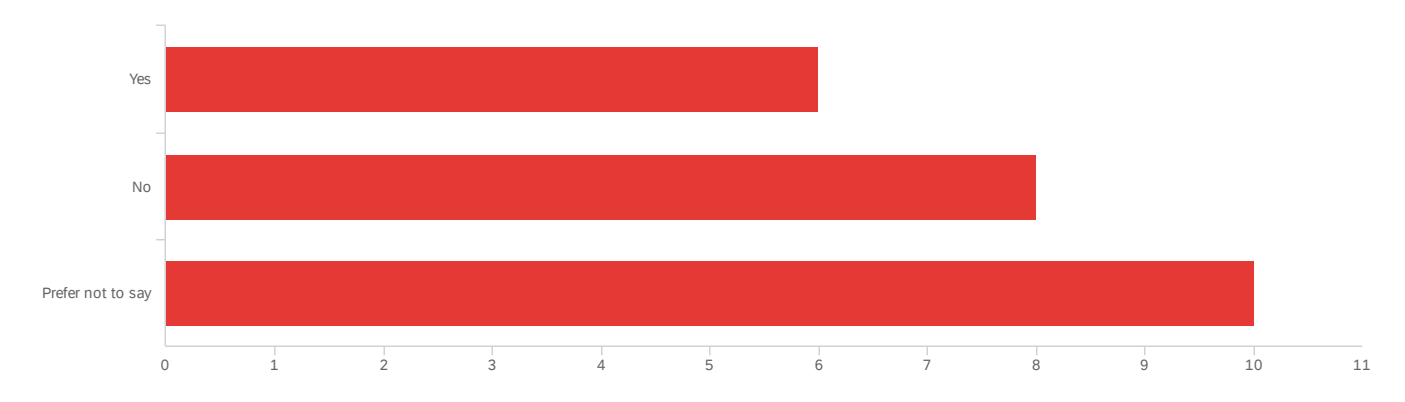
Q22_1_TEXT - Yes (if you answered 'yes' please explain why in a few words)

WIDGET_ERROR.ERROR

Q22_2_TEXT - No (if you answered 'no' please explain why in a few words)

WIDGET_ERROR.ERROR

Q21 - If you have not had a Covid-19 vaccination, would you have one in the future?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	If you have not had a Covid-19 vaccination, would you have one in the future?	1.00	3.00	2.17	0.80	0.64	24

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	25.00% 6
2	No	33.33% 8
3	Prefer not to say	41.67% 10
		24

Showing rows 1 - 4 of 4

Q23_2_TEXT - No (if you answered 'no' please explain why in a few words)

WIDGET_ERROR.ERROR

Q22 - What factors do you feel might influence the number of people choosing to have the vaccine in the community?

What factors do you feel might influence the number of people choosing to h...

Ability to travel abroad Keep vulnerable members of family safe

Friends and family.

Lack of normality

Stereotypes and lack of knowledge on the virus.

Concerns over long-term consequences of jab as it's untested. WhatsApp, Facebook etc there have been a garage of misinformation.

Trust is a big factor Covid vaccine is a very hard topic

People should have freedom of choice as regards to the vaccine. I strongly feel that the majority of people were made to have the vaccine in fear of the unknown outcome.

The fact that it hadn't been tested long enough. Rumours going round of how you won't be able to do things in the future if you don't have the vaccine. Travel!!!

Staying safe and keeping others safe

Trust in government, the masses have been vaccinated

History of vaccination programs toward black people. No one trusts them even if they may be of benefit.

What other people also possibly side effects

I think the younger generation are more concerned about having it. It's a new vaccine, we don't know about Amy trials, and in a short amount of time it was introduced and used on people.

Had evidence and for the government to be transparent and tell The truth

Social media, 'experts' advice, potential side effects

people need to be given right information right advice vaccine ingredients as lot of people don't trust what is in vaccine

Information sheets of the vaccine in different south asian languages.

Scare stories that emanate from ill-informed uneducated people who may have cultural or religious standing in the community. This is, I believe, preventing some of those most at risk from benefitting themselves and their families from the protective action of getting vaccinated.

Maybe if the virus was actually real then we'd take the vaccine.

What factors do you feel might influence the number of people choosing to h...

More social media etc and denouncing various conspiracy theories

Fear - the impact of COVID has been unlike anything our generation has seen before, the level of fear that it has embedded in our minds contributes largely to the desire to get the vaccination. Need for normalcy - the lockdown, social distancing, masks, travel restrictions have created an atmosphere in the world that felt borderline dystopian. The desire to see the smiles behind masks, eating in public, seeing our family and going on vacations will influence the decision to be vaccinated.

More explanation to combat the myths

Illness following the vaccination.

Education on vaccine and people not trusting it

safety of vaccine not having it forced or pushed on people too much

Adequate research. Scientists and powers above having their vaccines live on television I. Proof that it works. Transparency.

Conspiracy theories, natural anti bodies, age, side effects

Being forced into it by legal requirements, being strong-armed by government financially through absurd testing costs for international travel.

Reduce fake news, more awareness and vaccine passport requirement for essential places such as supermarkets and workplaces to penalise people not vaccinating as they are risking lives of others.

N/a

More information. The government building trust with the people.

Information Trust Previous experience with healthcare and authority Availability of vaccines Co-morbidities Adverse reactions Age Accessibility

Mixed messages from government and scientists. Them stating vaccine protects you from catching Covid-19, which is untrue.

Easier access

Travelling

Understanding the options, government and companies administering the vaccine need to be more transparent and give assurance to the community

MORE DETAIL EXPLANATION THE CONS AND PROS OF HAVING A VACCINE

Media and advertisement. Travel requirements. Others having the vaccine.

Clarity of information and use of community leaders to persuade and motivate BAME communities as suspiciousness and alienation along with social deprivation make these communities vulnerable.

Immunity from covid

More people having the vaccine.

Q23 - Please provide any other comments that you wish to in the box below. You may wish to expand on some of your answers given above, or you may wish to give more general comments on government responses, impacts of Covid-19 and ongoing concerns within the community, issues you feel have not been addressed or need to be addressed, or ways in which Mosques or other community organisations have intervened during the pandemic.

Please provide any other comments that you wish to in the box below. You ma...

None

GCSE and A level TAG of 2020 have had and will have a negative effect on that generation's career, as many people were given grades below their level, while others were given higher grades making it unfair.

I think that things that worked well should be continued and things that are not working should be stopped.

Government caused uncertainty & were unclear with their rules.

No one wants to be bullied, restricted from services, forced or have to go through scaremongering to participate in something they don't believe in. That's what the government did and especially to black, brown and poor people.

Poorly prepared the whole world was No financial support was made to mosque who could have helped better Should have had a national tv show to keep us all going

People from ethnic minorities tend to work in frontline jobs increasing their exposure to the virus and mortality

lockdowns very difficult for health and less family contact sister died and could not go to her funeral this was most difficult time for me in the whole pandemic doctors and hospitals not supportive of people no sympathy husband suffered covid and took long time to recover children could not visit us we felt very lonely

Mosques are useless, they do absolute nothing for the community and only line their own pockets.

The government have been world class clowns

I believe there is not enough being said or done about the emotional impact that Covid has had. I began the journey terrified looking to the government for guidance and reassurance, but was only given daily death counts and fear fueling rhetoric. Their initial actions and response to covid, fueled my anxiety enormously and for weeks I was just watching the death count grow, fearing for myself and my family. However, my mosque provided hope, emotional support and guidance that helped me accept our new normal and the impact of Covid more productively.

No further comments

Interview 1

Date: 27/02/2022

Duration: 55:17

Participant characteristics: Male, community member

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: We're looking at, you know, a kind of, a broad range of experiences in the community. So, initially I just wanna ask you what do you think are the most sort of, erm, the main impacts of the Pandemic for the Muslim community or, and for yourself as well? Going right back, you know.

R: The impact. Erm...

I: What kinds of things spring to mind as being sort of the most significant?

R: I, I mean initially there was the, the fear, the fear, you know, in the air itself when everything was, erm...

I: Yeah.

R: ...surfacing. Erm, for somebody like myself, I used to attend, you know, the mosque regularly for prayers, erm, at least three times a day and that was, completely came to a halt.

I: Uh-huh.

R: So, you could end somewhere in the community we used to gather with other people, erm, in groups, you know, you have that sort of community spirit, you know, it's a sense of belonging...

I: Yeah. Uh-huh.

R: ...and that, that all came to an abrupt halt, erm...

I: Yeah.

R: ...and just like you used to get little spiritual reminders as well, you know, just to, you know, just...er, just, just used to get very like sort of tranquil, sort of a peaceful sort of...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...feeling after having attended but that wasn't a part of our lives anymore.

I: Yeah.

R: So that came to a halt after that, erm. Yeah, that was just before the lockdown itself, so...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...I think there was already something circulating on social media about it being better not to, er, attend, you know, any gatherings because of the risk of spreading...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...the disease. So before the actual, the official national lockdown, that was in the air so...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...I, I probably stopped on the, the Friday the week beforehand...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and in any congregations. So, I think that was the biggest initial impact.

I: **Yeah. And, so is that something that was sort of felt widespread across the community in terms of losing that point of connection or that, that centre to, to sort of connect with community members and stuff?**

R: Very much so, you know, very much so. Uhm, yeah, very much so, and that's sort of, it's a spiritual identity, isn't it, so...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...it was just taken away from you, so...erm, yeah. When you've got such a ritualistic practise and you're constantly doing it automatic, you know, it's something to look forward to, something that's very disciplinary, erm, that was just gone, so.

I: **Yeah. Which area do you live in? Which mosque was it that you attended? I mean we'll anonymise, we're...**

R: So...

I: **...gonna have to anonymise a lot of this stuff.**

R: ...so I'm in Ward End, so our, our, our Mosque would be, erm, it's, it's a couple of minutes from here, erm...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...erm, XXXXXX XXXXX it's called.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...so, erm, 'The Lights', I think it translates to.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, but yeah, it's just, that came to a halt. So...

I: **How did that impact for you in terms of your wellbeing and, and, and kind of thinking about maybe stuff that's emerging in the news about, at the same time? In those early stages?**

R: Mentally it was hard, erm, actually...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...you come to terms with not being able to have that connection anymore, erm, but, you know, it was, yeah I think you just adapted and just got on with it really.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Erm, took, especially mental so it impacts certainly.

I: **Yeah. Yeah. Did it concern you thinking about how long this might go on for? Was there any sort of, you know, thinking about how long this would last or if this is just a passing thing? Can you recall what your sort of perspective was back then?**

R: I, I think naively, naively initially I assumed that it would probably go on for about a month or so, probably for a couple of months. I don't think it would be longer than that then I think when we were listening to reports from China as to how long their lockdown was and it was, it hit home actually this might actually linger on for longer. Erm, and then, you know, not going to work and everybody's feeling cut off, so all of a sudden I found myself at home so I wasn't going to the mosque anymore, I wasn't going to work anymore...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...erm, and, and, yeah, it was, it was just a dramatic change I think, yeah, I was...

I: **Yeah, how did that, you know, as time, as time went on as well, how did you feel about things, as, as things dragged on and we came in and out of lockdowns, you know, then lockdown's re-emerged then local lockdowns, those kinds of things. Did your, you know, kind of how did your reaction to it all change over time?**

R: I was still very weary, so...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...as the situation improved, erm, I was too apprehensive about going back to work, er, and even, even though I could, I had the option to go back to work, erm, I stayed up for another four or five weeks I think beyond that just because I didn't feel safe...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...enough to go back to work. Erm, so that, there was that and then even with mosques and so on their, erm, you know I still didn't feel comfortable about going back. Erm, and even though they had the two metre distances, they had the face masks, they were taking temperatures at the door...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...erm, but, it still just didn't feel safe, er, in the wider aspect and I'm, I used, I commute by public transport a lot, so again I just didn't feel safe commuting, erm...

I: **Yeah, yeah. And then, I think, I know you said that you've, presently you're isolated, erm, so I think, but do you suspect that you had, did you have Covid, have, did you have Covid earlier in the Pandemic? Do you know if you did, or, you know?**

R: I've not had anything, erm, so this is the first time it's actually, erm, yeah, directly affected me.

I: **How's it been?**

R: I feel like a fraud, I feel like I should be at work, you know.

I: **[Laughs]**

R: I had a bit of a runny nose and, er, a little bit of a cough here and there and, I, I, it just feels wrong, you know...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...not going to work because of this, erm, but it is what it is, so.

I: **So, yeah, kind of going back, so did you have family members that contracted Covid or did you have, did you have concerns about family members, you know, loved ones, people you're closed to, friends?**

R: Yeah, I mean, initially that's why, you know, we didn't go anywhere, any, any gatherings in anybody's houses, or anything so, we were, so it's my immediate family and they were completely apart from everybody so we didn't visit anybody, erm, we didn't go to any gatherings because I live with my parents, erm, and so I didn't want to bring anything home that would risk them, er, or their, you know, their health. Er, so, we were over cautious, it was, you know, sticking to everything, sticking to the rules. Erm, and then still, so if I did go out for some groceries or something or such, erm, I'd make sure that, you know, as soon as I came back, you know, I changed my clothes, I showered, erm, you know, every single time, wiped everything down. So, yeah, it was unusual, er, but you kind of felt you had to do it to protect those around you.

I: **If you don't mind me asking, what kind of age bracket would your parents be in?**

R: Er, my, they're in their 60s.

I: **Okay. Erm, and then thinking about, was there sort of, did you hear of, were there people that you knew, that you were close to, that had particularly bad experiences, er, with contracting Covid, er, during the Pandemic?**

R: One of my best friends he contracted it and he, he's got a history of other ailments in the past, erm, but he managed to get through Covid, er, the initial, er, disease, yet he, er, he still suffers from long Covid, but he still has the breathing problems, erm, so he can't talk for too long without some sort of repre..., er, issues, erm. He's a GP by profession. so.

I: **Wow, okay.**

R: Yeah. So, yeah, I mean him it affected. People that I work with, er, one of the people that are closer to me his father passed away from Covid, er, his mother contracted it as well, she was hospitalised but she, she pulled through, erm, but his father didn't make it. Erm, so, that's the closest people with that experience.

I: **Er, and did you say you managed, everybody in your household managed, to sort of escape relatively...?**

- R: Yes, yeah, yeah, they were absolutely fine, it's just this recent wave has been crazy, er, but yeah, otherwise, but the more serious variants I suppose we've been lucky, very lucky.
- I: **Yeah. So what do you think the impact was in the community in terms of, erm, the realities of Covid in terms of people contracting Covid, becoming ill? Erm, what's your perception of how it impacted the community more widely?**
- R: There were, there were a lot of people that suffered Covid, there were a lot of deaths, erm, people that, you know, not that we knew directly but family members of friends, of family and friends, so they passed away, erm, due, due to the disease. Er, there was a lot of, there were a lot of deaths at the time, erm, it seems we were getting a lot of messages from, er, XXXXX XXXXX Masjid [a large Mosque in the city], where they had extra containers and cold chambers because they couldn't cope with the number of bodies, er, that they were seeing. Erm, scary, erm.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: And as a community, if you hear of somebody passing away then you, you need, you normally attend their funeral prayer, erm, and that, again, was a regular occurrence. But with Covid you weren't going to be attending anybody's funeral prayer, erm, so again that, I think everybody felt the impact of that as well of not being together at that time when people need you and show your support.
- I: **Yeah, and do you, I mean, do you have any insight into how that was handled differently to, I mean, obviously people weren't able to attend but do you have any insight into how they were managing that situation in terms of what they were facilitating for families in terms of the appropriate sort of rituals around, er, death and burial and so on?**
- R: As far as I'm aware it was minimal numbers, so just immediate family, er, that they'd have, er, so it was very small numbers in attendance.
- I: **Uh-huh.**
- R: Erm, I think the majority of the actual ritual itself the, the people in charge of the actual, taken care of, erm. and then again, storing bodies in the extra, erm, containers that they'd arranged for unfortunately.
- I: **Yeah, yeah, of course. Erm, and so I think, just to come back to something that you touched upon in terms of staying away from work. Erm, what was the impact in terms of your, how did the impact kind of, the impact on work and employment sort of play out for you?**
- R: So I'm self employed...
- I: **Okay.**
- R: ...erm, so not going into work meant there was no, er, there was no pay cheque...
- I: **Right.**
- R: ...so, yeah, it was difficult but...
- I: **Yeah. Were you able to claim for furlough?**

R: Er, [sighs], yes, we did, an accountant sorted out something, erm, a lot less than what I was used to but...

I: **Yeah**

R: ...yeah, it was something in the background.

I: **Yeah. What do you do then?**

R: I'm an Optometrist.

I: **Okay. So, yeah, so what ordinarily, kind of what's your working life like ordinarily?**

R: So normally I, er, travel between a couple of different places, erm, four or five times a week.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Erm, so it's, yeah, so, so, so you leave home at 7 in the morning you get back about 7 in the evening.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And, yeah, that's the routine, four or five times a week, erm, a little bit longer than most people probably because of public transport.

I: **Yeah, yeah, and, and what kind, and what kind of stuff in your every day, like what kind of stuff were you, erm, sort of, what kind of activities were you sort of engaging in out and about in, or pre-Pandemic?**

R: Pre-Pandemic activities?

I: **No, just in terms of, I mean connected to work and stuff.**

R: So like during work itself or...?

I: **Yeah, yeah, what kind of, you know, if you're travelling around, is it the same, erm, you know, are you visiting the same organisations or is it the same spaces or is it kind of varied, you know?**

R: Yes, it was the same organisations, so I've got regular work so it was the same places I was visiting.

I: **Yeah, yeah, okay. So thinking about some of the things around, I guess, faith and religious observance. I mean you talked about how it was difficult to lose the connection through not being able to attend mosques and in particular if I recall correctly, the first lockdown intersected, erm, with Ramadan as well?**

R: Yeah.

I: **So how was that as a family and, and as a community? How was that, you know, kind of going through that experience also sort of, sort of lockdown as well?**

R: As a family I suppose, well you're closer together because everybody was there, and you couldn't go anywhere. Community, er, during Ramadan usually every, every night you

congregate for, er, extra prayers and so you're usually there for a couple of hours every night during Ramadan, so again that was cut off.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, and I was hoping to stay as well at the mosque for the last week and a half, as well, the last 10 nights...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...er, this time round until this came in, erm, so again, those plans went out the window. So, yeah, and normally you tend to go, you do tend to go to prayers more regularly as well...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...so like three or four times, two, three times a day you try to make five if you could as well. And so again you could that. Erm, on the flip side yes, there was more time at home so more time to observe things on your own, erm, with your immediate family and it was a very different experience to what we normally have in Ramadan.

I: **Yeah, of course, yeah. Yeah, and do you feel that that was the sort of thing that was felt across the community, was this a common kind of sense of, er, of impact I guess across the community?**

R: From my, from those I've spoken to yes, yeah, they all felt that and for a lot of people it's the one time of year they actually go to the mosque, so, you know, there's some people that, you know, you meet up, you know, in Ramadan, because the rest of the year everybody's busy with other things, erm, so, yeah, it's, it was a, it was a life changer for a lot of people.

I: **Uh-huh, uh-huh. Was there an impact on how you engaged with your own faith practise? What were the sort of challenges, you know, facing the Pandemic, kind of, did those challenges come through in terms of how you engaged with your faith in the Pandemic?**

R: I think, I think it's, you always, as a Muslim you, you use things as trials, tribulations...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...erm, so you, yeah, if everything's too easy you kind of start getting worried and there's something wrong, you know, comfortable. Erm, and you normally try with the challenges so I think with a lot of us we saw it as a challenge, it's something to get through, erm, and just, just be patient and just, you know, observe whatever you can to the best of your ability and...so yeah, I think it was just a time for introspection, erm...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...just yeah, you know, just reflecting and just finding yourself really.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: I think that was true for a lot of people.

I: **Yeah. Was there, kind of either WhatsApp or social media you used as a way of supporting each other at that time?**

- R: Yeah, social media, I suppose WhatsApp would be, you know, I think everybody has like a WhatsApp group with friends and so on...
- I: **Uh-huh, yeah.**
- R: ...and I think, and everybody is always posting on that, erm, we used the video function once during the Pandemic as well because it had been so long since everybody had seen anybody else.
- I: **Yeah [laughs].**
- R: Erm, so I think we used the video function for the first time, and that, at least you actually see you, the face of somebody, er, that you know, which outside the family, which, which was an experience, it's unusual. Er, but yeah, I suppose I, I, I'm surprised it didn't play a bigger role, I suppose...
- I: **Uh-huh.**
- R: ...in terms of that but I think depending on how text savvy you are and how comfortable you are with these things, that, that experience would have been a lot different,
- I: **Yeah, there's two things the project is really focus on and one is the impact and I guess we've been talking about that and we talked a little bit about how you stayed connected and what, and what the impacts are for you. As well what I did want to ask you about as well was around the economic impact in and around the community?**
- R: There were, I mean, during the Pandemic there, certain places increased prices and so on and...
- I: **Yeah, yeah.**
- R: ...er, that, there was quite, er, a bit of, yeah it's no problem about that, erm, for certain basic, you know, amenities...
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: ... and the prices just went, skyrocketed, erm. Other businesses, I mean it's hard to pinpoint because so many have closed down, in terms of the attitude post-Pandemic, I don't, I can't comment I suppose, I don't know, is it a lot of retail units, erm, but yeah, just a dramatic shift from, erm, there was a lot of closures, there's a lot, a lot of people suffered quite badly unfortunately.
- I: **Yeah, erm, and so thinking about kind of what responses there has been a lot of talk in the news media, about the impact on minority ethnic communities in particular, you know, and, erm, and Muslim communities of course are not exclusively minority ethnic identities but, you know, significant proportions, erm, are from say, for example, South Asian backgrounds. What was the sense in the community, around impacts and how needs were being met, kind of, around this, in the Pandemic?**
- R: I don't think it is specific to this community I think, erm, you know, a lot of people do still stay on their own and that isolation would have impacted them, erm, I don't know it's enough befriending services as such available, or they weren't things from some, er, I, I can't remember which mosques they were, but I think some of them had sent out on social media

that they were, you know, er, willing to drop by just for, you know, a chat on the doorstep or so on.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, and, you know, for, for groceries, you know, if somebody required them again there was a mosque and said that they're, you know, they were willing to supply groceries for vulnerable people as well, erm, to save them having to, to make that trip, that journey, erm. So I think that's, yeah, not a lot more to add to that I suppose.

I: **Yeah. This might sound like a curve ball, but hate crime and hate incidents, but was there ever a sense of hostility or, or tension between communities in the Pandemic?**

R: I think if anything it probably brought people more together...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...and...

I: **I mean with regards, how things get to a point where we end up with hate crimes and things, phenomena like Islamophobia, for example, was, did you feel like any, any of that stuff was made worse in the context of the Pandemic?**

R: Personally I think I was oblivious to it, to be honest.

I: **Okay.**

R: I think if anything there was less media attention, erm, you know, negative media attention as such there, erm, and, you know, you, you, and I think later on when you actually, occasionally when you, when you, when you're on public transport you like a little look or something or, you know, in some ways, you know, just 'cause, I think when I did eventually return to work I didn't get any of that.

I: **Okay.**

R: Which was unusual but...

I: **That's interesting. So thinking about, erm, responses, so you've talked about befriending services, erm, you've talked about some of, some of the mosques sort of offering, erm, befriending services, shopping services for vulnerable people and so on. Are there any other kind of responses that mosques or other Muslim community organisations took in the Pandemic that were particularly valuable to the community?**

R: I think for the, I think some of...there was more teaching online for, for, for youngsters.

I: **Oh, okay, that's interesting, yeah.**

R: Because they couldn't formally attend the classes, so they, they were quite quick to actually address that, erm, where they could so, so that, that was a constructive change, erm...

I: **Uh-huh. So is that with supplementary education through Madrassa, what would previously have been presented in Madrassa or is this, erm, do you have young children in school?**

R: Yes.

I: So do they attend Islamic school, an independent school, or a state school that doesn't have a faith?

R: Er, faith school.

I: Oh okay, okay, and, and, and, okay, yeah, so the, okay, so there was online provision from both the mosque with supplementary schooling and through the state school as well?

R: Correct.

I: Okay. That's interesting. How do you think families sort of, how did that, you know, kind of, erm, how was that kind of received by parents, erm, having, still having access, you know, to the supplementary schooling?

R: I don't know, it was valuable...

I: Yeah.

R: ...erm, you know, it was valuable because, erm, not everybody's able to sit down with their children actually to teach them correctly, erm, because, erm, you know, myself we have limited knowledge because we mispronounce things or we misread things or, you know, lose, it's nice to have somebody who's actually qualified to actually be able to teach correctly and continue to teach...

I: Yeah.

R: ...erm, despite the circumstances, so, yeah, that was invaluable in itself.

I: Yeah.

R: Erm...

I: Were, were there other things that, erm, were kind of, which either mosques or other organisations might have offered in the Pandemic that was, you know, addressing a need within the Muslim community, if that makes sense?

R: Yeah, I mean, I mean there was I think some of them tried to set up a YouTube channel for the kids as well, so they, yeah, the kids being home so it was something for them to engage with, directed at kids, so it was for a much younger audience. Erm, so I think that was quite, quite a nice initiative, just to have something for the kids to watch and be entertained by it as well, erm, so that was good, er...

I: Was that lead through a mosque or through another type of organisation?

R: That was, I think that was loosely associated to XXXX XXXX Masjid [same large Mosque as above] as well.

I: Okay.

R: Erm, yeah, so it was one of their teachers I think at the time that set that up, so that was loosely associated with them, so there was that which was quite nice again just to have something for kids...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...and, and just to be entertained by it really, erm, in addition to Joe Wicks and everybody else.

I: [Laughs]

R: Integral, integral part of our lockdown. Yeah, erm, yeah, he was good. Erm, and then all the, the little, the little initiatives they had, those were a lot of very good things that they did provide actually for the kids throughout the day, so it was yeah, it was nice having that. Erm, if we're missing out something I think it would have been nice for the mosques or some of the teachers associated with them to have something, erm, set up more, more regularly for adults I suppose, even if it was just once a week. Erm, something where they could have just, you know, erm, again just a reminder just to address some, you know, technical Q&A session, er, I think that would have been really useful, erm, just to keep everybody, you know, everybody's morals lifted, hopeful.

I: Uh-huh.

R: And, yeah, I think that, that, that's I suppose was lacking from elsewhere.

I: **Yeah, was there, erm, did mosques stay connected within the community through using platforms, you know, to keep the community, you know, community connected via the mosque and so on? Are there influential, er, you know, kind of leaders within the community, I guess, you know, erm, stay connected to people through using social media platforms or other messaging platforms?**

R: I think Facebook is the, the common way that the majority of them tend to use to post messages and...

I: Yeah.

R: I'm a not a big Facebook user myself but it, you know, I, I, I know that there are, that they do post quite frequently on there, er, erm, so, yeah, so, so, so I think individuals more than actual mosques themselves tend to do, use that platform. Erm, mosques tend to, yeah, once in a while will get, er, obviously if it's, you know, an event that they're running also on. Yeah, it's more individuals that tend to post by that means into, yeah, information.

I: **Yeah. So, erm, let's move on to think about government or national responses. So, what's your general perspective on how the government responded with the Pandemic?**

R: I don't know how to word it, erm, I thought it was delayed, I thought the response was very delayed. I think, you know, with everything happening, you know, in China and other countries that, erm, I think we should have been a little bit quicker off the mark, erm, I didn't, you know, the herd mentality, erm, that, that process that was pushed through initially I don't think that was the right call but in hindsight, erm, so...

I: **In terms of...**

R: ...I suppose they, they acted the best with what information they had, allegedly, but it would have been nice to, you know, I think, I think he should have put in measures earlier on, you know, an early lockdown would have saved a lot of lives, erm, especially like the older people that passed away in care homes and so on, erm, on their own, so that was, I think that's a tragedy to be honest, I think, I think that, was slow to react.

- I: **Yeah, yeah. I mean do you know people who lost family members who were in care homes and were unable to see family members?**
- R: Not personally, no, not personally.
- I: **Yeah. And, yeah, so thinking about, specifically things like mask wearing, social distancing, you know, kind of, what are your perspectives on, you know, kind of, those, er, measures?**
- R: Er, if you work in the health sector you, you still need to wear PPE, so we're still be wearing masks and gloves, erm, until we're advised otherwise. Erm, in public places, I think, I suppose in any gathering I think, I think I'd feel uncomfortable without a mask now, you know, as soon as somebody coughs or somebody, everybody's gonna look at them. So it's, you're centre of attention, erm, but yeah. I think in crowded spaces I, I'd either avoid them, or if, I think I'll pull out a mask and just put one on anyway, erm, I suppose, erm, although, yeah, I'm not a big fan of masks myself I always find they dry your throat when it comes to midday. It is what it is.
- I: **Yeah. Thinking about, I think you, you mentioned this previously, thinking about how, what do you think about government responses that might have, could have maybe approached things differently in terms of the needs of the Muslim community?**
- R: I don't think it was specifically the Muslim community, I think that there was a shortage, you know, there was an, there was an underst...they underestimated how many lives would be lost, the rate at which lives would be lost. So I think, you know, mosques did need more, erm, to help, er, unburden them 'cause their capacity, they were, they were over capacity weren't they, so, with the number of funerals they were having per day and so on. Erm, I, I think that could have been quicker, I think. But the, the process I think was speeded up any way in terms of, there's been something already, er, came out prior to the Pandemic where you could quite quickly, if somebody's diseased, quite quickly arrange to have them buried the day or the day after I'm sure there was some sort of initiatives that had come in. Erm, so, yeah, I just think there should have been more capacity issues more measures in place, you know, if you need this we can get this, or you can get, you know, these extra rooms or storage areas, you know, for, for people that have passed away. So, you know, erm, just to, you know, just to make it more dignified I suppose.
- I: **Yes, yeah, yeah. As things progressed and we move towards looking at interventions, ultimately I guess we land on vaccines. So, erm, kind of, what's your perspective in terms of how the vaccines were sort of rolled out and, erm, and also maybe a view on the, how that's received a little bit more widely?**
- R: Erm, I mean initially, everybody, everybody had a theory as to how to, you know, cure Corona Virus and there were a lot of random things going around on social media.
- I: **Can you, can you, can you remember any of them?**
- R: Ah, oh, there were, I think there were random oils and seeds and something, some type of honey or something, and there were just some random, you know, er, yeah, ideas just floating around, erm, as how to cure it. And then something about a hairdryer or something...
- I: **Okay**

- R: [Over speaking]...something, and, it, it was farcical, comical. Erm, and then I think it was the information, I think it's dexamethasone or something that, er, was put out to help relieve the symptoms. Erm, and then after that there were actual, I think it was the vaccines after...
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: ...if I remember. Erm, yeah, yeah, er, vaccine uptake. I think a lot of people again were put off by the negative, erm, social media regarding and about...
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: ...you know, the lack of, er, information and its side effects etc, so, that was to be expected.
- I: **Yeah. Did you have any reservations yourself? Maybe some of these things which were widely discussed about, you know, how quickly the preparation was, you know, kind of carried through and all that stuff?**
- R: No, I mean, I think I, I was glad when they actually did come out because, you know, in this day and age you, you expect things, especially under the circumstances to be done quicker and speeded up, erm. Erm, so, that, er, you know, initially that [unclear] so yeah, [unclear] a rollout, vaccine roll out itself.
- I: **Uh-huh.**
- R: I know, you know, everybody was hesitant initially to have, to take the vaccine, erm, and we had to, er, just because of our line of work and so you're exposed to general day-to-day. So even if not for yourself it's for the people around you, erm...
- I: **So can you, just give a little bit more detail so do you work around, are you around vulnerable people in particular? Because you said before you'd be wearing PPE, you know, so, can you just give a little more insight into, you know, what your environment is like, and that 'sense of responsibility' as you put it, or as, as you insinuated about, it's about other people rather than you?**
- R: Yes, I mean you're still in an environment where you're, where you're seeing elderly people coming in, erm, you know, you get diabetics coming in for their other conditions, etc. So, even though you were wiping everything, we were masked up, you had aprons, face shields, gloves, every, every all the equipment was being wiped between patients. Erm, so, and we were given extra time to do that as well, er, you still felt that, you know, nothing's a 100% effective, so it, there's always a chance of somebody, you know, could get it, somebody could pass it on to somebody else. You know, even when you're removing your PPE, you touch something without realising, you know, things, things can happen.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: So, it's just more over cautious more than anything else really.
- I: **Yeah, do you have any kind of friends or, er, close family members or people that you're, you talked to a lot or you have a close sort of relationship with who are very strongly anti-Vax?**
- R: One of my friends is anti-Vax, so a Pharmacist no less...
- I: **Okay.**

R: ...yeah, he's, he's strongly against it.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, but I think, I think his experience he, he had one of his regulars come in, in his mid 40s er, he had the vaccination, the Astra Zeneca jab and a week later he passed away from a blood clot.

I: **Wow.**

R: I, I think that was enough to put him off.

I: **OK, yeah, yeah.**

R: So, yeah, so he, but then he suffered from Corona virus, during I think it was the Delta variant sort of time and so, yeah, he's had any issues and, you know, he doesn't stop anybody else from taking it, from having it, but he said for me, you know, it's, it's not for me.

I: **Yeah, yeah. What do you think the wider kind of, the wider point of view has been, sort of, erm, has it changed over, has the perspectives on, on that changed over time, do you think, more widely in the community?**

R: A lot of people that I know have said that they'd had issues after the third jab for some reason.

I: **Okay.**

R: The, erm, you know, some sort of weakness or arthritic pain, or, you know, a headache that doesn't tend to shift or so on, they're all kind of attributed back to around the time they had the third jab.

I: **Okay.**

R: Erm, you know, they'd taken the first two jabs and they'd had, you know, just the usual side effects, you know, a couple, couple of days of aching and a little bit of a flu and that was it, erm, so, the majority of people around me had taken it...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...erm, without question, the first two jabs anyway. I think the third one, more, more people after hearing stories from other people have been more hesitant.

I: **Yeah, yeah. But what kind of thing, what kind of, erm, what do you think has fed into some of the kind of, erm, were there is a bit of resistance or a little bit of a concern, what kind of things do you think have fed into that concern?**

R: Social media, other people's reports, experiences. And then past experiences I suppose with other jabs and so on. I don't think anybody's used to having more than one booster, you know, from when we were little they'd have an injection for whatever, and then a booster and yeah that's, you're good for the rest of your life.

I: **Yeah, yeah.**

R: ...sort of thing, it's, it's simpler and it's, yeah, and people stay immune.

- I: **You think there's anything other than the kind of immediate, erm, medical side of it that feeds into that?**
- R: Yeah, I don't think, I don't think people like the idea of compulsory vaccinations.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: Erm, I, I think they'd prefer to be, at least believe, you know, you have a choice in it, erm, yeah. I don't think there's anything else.
- I: **Uh-huh. Do you think that the advice that was given along the way in terms of whether it's NHS or government-led advice, erm, do you think that's been, you know, kind of, how would you evaluate that in terms of its usefulness?**
- R: Initially we all observed it religiously, erm, we're always looking for the day, er, erm, er, programme that they used to have the daily rou..., er, review, er, Prime Minister and his advisers. Erm, so I think everybody took it onboard initially, erm, and then I think where we are now, I think so many things are coming out and he's liked less trusted as well, erm, as to, you know, I think there probably is an atmosphere of less trust with, with what's coming out, with what's happening, with, you know, you know, allegations of what's going on behind the scenes and...
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: ...and then people are wondering, you know, well, you know, how, how am I supposed to take this advice, is it, you know, is it just for us, it doesn't apply to them, you know, erm, it's, yeah, it makes it difficult to make a decision and...
- I: **What do you think, what do you think could be done about that? What, what do you think could be done to build, build better sort of, a better sense of trust in national leadership?**
- R: It's a tricky one. Erm, it's a, it's a, er, a tricky one I suppose. Erm, er, I suppose if they were just more transparent, more, more honest, erm, you know, if they upheld stronger principles, you know, erm, that, that, that would probably be a good start.
- I: **Uh-huh. And so, I think we're basically approaching, er, the end, but I think there's, a two part question, really. I guess a bit of a recap, so what do you think the main needs have been within the community in the context of the Pandemic? And also what do you think the main needs are for the community looking forwards, erm, from where we are now?**
- R: I think just support, just knowing that, you know, there is support available be it for your mental health, you know, your, your physical health and wellbeing, erm, knowing that there were avenues of having, you've, er, services provided, erm, you know, that were available to you, erm...
- I: **But this is through, when you refer to those do you mean those which are community-led services which are available rather than government initiatives? Or a combination of both?**
- R: I suppose in this day and age it would be a combination. It's difficult for communities to do it on their own without some incentive, especially with the community leaders, you know, sort of somebody to push them, you know, in the right direction.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Unfortunately. Erm, so I think collaboration of the two would work well for most communities...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ..erm, going forward, and...

I: **Yeah. And if it, in the balance, thinking about a balance between what came from within the community versus what came from, you know, national leadership or local government, or whatever, you know, what's your view on, on that balance, basically?**

R: It didn't feel a balance at the time, so it's, erm, I mean at the time we were more cut off from both because we weren't attending anymore, erm, you know, social media just came later on, erm, and then, you know, the lockdown, it kind of felt like it was done all of a sudden, you know, I know things were just out of sync, so, it didn't make you feel very balanced.

I:
Is there anything you wanna ask me, erm, as we sort of approach the end?

R: No, not really, nothing. No.

I: **Okay. Well, thanks, I really do appreciate you taking the time, thanks and take care.**

R: And you enjoy the rest of your day.

I: **Yeah, you too. Thanks, bye.**

R: Bye.

INTERVIEW 2

Date: 01/02/2022

Duration: 01:13:51

Participant characteristics: Male, community member

Key:

D = Interviewer

I = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

D: ...we're recording then we can get started. But thanks for taking the time. Erm, so if we go right back to the beginning, what do you feel have been sort of the main impacts, erm, of the pandemic on, on the Muslim community? Your own experiences as well. What are the main things that stand out, you know, looking back to the beginning, if we start there?

I: Erm, there's been a lot of...like, I think the impact is a lot of...there's been a lot of paranoia, erm, around what's happened and, erm, I don't think there's been enough information being sent out by, erm, the leaders in the Muslim community as well. And that enough has been done to, you know, erm, help understand, you know, how, you know, this pandemic is. Because a lot...there's a lot of people that don't even believe there is, there is a...Covid is actually around. And I, I, I've, I've even seen it from my own, own family that they don't believe, and my friends, some friends as well that don't actually believe that, erm, there is...Covid is actually around. And, you know, on top of that the actually, you know, the anti-vaxxers as well.

D: Yeah.

I: In my own family, you know, family and friends I know that they're against the, the vaccine, and things like that. And I think it, it does stem from...I know, er, the government's...erm, personally I just think they've done a, a, a really shoddy job of, you know, the whole pandemic. But in our community the, the people and the, the, the leader as well, the so-called leaders haven't actually done enough, you know.

D: Yeah.

I: Er, but I'm...I...the mosque that I go to, they've done quite a bit, but then they're not in this area that I'm...we live in, you know, 'cause I live in the Washwood Heath area.

D: Yeah.

I: And that mosque, I don't know if, er...XXXXXX XXXXX? [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath]

D: Yeah, ...I know about XXXXX XXXXX, yeah, yeah.

I: Yeah, that, that is the mosque that I actually go to, I don't actually go to these local mosques, 'cause they're quite uneducated and, you know, there's a lot of ignorance about just, you know, in general. And the people tend to follow...there's...you know, sheep, to say, you know, they, they, they just follow what they think is what...they just listen to what the, you know, the so called...you know, the, the, the imams and everything in the mosques, and they just follow that, and they just go without actually looking into it. 'Cause we can just look at anything in...on the...on our phones

nowadays, but they choose, erm, not to, they just wanna follow blindly basically. And, erm, I think it, it stem back to the actual Muslim, you know, the, the leaders, so to speak, in the community, erm, not doing enough to help, you know, erm, you know, try and, you know, erm, contain this, erm, you know, erm, this virus that we've got at the moment. But...and unfortunately because of that, the...people are not getting vaccinated and just going about doing things that, you know...rather than trying to help contain it, they're just basically spreading it instead. And that's why there's, erm, you know, the virus in that area, yeah, it's quite high, because they're not following the rules basically so...

D: Hmm. What, what do you think that comes down to? Is there something to do...what's the balance between kind of what the government could have done in terms of how they've put information out? Whatever information they've put out, how far did that, how far did that resonate with the community?

I: ...yeah. I'm...I, I, I do believe there's not been enough done, erm, by the government and by the, the community to get the information out, and, and keeping everybody safe, erm, I, don't think enough has been done, er, from...er, but there needs to be more information sent out, and there needs to be more trust as well. 'Cause, erm, a lot of people don't actually trust the government, you know...

D: Hmm.

I: ...er, 'cause we've seen time and time again what, you know, the, the, you know, mis-information that they send out and, you know, the, you know, er, the hypocrisy that they've shown, you know.

D: Hmm.

I: Just obviously with what's happening at the moment with the, you know, Prime Minister and stuff. But I don't think there is enough trust in the government as well.

D: Hmm.

I: Erm, but again, the Muslim...you know, the community leaders need to do more to help, you know.

D: What, what would that look like then, from your perspective? How would they...what kind of things could they do to help the situation more?

I: Well, I mean, going out to, erm, the community, erm, just sending out more information really, you know, erm, going door to door as well, to, to help. And, you know, maybe people from the...erm, you know, our local MPs including the, the, the community, community leaders, coming...

D: Hmm.

I: ...out. And even having like meetings, you know, like even meetings in a, in a mosque or something like that, just somewhere just to, you know, help, just, just get more information out. And, if they... you know, if the local MPs and the community leaders were to...able to get people to have like, erm, meetings...you know, it doesn't have to be like a weekly things. Or just, just to get people together and just understand, you know, get them to understand how serious this is, you know. But, like I say, it, it comes down to not enough information has been sent out to...and it just feels like we've kind of been left behind. And the people that...you know, I'm not saying everybody's like this, but you know, there are people were trying to, you know, to keep ourselves safe, and there's not enough information. And I don't think people realise how serious it is.

D: **Hmm.**

I: You know, because there's not enough information being sent out to them, they're just following blindly with the so-called, you know, leaders of the, you know, the, the Mosque, Imams, and stuff like that.

D: **Hmm.**

I: You know. Or maybe they're not getting enough information, the Imams are not getting enough information, but they can do, do research themselves, you know, everything's on our phones these days, so...

D: **Hmm.**

I: ...you know.

D: **So how far does the kind of sceptic...'cause you mentioned the terms, you know, that this might not even be a 'real thing', that idea...**

I: Yeah.

D: **Erm, and you mentioned sort of vaccine, I guess we'd call it vaccine hesitancy...**

I: Yeah.

D: **...in technical terms. But...so how far did those views go, d'you think? How, how kind of strongly are some of those views held?**

I: Erm, I've seen, yeah, in my own family, you know, they're, they're just, you know, erm, reluctantly having the vaccine, and believing that it doesn't even exist, this, this, this, erm, this virus. And, erm, even, even my own family I've seen, you know, erm, majority of us have been vaccinated. Well, everybody has been vaccinated but, you know, some of them are, are, are, are...believe that it doesn't even exist, and we're just having it because...

D: **Hmm.**

I: ...you know, the government think that we need to have it, you know. But, erm, there's other members that haven't even had the vaccine, they don't...they just refuse to have it 'cause they don't believe in it. So, erm, yeah, in my own family I've, I've seen it, so it's just trying to educate them, and it's just hard, especially the older generation as well, trying to get them, you know, to engage and stuff like that, they just refuse, kind of thing, so yeah.

D: **Is there any difference with age or generation? And, and also how far do you feel like those...how far do you feel that you encounter those kinds of sceptical viewpoints in, in the community more widely as well, you know, outside of your own experiences?**

I: Well, one of my close friends, he, he's a total anti-vaxxer completely, you know, he doesn't...he, he, he just keep sending out things about how, erm, the vaccine, er, you know, erm...he keeps sending out things like, you know, videos of doctors, erm, you know, some certain doctors coming out saying that they're not vaccinating and things like that. He's, he's a total anti-vaxxer, and he's one of my close friends as well. Erm...

D: **Hmm.**

I: ...and he's, he's, he's grown up here, you know, erm, he's been educated here but, erm, yeah. And, then, then, then, like I said, some of my family members don't even believe it, but they have had the vaccine, 'cause we've kind of pressured them into having it...

D: Yeah.

I: ...because they need to have it done, kind of thing, you know, erm. But then there's like my own...erm, one of my relatives, erm, she's, a, erm, a care worker, but she hasn't had the vaccine, which is like shocking, you know. You know, working in that environment you need to have the vaccine, you know, if, if not for yourself, for the, you know, the people that you're caring for.

D: Yeah.

I: But yeah. So it is, and I, I've, I've experienced it and it's quite close, you know, I've seen it, you know, erm, but we're just trying to get them to understand how serious this is. I know eventually we're gonna have to just live with it and just, you know, that's what...I think that's what they're trying to do now, the government, 'cause that's what is gonna happen, it's gonna be like the flu, isn't it? But, erm, it's just...

D: Hmm.

I: ...getting through that phase, I suppose. But, yeah, just trying to get people to understand how serious it is, you know, when you see the amount...you know, the, the, the figures out there, you know, the death-related Covid is just staggering. But, so yeah, just trying to get people to engage and understand how serious it is.

D: Yeah. So those impacts, erm, you've already kind of alluded to this, but d'you feel like they have been more present and, and that it has impacted in real terms the Muslim community...?

I: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, I definitely think it has impacted. Erm, people don't understand how serious it is, and because they're not, and they're just carrying on the way they...you know, as if everything's back to normal. And it has impacted, you know, er, you know, it's just fortunate that some people are not getting it as bad as other people, you know, erm. One of the, er, the teachers at, at my kid's, erm, school, erm, she's got...she had...her lungs collapsed and she's still struggling to breathe from it. Yeah, so it's just, you know, things like that. It's just 'cause, because it's not...I don't think it's happening to them as, you know, serious, they think it's nothing and carrying on. Until it happens, God forbid it does actually happen to anybody but, you know, just trying and preventing it from getting to that, to that stage, you know, just have the vaccine, 'cause that's what it's there for, you know. So yeah.

D: Hmm. So how did that impact for you in terms of thinking about, I guess, when we were approaching lockdown for the first time, those kinds of time periods? I mean, how was your wellbeing throughout the early stages, you know?

I: Erm, well, yeah, it was obviously quite scary to think...you know, erm, and then on top of that we had, er, we had to do homeschooling as well, which was a bit... that was, that was an *[laughter]* experience, you know.

D: Yeah.

I: Yeah. Yeah, so that, that, that did affect us. But, but...and I, I did end up having to take a bit of time off work, er, because of it, you know, erm, and I, I had to have a bit of counselling and stuff like that. Because it was really, you know, the whole just having to stay at home and not being able to go anywhere, you know, erm, just like...you know. And then obviously we were allowed to just

pop to the shop and stuff like that, just to get essentials and things like that. It just, you know, erm, it, it did affect us quite, erm, quite a lot, you know, not being able to get out of the house at all, you know. And, erm, the kids were able to go to the garden and stuff like that, but that was about it, you know, not, not being able to see the family and stuff like that. Not being able to see my mum, things like that. I mean, we did, like, you know, video chat and stuff, but it's, it's not the same, you know. Even, we had a few Eids where we couldn't, you know...erm, Eid after Ramadan.

D: Yeah.

I: But we couldn't, er, we obviously couldn't go down and, you know, my mum was obviously really upset about things like that. And just obviously it was difficult to get, get through all of that, and she wasn't really understanding that we need to be at home, and things like that, you know. And, you know, the whole emotional, you know, thing about...you know. It was difficult, I'll just say it was difficult.

D: Uh-huh.

I: But, you know, obviously it had to be done, you know, just to get through, you know, through this...yeah. It was, it's something that they had to put in place, and which is the right thing to do, put it in place just to keep everybody safe, you know. But there was people out there though even going about their own things, you know, breaking Covid rules, and stuff like that. But yeah, yeah, it was, it was difficult. Sorry.

D: Yeah. And, and, you know, obviously we've all, we've all lived through it, you know, in our own way I guess.

I: Yeah.

D: Erm, has, has that alleviated a little bit over time? Has your, has your...have those things kind of...have, have you...how, how's, how's, how have things been, sort of, sort of moving through the pandemic?

I: Yeah, yeah. Er, yeah, it's, erm, it's, it's gotten better, yeah. And my own mental health, I think, it's obviously going out with lockdown and stuff has helped, you know, I'm trying to get back to, to normal, you know, or normal as, as can be really, yeah. But, yeah, it has, you know, over the period it has helped, you know, erm, get back to, erm, kind of normal. But, erm, my own mental health it is a lot better than it was. Erm, I do feel sometimes, you know, because of all, you know, having to wear a mask and, you know, things like that, you know, just trying to keep distance and things like that, you know. It does...I'm kind of getting used to the whole thing, and now we're told that we don't even...maybe we don't even need to wear a mask anymore, but still.

You know, going to the shops as well, just being really cautious and, you know, just, you know, erm, trying to keep my hands clean, and stuff, I've got a sanitiser with me all the time, and things like that, just yeah. Erm, we did go through a periods where we were just like wiping everything down, as soon as we got home, we just like leave it on top of the dining table and just spending ages just cleaning, wiping everything down and putting them away. But we've stopped doing that now because, you know, we know that there is less risk in the actual packaging than there is, you know, actual, physical contact and things with people. So we've kind of like tried to move away from that. 'Cause I do have, like, OCD as well, so it's kind of like...

D: Uh-huh.

I: ...cleaning, and things like that. So it did, that did affect me as well quite badly, 'cause I was coming home and I was like soon as I come in home, I was going to have a shower and that, you know. Just getting in the house, washing my hands, and then changing my clothes, you know,

going and have a shower and things like that, it did affect me quite...erm, I forgot about that actually, it did, it did quite...but over the time I was just like, you know, reading more into it, and you know, just doing more research and realising that actually it, it, it isn't...I mean, obviously these serious points, not, not having to keep...you know, as long as we're washing our hands and things like that, is...it did help, you know.

But, erm, but I still do that when I come, I do wash my hands and stuff like that even though I don't use sanitise and things. But over the time has, erm, helped, you know, reduce the stress of it, trying to get, you know, just getting by and, you know, and just getting used to it kind of thing, you know, so...I'm still...you know, I know they're saying that we could, erm, stop wearing the mask, but I don't feel comfortable not wearing the mask, you know, 'cause you're used to it now, and I'd rather wear it until I know we've got to a stage where it is, you know, safer than it has been, kind of thing. But I'd carry on using the mask for as long as I, I think it's alright, you know, or I feel safe, you know, not to.

D: Yeah. Yeah, and I think...and that's another thing as well, is it, what is the balance between sort of your concerns about how you might be affected individually and other people? 'Cause that's part of a conversation as well, I guess, about what goes on behind mask wearing, you know.

I: ...yeah.

D: So is it about protecting yourself? Or is it the peace of mind when you come home that you know that you've taken a step to do what you can? But, you know, kind of where do you sit with, with that I guess?

I: Well, erm, I think, you know, erm, it's not just about me, it's about protecting everyone around me as well. You know, God forbid I, you know, I have something and I did pass it on to somebody else, and how would I live with that kind of thing, you know. So it's just trying to, you know, keeping myself protected, but keeping my family and everyone around me. You know, when I go to the shops and stuff like that, just not passing anything on. 'Cause obviously we don't...you...the symptoms don't, you know, we, we don't know if we've got it, 'cause they do say that people can have it without, you know...can carry it without, erm, actually showing any symptoms. So, you do, I, I just feel like you should do what you can to protect yourself and others around you, whether it's your family or the people, you know, in the shops and stuff like that. So just anywhere really, just protecting yourself, erm, protecting everyone really. 'Cause, er, like...it is, erm, you know, erm...I don't know how I would live if I'd, I'd known that I'd given somebody, you know...

D: Hmm.

I: ...Covid without, you know, not doing the right things, you know, to protect myself and them.

D: Hmm.

I: You know, so yeah.

D: So you talked about trust before, and I guess I'm thinking about is there something deeper than this? Is there something pre-existing, in terms of trusting of government authority or trusting, around, around these issues?

I: Well, I think it just stems back from just the government in general though, you know.

D: Hmm.

I: It's just, you know, politicians, you know, you know, I just have, you know, erm, that politicians do lie a lot, you know. And it's just that I think that's just been...that's how...I've always felt that, because you just see, you know, time, time again that they've been caught in a lie. So the, the trust, you can't...I don't believe you...I personally don't believe you can trust the government any of this stuff, you know. Because especially with everything that's just come out recently about them having, you know, doing all their parties and things like that, when we were at home. We're not even allowed to go see our, you know...things, it just, that just fuels it even more, you know, how can we trust any, you know, anybody in the government, you know. Even if somebody else was in charge, you know, if they put, you know, er, what's his name, Keir Starmer, or whatever...

D: Yeah.

I: ...you know, I still believe, you know, there is a lot of mistrust in the government, because they haven't helped themselves, you know. They're over...you know, you've just seen in history how, how much politicians are...do...are, are lying through their teeth really. So it's just, it does, I think it is...I don't know how we can trust the government with anything really, to be honest, you know. Erm, and just, yeah, just in general, I don't think we can, and...me being like a conspiracy theorist when it comes to that, but I just, I just seen time and time again how they just, just lie and lie over things. And policies that they say they were gonna do, and then they just, they don't do it. Just, just things in general, just, just over time really. And this guy, this prime minister, he's just, he's just at the top of that really, I think.

D: Hmm.

I: Yeah.

D: D'you think is there anything in particular...do you feel like that's a commonly held view, you know, for citizens in general? Or are there kind of particular levels of scepticism which might be particular to either minority ethnic groups or within the Muslim community? Or is this a shared thing really...?

I: Erm...

D: ...this notion of scepticism?

I: ...erm, I, I do believe it, it is more shared, erm, than just, you know...

D: Yeah.

I: ...just...I mean, look at Brexit, look what's happening Brexit.

D: Yeah.

I: You know, just things like that. And I think people in general do believe, well, I, I, I think they do anyway, erm, the majority, I do believe see that, you know, there is a lot of mistrust in the government, because of just that time and time again what's happening. You know, just, erm, Brexit were some of the biggest lies, I believe.

D: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

D: So, yeah, if we go back, back to thinking about impact within the community, did you know people who, you know, contracted Covid and were badly affected, erm, you know?

I: Yeah. Erm, I...thankfully there hasn't been that many people that have been really affected. Yes, they've contracted, erm, Covid, but they haven't really been, erm...thankfully for me the people that I know haven't been as, as affected. Maybe because they haven't been as affected they see it as it's, you know, erm, something that, you know, we don't need to get vaccinated. Or they don't believe it actually exists, because they haven't been infected. 'Cause obviously everybody's different, you know, so, erm, but then I said that teacher, she had, erm, a collapsed lung and, erm, she's still suffering now, she's still...she needs to go for an operation, and they're still waiting to get her done. But, erm, yeah, personally my own, like my friends and family that have had it, they haven't been impacted as...thankfully they haven't been impacted...

D: ...yeah.

I: ...as, as seriously as that. Erm...

D: Yeah.

I: ...can you just give me one second, the battery...

D: Yeah.

I: ...on my laptop is, er...

D: Sure, no worries.

I: ...one second.

D: That's fine.

I: Thank you. Yeah, sorry, the battery on this laptop, it doesn't even tell me when it's, erm it's about to...it's really low or anything. So I have to just charge it as soon as, otherwise it just dies really quickly.

D: Yeah. No, that's alright.

I: Yeah, sorry.

D: Yeah. But, so no, of course not. So I think, you know, what about thinking about the wider community, you know, kind of maybe thinking a...so you, whereabouts are you again, Washwood Heath?

I: Washwood Heath, yeah, yeah.

D: Yeah. So kind of what d'you...can you give us a picture of the impact in terms of, er, kind of how severely the community was affected in general, erm, you know, in terms of people contracting, er, Covid, hospitalisations, that kind of thing? What was kind of your experience of what was happening in the, in the wider community?

I: Well, erm, I think, I mean, looking at figures and stuff, and see there's a lot of, you know...we are quite high risk in that terms. Erm, erm, another thing as well, one of my neighbours, she actually passed away with Covid, she had just, er...she did, erm...she'd given birth and then she passed away. But she was going to have the vaccine, but she didn't have it during pregnancy because she wasn't sure.

D: Right.

I: But she...the vaccine. Erm, but yeah, the baby was born and then she passed away. Erm, that, that did quite affect as well, erm, she just, she just lives a few doors away from us as well. So, yeah, I did...you know, that kind of slipped my mind to be honest. It was in the, it, it was in the Birmingham Mail as well about it.

D: Yeah.

I: Erm, but yeah, she left, five, five girls, er, behind, erm, yeah.

D: Oh.

I: Yes. Er, yeah, and she was going to have the vaccine, but she wasn't, erm, sure. Whereas my, my sister-in-law did have the vaccine while, while she was expecting with, with my niece. So erm, she did have it, and she's...but thankfully nothing...you know, her, her daughter's okay, you know, er, there wasn't any side effects from having the vaccine...

D: Uh-huh.

I: ...so yeah.

D: Yeah.

I: That's another thing as well, getting...erm, 'cause, well thankfully, you know, er, first time experience my, my niece, she seems totally fine, you know, there was no effects...

D: Yeah.

I: ...of my, my, my sister-in-law having the vaccine. So, erm, getting, getting out there as well, telling pregnant women, you know, to basically get, get, get the vaccine, but yeah.

D: Yeah.

I: Erm...

D: Yeah. So with the, with the...I think maybe a little bit more indirect now, thinking about things like economic impact. So what, what do you do for work, er...?

I: ...erm, I, I, I work in mortgages for, er, for XXXXXXXX [a bank].

D: Oh right.

I: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

D: Okay, okay.

I: Yeah.

D: Okay, the, the economic impact. Thinking about, I guess, people having to go onto furlough...

I: Yeah.

D: ...you know, possible strain on local businesses...

I: Yeah, yeah.

D: ...and those kinds...so what kind of economic impacts were there in the community?

I: Well, you know, well, during the whole...er, when it was lockdown and stuff like that, they were putting prices up ridiculously. You know, people were like the prices of groceries, erm, you know, the meat and stuff like that, it was like ridiculous prices. And, like, how can they, you know, do that, but people were just bunking prices up. It was all here, you know, erm, all these local shops that were just putting the prices up so much. And thankfully they did stop that after a bit, but it was just like, it was just shocking to see, you know, they, they were blaming, erm, you know, Covid for it, but I don't...I think they were just trying to make, er, a few extra quid really more than anything else.

D: Hmm.

I: 'Cause it wasn't...you know, they, they, they were blaming Covid saying that, you know, prices are, you know, the prices of meat and stuff were going up because of Covid. But then you look at like Tesco, Asda and stuff, their prices are still the same, so how can...

D: Hmm.

I: ...they justify that. But, erm, yeah, we had to get through, the prices were just ridiculous, you know, buying just local, you know, the groceries and stuff like that. So yeah, I think that did impact, you know, people being on furlough and stuff like that. Erm, my brother was on, erm, er...two of my brothers were on, er, furlough actually, and it did affect them, you know. Well, one of them, it definitely did affect him financially quite a bit, you know, 'cause he works at the local nursery and it was, erm...it, it did affect him quite a bit, erm, yeah so.

D: Yeah.

I: So I think people were, were affected quite a bit. Erm, I mean, even saying that actually, you know, 'cause I work in mortgages, I'm an underwriter and seen a lot of cases come through, you know, people on furlough and stuff like that. And one of our policies is that if they, they need to be confirmed whether they're, they're come off furlough, or they're, erm...when they know they are going to be off, erm, erm, off furlough. And if they didn't...couldn't provide that, then we would have to decline it. So things like that, you know, people...

D: Yeah.

I: ...being affected by furlough, you know.

D: Yeah.

I: Erm, so yeah, that was one of our, that was one of our policies that people have to either be confirmed when they're going off furlough or they've actually come off furlough. And you see furlough on there, that's like a red flag, and you have to, you know, erm, speak to the, you know, the broker or...about it, you know, just confirm things like that. So like yeah, furlough, I think it was a massive effect, but thanks for us we, we weren't furloughed at all, we didn't need to be...

D: Yeah.

I: ...because we were still getting enough, er, coming in, so thankfully. But one, one thing that did come out of this was working from home.

D: Yeah.

I: And I, I know that the, the only, for me the only drawback was not having to, er...you know, the banter at work and stuff like that. But we do...we have a, you know, Zoom meetings, you know, three times a week, so we have that so we can...you know, it's not the same, but it's still, you know, we still...you can still see the...you know, your own colleague and stuff like that.

D: Yeah.

I: But, erm that has helped, I think, massively for us, you know, for us anyway, 'cause we're working parents, it, it, it does help, you know, with the school run and things like that, you know going to appointments and things like that. I think that's the only positive I can really see from, you know, the whole Covid thing, you know, erm, just working from home is...it was a...it's been a massive thing, you know, for us.

D: Hmm.

I: You know, financially as well, not having to, erm, you know, get on the bus every day and, you know, just, yeah, just getting up in the...getting up so early to get it...get into work, and then, you know, having to sit with someone who might have Covid, you don't know, kind of thing. You know, just generally things like that, you know, I think it's made...it, it, it has helped us, you know, positive way, I think it has helped us, you know, just being at home kind of thing, you know. Erm, yeah, financially and just knowing that, you know, you know...er, might be sitting next to somebody on the bus who has got it. Even at work, you know, going into work and then your colleagues as well, they might not know that they've got it, kind of thing. So, erm, but yeah, I think that's helped. But I think in a wider sense, that I think for people being on furlough as well, and then losing their, you know, jobs and stuff, I think has affected around here as well. You know, because the jobs people tend to have around here just like local shops and things like that.

D: Hmm.

I: So people being on furlough, like, the supermarket I go to here, erm, notice there's a lot, lot less staff there, and I think Covid has, er, has affected them. Because you only see like two or three, erm, people on the tills, you know, before it used to be packed, used to have like four, five people on the tills, but now there's only like two. Actually, there's only two now, you know, and, and I think that's...Covid has, has made a massive...erm, and I see, keep seeing staff changes as well, you know, when you go in there, you know, people, erm, at the same people, er, there anymore. And there's less staff everywhere, you know, erm, on the shop floor, and things like that, so I think Covid has made a massive impact on that, people...letting people go, you know, because there's not enough business, you know. Maybe the prices of stock and stuff, bringing it in has affected them as well, you know, the actual employers.

D: Hmm.

I: So yeah, I think...

D: Oh sorry?

I: ...no, no, sorry, carry on.

D: No, I was just wondering if you'd noticed any change, changes in the character of, erm, as you say, shops and small businesses in and around the area. Were, were there times where going into lockdown then coming out where you might notice that, oh, that's shut down, this is closed. You know, were there...was that happening in and around the area?

I: Yeah. Yeah, it was, yeah. Yeah, it was.

D: Yeah. And were there kind of , erm, I think as well sort of you talked about homeschooling...

I: Yeah.

D: ...so working from home being one factor, and then homeschooling, I guess, being another. So how was the balance of that, er, during the times that...?

I: Yeah. Erm, that was, yeah, it was challenging. Erm, 'cause we, we put like a kind of scheduling for them to do, erm, certain things and then let them have a little bit of a break. And then going back and then doing lunchtime, and then doing...trying to schedule it in a way that they...erm, in the morning they do this and that and then...it was, it was, erm, it was quite difficult. Especially, erm, as, erm, my little one, she's got, erm...we do...she's on the spectrum, you know, ...we do believe that. And then the middle, er, we've got...I've got three kids, you know, erm...

D: Uh-huh.

I: ...the middle one we believe's got ADHD, er, which is...he's getting looked into about that, erm, at the moment. But, erm, he was...especially with him as well, erm, he wasn't...he was playing up quite a bit as well, so it was, it was difficult trying to balance, trying to work and, er, get them to do their homework and stuff like that, you know, doing their work and stuff. There was a...they did do...they had Microsoft Teams as well, so they were doing online classes, then they were having to do stuff on the books and things like that. So we're just getting him through all of that, and, erm, yeah, it was, it was an experience. Erm, I think we did come out, maybe we did come out stronger, erm, or when we came out of it. But then looking at it now, if there was another lockdown, I'm not sure *[laughter]* how we would cope if we had to do it again. But it was, no, it was an experience, I have to say, and, erm...

D: Yeah.

I: ...yeah. I, I don't know if we could...I do, I do believe we did come out stronger, erm, so...

D: Hmm.

I: ...'cause it was two, wasn't there? The was two lockdowns, wasn't there, yeah?

D: Two, two significant national...where the schools...

I: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I think the second one was, I don't know, I think we found it a bit more challenging, er, I think it was...it didn't help with my middle one, he, he was playing up quite a bit as well. So just trying to get him focused and doing his work and things like that, yeah, but yeah. Yeah, it was, erm, yeah, it was an experience, so just...

D: ...yeah. I have my own experience *[laughter]* as well with homeschooling, and...

I: ...yeah.

D: ...you know, balancing with working from home, definitely was...

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

D: ...challenging. It depends on the ages, I guess, as well, so were your, were your children primary school age?

I: Yeah, yeah. erm, at the time, yeah, my other one's just, er... he's in Year 7 now, but he...all three of them primary school, yeah. Erm, at the time they were...erm, nine, seven, no, 10. Yeah, my, my older one he's 11 now, so he would have been nine or 10 at the time. And the other one, he's nine now, so he would have been seven or eight.

D: Yeah.

I: And the little one, she was four, er, five, five. Yeah, four, five she was as well.

D: Yeah.

I: At that time, yeah. So yeah, there was, erm...it was challenging, yeah.

D: Erm, so I think you've probably covered this, but I do want to ask you if you, if you experienced any direct bereavements or, erm, anything kind of losing friends, you know, to Covid? Is that something that happened for you in the pandemic?

I: Erm, I mean, my own family and friends, no. But, but like I said, my neighbour, erm, she, she passed away. Erm, was, when was it, last, I think it was September I think or October, something like that.

D: Uh-huh.

I: Erm, yeah, that, that was a huge shock. She wasn't even that, that old, you know.

D: Hmm.

I: So...but yeah, it's...no, thankfully, erm, haven't had any actual direct bereavements.

D: Yeah.

I: Erm, yeah. Er, no, er, er, we, thankfully we, we haven't, erm. My, my brother-in-law, he's, erm, currently, erm...he's got lung cancer, but 'cause of Covid it's, it's...you know, they're not sure whether it's Covid, erm, as well as just the, erm, lung cancer. But it just, yeah, it is, it's quite...I mean, he's, he's in his mid-40s and he's got lung cancer, so it's...er, it does really hit home. So...but, erm, and, and just going to see him and not being able to go...actually see him, because you're worried that, you know, 'cause he's, 'cause he's got...you know, you don't know what, what he can pass on, and things like that. You know, he has to go to hospital quite a bit as well. So, yeah, that does, that has impacted on us as well, not being able to see, you know, your own family that's, you know, not well. You know, just going to see him, you know, things like that. Er, and speaking to him on, on the phone is quite difficult, 'cause he's coughing so much, things like that, so it's difficult to speak to him on the phone.

D: Yeah.

I: Yeah, I think just things like that has, you, you, you know, it does, you know, it does really affect you, erm, not being able to see family that are not well, and things like that, yeah.

D: Yeah.

I: But, no, thankfully haven't had any actual bereavements from Covid, erm, which is...erm, we were worried a few...couple of years ago, my, my, my uncle passed away with, erm, lung cancer as well. But he...erm, my brother is not even a smoker, but my, my, my uncle was a smoker and he as smoking since he was about, he was really young, I think he was about 11 or something. But back

then, you know, er...I mean, he was in his 60s when he passed away, but...and he was back in, erm...I'm from Bangladesh, so he was smoking...

D: Uh-huh.

I: ...you know, and they were, they weren't even like proper cigarettes, they were the, the non-filtered ones *[laughter]* so...

D: Oh right, yeah.

I: ...you know, can understand that, you know. Erm, but yeah, thankfully he didn't have Covid, so we were allowed to...there was only 15 of us so we were allowed to go to the funeral and stuff...

D: Yeah.

I: ...thankfully that was okay. Erm, but yeah, he, he didn't pass away from Covid, thankfully. But other than that, thankfully I haven't had anyone...

D: Yeah.

I: ... and hopefully I won't have anyone, but...

D: Yeah, of course, sure.

I: ...yeah.

D: Erm, are you, are you...were there things that...I mean, I guess this is quite challenging, particularly with families who are serious about, erm, religious observance, and things like that.

I: Yeah.

D: So how did the, how did the Mosque respond to, to kind of families going through bereavements? And was there still the opportunity to facilitate the kind of appropriate rituals and things ahead of burial?

I: Yeah.

D: Yeah. You know, have any insight into that?

I: Yeah, yeah. Erm, there, there was like, erm...but obviously we'd have to...there was, erm, er, measures in place so, so that...you know, there was still, erm, the distancing and, you know, and the two, the two-metre distance, and stuff like that. But there was, erm...they, they did follow the rules and we were able to, you know, er, carry out the actual, you know, the normal...er, the rituals that we had to...funeral stuff like that. Which was thankfully we were able to do, erm, things like that. Erm, but yeah, I think the...especially at XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath], they were, you know, all having to wear the mask and making sure that we're, you know, two-metre distance and stuff. Obviously it's been relaxed a little bit, but they still expect us to wear a mask when you go in, and if we don't have one, they'll provide it, which is the right, still the thing to do.

But we're...there's not the two-metre distance, erm, anymore at the moment, erm, but I think that's because they've, they've relaxed it a little bit, but they still want us to wear masks, which is still the right thing, I think, just, you know, at least some sort of protection, and stuff like that when you go to the mosque. Erm, but the local mosque, I think there are more...erm, they're not as...erm, they

don't follow the rules as much I don't believe. You know, when you go into the mosque you see the, er, you know...erm, when I had to go into local mosques, you know, whenever I haven't been able to go to XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath], and they see people that are...number of people not having masks, masks on and things like that. Erm, yeah, things like that, that's, that's why I don't like, er, I don't prefer going to the, the local mosque because of things like that, people are not following the rules. Erm...

D: **Hmm.**

I: ...they, they should. You know, and you're going into a place of worship and you wanna make sure that everybody's safe, and things like that, they're just going to pray, you should be...you know, you should do what you can to make sure everybody is, erm, you know safe and you're not giving anything to anybody. But, yeah, that's why I prefer to, erm...I like going... XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] I think is more, erm...the more, you know, the more for the community, I think, you know, they're making sure that everyone is doing the right things, and things like that. And they do a lot of charity work and stuff like that as well, so yeah, that's what I like going there as well, you know, but yeah.

D: **Yeah. So how was your, how was your religious observance affected in the pandemic? I mean, especially, I guess, in terms of lockdown where it wasn't, it wasn't, you know, possible...?**

I: Yeah, erm, not being able to go to Friday prayers, you know, erm that, that, that was quite an impact. And, you know, Eid prayers and things like that...

D: **...uh-huh.**

I: ...not being able to go to Eid prayers as well, erm, that, er, that did impact us, er, not being able to do things like that. But then at the same times we were able to pray at home, you know, the...'cause we prayed at home with the family, and stuff. I think, I think in one sense that did help us in a way, 'cause we were in a routine where we were able to do, erm, not do the actual, er, Friday, 'cause of the Friday prayers side are different. But, you know, the normal...'cause we do five times a day, er, pray five times a day. The afternoon prayer is the one that on a Friday is, er, we go to the mosque, you know, it's different, but we're able to do that, we were able to do like activities around that, and things like that. And, you know, er, which did, erm, you know, kind of like it was a little positive in a way, we were able to teach the kids a bit more about the religion, and things like that. So that did help us in a way, erm, to get them more engaged about the religion and things like that, you know, watching more things on, like, you know...about, er...on YouTube and things like that. Just like, yeah, it, I think it did help us in a way as well, you know, not being able...

D: **Yeah.**

I: ...not going to the mosque, and things like that. The kids being at home and being able to, erm, do things around Friday prayers and stuff like that, so...

D: **Yeah.**

I: ...it did help us in a positive way, I think, yeah.

D: **Yeah. Did you, did you use, I mean, I guess people always do use social media and Whatsapp, and those kinds of things, were they being used to kind of keep a sense of connection...?**

I: Yeah.

D: ...erm, in times where people were locked down?

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, we had...er, we used to do, er, a family, erm, facetime as well, we did, er, we all of us, er, were in there, you know, for about half an hour or so, just, erm, everybody, you know, all the...'cause I've got, erm, four brothers, so there was like seven, no, six different households, you know, er, on the video. It was a bit loud and stuff, but we used to do that regularly, like once a week or so like that...

D: Yeah.

I: ...just to be in touch with everybody, kind of thing, so...

D: Yeah.

I: ...yeah, it was, it was, er, it was nice to be able to do that, to stay in, in contact. But we have like obviously Whatsapp groups and stuff anyway, so we chatting every day anyway, so, erm...

D: Yeah.

I: ...we were still doing that, but then having actual, you know, video calls and that as well.

D: Yeah.

I: That helped, you know, just to, you know, just to be able to see the family and things like that. Yeah, to see my nieces and, you know, my cousins and, you know, erm, my little, erm, brothers and stuff like that as well. 'Cause, er, my cousin...erm, where my mum lives, erm, a few doors away, he's my, my cousin, so my, my uncle, her brother lives there, and got, got to little cousins with the same age as my, my two boys which is still weird. You know, erm, I've got actual first cousins that are, you know, like I'm old enough to, you know, it's just 'cause my uncle got married quite late, and then he had, you know, then he had kids, like...

D: Yeah.

I: ...'cause my two cousins are, erm, nine and six, no five, nine and five, so my first cousins, you know. And my, my kids calling them uncle, and things like that, is a bit weird.

D: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, of course, yeah.

I: Yeah, so. Yeah, so it was just, it was just nice to be able to have video calls and stuff, erm, you know, with them, things like that, just seeing how everyone's getting on.

D: Yeah.

I: Erm, so yeah.

D: Yeah. Were the mosques or any other community organisation, like Muslim community organisations, were they using social media or Whatsapp to keep in touch with community members? Or community leaders, you know, were they using sort of Whatsapp or maybe even YouTube or, I, you know, I don't know but...?

I: *[Over speaking]*. Erm...

D: ...on social media platforms to keep connected?

I: ...yeah, yeah, yeah, there was. There was communications and, you know, there was things getting sent out, especially XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] were doing that. But, erm, I know my, my friend, he is, erm, his mosque, erm, they have like a Whatsapp group, and they were sending out, they used to send out like, they used to have like chats and things like that. And, you know, if anyone was affected by anything they would be able to help, you know, help and whether it was just a phone call or a video call, and stuff like that, there were things in place. Erm, when I...my own community, I'm not...er, 'cause I'm not really...I don't have any real contact with them, other than just going to the Friday prayers if I have to. Erm...

D: Uh-huh.

I: ...but I'm not sure about our own community here, but my friend, he, he, he's in his Whatsapp group with his, his mosque. His mosque is in, erm, is it in Aston? Yeah, it's in Aston, his mosque is.

D: Uh-huh.

I: And he, he, he has shown me things that they send out, which is really good what they do. You know, they're not like, erm, a, a massive mosque, you know, in terms of like, you know, like XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath], kind of thing, but they do, do really...do things like that. Erm, so...but I'm not sure about my own, you know, the mosque around here, I don't know if they do things like that. Erm, because like I said, I'm not in...er, whereas with XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath], I have like...I don't have like a Whatsapp, 'cause I've got like Facebook, I've got Facebook page. And their own website, they put a lot of information on, which is quite helpful, and things like that so, erm, yeah, they do have things on there. But, erm, my own...I'm not sure about the mosque around here, personally because I don't really attend the mosque here...

D: Hmm.

I: ...'cause I go to the XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] one, so yeah.

D: Yeah. Erm, so on that point were there interventions, were there things that mosques or other community organisations were doing to try to meet the needs of the community that came about with the pandemic? You know, were there initiatives, things like that, which were, you know, to help?

I: Yeah, erm, I'm, like I said, I'm not 100% sure about people around here, but I know...

D: Yeah.

I: ...XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] were doing, er, quite a bit of things, you know, around Covid and stuff like that, help, helplines and things like that.

D: Right.

I: There was a lot of things that they were, they were putting...they had out, you know, to help anybody that needed...even if it didn't need to be, erm...it didn't even have to be Muslim people, just people in general, erm, if they needed help. And they were...erm, things like, you know, erm, if they needed a place to stay and stuff, they had like shelters and things like that in, in place, for anyone that needed it, and things like that. So they do a lot, I, I do think XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] do a lot of things around for the community, you know...

D: Yeah.

I: ...er. But in terms of my own, you know, the people in the mosque around here, I am not...I, I, I'd be lying if I said I knew what they were, what was going on around here, because...

D: Yeah.

I: ...yeah. So,...but XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] I can say that they were doing a lot of things...community, and things like that. They were...you know, there was a lot of, you know, 'cause XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] has even have got the vaccination, erm, centre there as well, so you can go...

D: [Over speaking]. Uh-huh.

I: ...vaccinated and things like that. But they were encouraging people to do that, and they were...I know, erm, one of the...they did go on, erm, social media and to tell people, you know, to get the vaccine, and, and things like that, the vaccine to get it done, and things like that. Erm, because of obviously there was a lot of scepticism about it, that there may be, you know, something that we can't...you know, it wasn't halal, and things like that.

D: Uh-huh.

I: You know, a lot of people were like worried about things like that. But the people, these people...not just XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] , it was XXXXXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located near Highgate] mosque as well...

D: Yeah.

I: ...and they were coming out and saying that, look, you need to get this done, erm, it's, it's gonna help us and people around us. So, yeah, there were, they were some...the community, some coming out. But in terms of the local, erm, here, I, I can't say that I'm 100% sure that they did, because I'm not...I wasn't...

D: Hmm.

I: ...you know. Especially 'cause of, er, wasn't going out too much anyway, so I wasn't engaging with that much people, in terms of that.

D: Yeah.

I: So, but yeah.

D: I mean, I've heard...of just through the process of doing the project, you know, I mean, I've heard of, er, things like befriending services, in the community doing shopping rounds...

I: Yeah.

D: ...you know, for older citizens living alone. Was that kind of thing being facilitated through...?

I: [Over speaking]. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Erm, that, I think especially XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] was doing things like that. Erm, yeah, that was, that was actually one thing that I, erm...that was happening, yeah, people, erm, you know, young, you know, lads, lads going out and helping people with the shopping, and things like that.

D: ...yeah.

I: That, you know, that was, yeah, that was happening, so yeah. Yeah, that was, that was happening. But other than that...

D: *[Over speaking].*

I: ...yeah, sorry.

D: **Were there counselling, counselling services through the mosque as well...?**

I: *[Over speaking].* Yeah, counselling, yeah, there was counselling. Erm, so, well, like I said, XXXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] were doing, they do...they did do...there is still counselling available if anyone needed, erm, counselling, yeah.

D: **Hmm.**

I: Yeah.

D: **Yeah, yeah, okay. So, I think this brings us to – and we've already talked about this, er, a fair bit I think early on – but government responses. So I guess there's pre-lockdown, which is hand washing and...**

I: *Happy Birthday.... [laughter].* Yeah.

D: **...you know, yeah so things like, I guess, the advice on hand washing, the, the, the point at which we locked down, you know, what are your views on, on how the government handled that, those early stages? And then maybe we could talk a bit more about measures they took later on.**

I: Erm, I, I, I think they just done a really poor job. You know, when you look at certain leaders around the world, like New Zealand, you know, how they locked, locked down straightaway. And, you know, our leaders telling us to wash our hands, you know, instead of like...you know, I think he should have been...you know, we should have had a lockdown straight, you know...a lot sooner than we did. You know, and, and then we would have...I, I don't think there would have been as many deaths. I, I just don't, just don't think the government have done a good job at all of handling this pandemic, you know, at all. I, I...it's just been such poorly managed, you know. You know, wasn't it first "hands-face-space"? And now they've, like...and they kept changing it, hasn't he? With the, with the, the slogan, or whatever. Now it's not even that, is it? It used to be "Protect the NHS", you know, what happened to that, you know.

D: **Yeah.**

I: Er, it's things like that, you know. Not being able to...you know, just the way they've handled the NHS as well, you know, you see so much, erm...you know, how understaffed the NHS is, you know, not helping the NHS. What happened to the £350 million that was supposed to...the NHS is supposed to get *[laughter]*, you know, just things like that. You know, just things have been so poorly managed by the government...

D: **Hmm.**

I: ...everything has been done so poorly, you know, not helping the NHS at all, you know. So yeah.

D: What kind of...I guess, you know, this is only a hypothetical question. But faced with a similar sort of crisis or a similar sort of challenge in the future, what kind of things do you think the government, whether that's national government or local government would need to be thinking about, in terms of protecting the interest of the community, you know, facing another challenge like this?

I: Yeah, I think what they need to do is just get on the front foot and, you know, erm, if it is as serious as it is, you know, if it's like Covid, then they just need to lock everything down straightaway just so that it doesn't spread. And they wouldn't...I believe that if, if we did do lockdown sooner, I don't think there would have been as many deaths as there had, had been, you know. And just making sure people understand how serious it is, you know, just getting out there straightaway and just, just like, yeah, I'm going back to New Zealand again but, you know, they had their lockdown, and then, they were...you know, we were in lockdown while they were all out, you know, just carrying on normal, any other day, you know, just carrying on the way they were. Whereas we were still struggling in lockdown and things like that, you know, then we had to have another lockdown.

D: Hmm.

I: Erm, but just the government needs to get on the front foot and just get out there and straightaway just...you know, I know it's gonna have a massive impact on, you know, like the, you know, the, erm, the, the economy, and things like that. But, you know, people's lives, you know, you need to think about people's lives. So I think they need to get on the front foot and just...you know, if, if, if it is anything like this again, just lock, lock everything down and then, you know, the impact of that obviously will be financially and things like that. But you need to think about people's health as well at the same time, so...

D: Yeah.

I: ...yeah.

D: Yeah. And then thinking, I guess, similar question towards local community organisations, erm, mosques, what kinds of things would, would, would, you know, would you envisage they would need to do in order to meet the needs of the community?

I: Yeah, similar things. They need to go, go out and, you know, make people understand how serious it is. Erm, 'cause it...I don't think the...they're quite blasé about it, they're not really, erm...I, I don't think they understand how serious it is, or if they do, they're just keeping it to themselves. But they need to go out straightaway and just say, look, you know, we need to like, like...you need to follow the rules and lockdown and not...even if it means...it, it was a...it did affect us that we weren't allowed to go to the mosque and stuff.

D: Yeah.

I: But if it means keeping people safe, then just lock all...you know, close all the mosques, you know, for a, for a period. We could even have, like, you know, erm, you know, erm, just a video, you know, have live video, live video where we pray but, you know, everyone has...you know, 'cause everyone's got, you know, a...smartphones nowadays, so you can have it on video, you know. You know, you know, the Imam leading the prayer, but everybody in their own homes, you know, praying like that...

D: Yeah.

I: ...things like that. So just...they need to put...if it ever happens again this serious then they need to just lockdown...

D: Yeah.

I: ...everything should just be shut down and just, erm...

D: Uh-huh.

I: ...keep everyone at home, at least that way everyone's safe. I know then the, the mental health, health aspect of it as well, but everybody's got...you know, most people have got, you know, smartphones nowadays, so you can stay in touch. You know, video, you know, via video call and stuff like that. So, yeah, just shut down straightaway I think, that's the best way.

D: Yeah.

I: Just keep everyone safe.

D: Yeah.

I: And get the vaccine done.

D: Yeah. Were you, were you...you mentioned that, erm, leading prayer remotely, is that something that you...that had happened? Or is this something that, erm...?

I: *[Over speaking]*. I don't think...er, er, erm, no, it hasn't happened. But I've seen videos where people have, you know, been in their own homes where...and, and the...you know, somebody's leading prayer from one house, but there's all, like, you know, everybody else is around, but they're in their own home, and they're praying, because they can hear, you know. Erm, but I think that's something that can...I, I believe that you can, you can do that. Because at the end of the day if it's live and people have...you know, erm, they're all doing it at the same time, then, then it...I think that's something that can be put into place, you know, and, and people can pray like that. Erm, I don't know what the actual ruling is, but if people can pray where they're, they're all in their own homes, but you know, erm, you know, their in the...their own...you know, on their own street and they're praying like that, because they can hear, you know, the Imam, you know, leading the prayer and all of that, then video call I think is, is...I don't see any issues with that personally. Erm, but like I said, I'm not...I don't know the actual ruling it is for that, but something...that's something I would be on board with, if that was to...

D: ...uh-huh.

I: ...if, if, if we could do something like that.

D: Uh-huh.

I: Erm, I think it's actually just lockdown, even if it means that people pray at home with their own families, because it basically, essentially we just...you just need somebody to lead the prayer. And you can, you can pray individually, but if you lead the prayer you get more reward for, you know, reading, praying in a group. So it's, erm, it's, it's essentially if you pray at home, I think, I don't think there's an issue with praying at home, 'cause that would, I think that would help keep your own family together, kind of thing, you know.

D: Yeah.

I: Erm, you're praying together as a family, you know. Erm, and that, you know, not necessarily going to the mosque and stuff like that, obviously the reward is there, more reward, the more people you pray together, the more reward you get, kind of thing, that's how, how...what we believe. Er, but praying at home is a reward in itself, if you're praying with your family and your...you

know, kids are praying with you, you know, and you're leading the prayer, and your kids and your, you know, your, you know, your missus and the, you know, the...all your kids are praying together, that's just...that's...bring you, yourself closer as well, I think, you know, yeah.

D: Uh-huh.

I: Which we...I do that at home anyway, we, we, we do that, er, you know, regularly pray at home together.

D: Uh-huh.

I: And it's just giving the kids...erm, and making them understand and...just something that they...it's good practice for them as they get older that, you know, they know they need to pray, you know, their daily prayers, kind of thing. So...

D: Yeah.

I: ...but yeah, essentially, just, I think they just need to lockdown straightaway, you know.

D: Uh-huh.

I: Yeah. And I think stronger measures in place, you know, if people do break lockdown rules, you know, and that goes to the, you know, the, the people that are putting the rules in place as well [laughter]. They...

D: Yeah, yeah.

I: ...need to follow the rules, you know, you know.

D: Yeah. Well, looking at things as they are, what do you think the, what do you think the needs are within the community at the minute looking forward?

I: Erm, I think the community leaders...and help and spread the word, you know, let's spread the information better, you know, get the information out a lot better, and people to understand how serious it is. You know, the local community, I don't think they understand, you know. I think it's down to ignorance and just following, blindly following the people, not doing their own research and things like that. But...so I think the community leaders need to come out and, er, and make people understand. They need to understand themselves and get the people out there, you know, to do their own research as well. Like I said, you know, even if, you know, the, the older generation, even if they don't understand how to use the information, at least get the younger, you know, generation to, you know, help them understand.

D: Hmm.

I: Get them and then do the, do the research and, erm, yeah, just get more information out there, the community leaders need to do more, to go out there and make people understand. Erm, 'cause I don't think there is enough information being sent out, you know, people...the people, the community is not...I don't think they understand how serious it is, because there's, there's not enough information being sent out. Whether they're, they're not doing it themselves, or the community leaders are not getting enough, enough information out there for them to understand how serious it is, you know, so...

D: Yeah. Okay, well, is there anything you wanna talk about that I haven't asked you or, or that we haven't...?

I: *[Over speaking]*...erm, no. I, I think, essentially it goes...comes down to not getting enough information out there, people that are sceptical and not believing what's happening out there, you know.

D: ...hmm.

I: There's not enough information being sent out to them, or they're not doing it themselves or they're, they're just being, you know, lazy or whatever about it, not getting enough information. I think that's the main thing, just people need to understand, they need to get their information themselves or get...the community leaders need to get it out there, and, erm, and I don't think that's happening, there's no enough information being sent out to people. And that's why there's...

D: Yeah.

I: ...there's a lot of people that are...I understand how people don't understand, you know, not even believing that Covid is there, you know, erm, when you can see, you know. Maybe they, they...you know, cause they're don't have, have it themselves, but they've not experienced it in their own family that they don't understand, you know. So, I think it comes down to just not enough information, people not understanding how serious it is, and they need to be, they need to make...people need to make them understand, and, er, yeah.

D: **Hmm, yeah. And you mentioned earlier that partnership, more...you know, you, you mentioned something about more partnership between local government and community leaders?**

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

D: **So that, that, that would be a healthy way forward for you?**

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, erm, I mean, this is, this is, er, this area's Labour and our, our MP is Liam Byrne, and, erm, I think he still is, I think he is. Erm, but, erm, 'cause yeah, he needs to come out and do more, erm, about it, yeah. I see him in...he is around the community, I do see him around doing certain things, you know, like drives and things like that. But, erm, in terms of Covid, I don't think he has done as much, erm, he hasn't, no, there hasn't been much. 'Cause I have him on, er, Facebook, and I've got his, his email, you know, email that he uses to send things out.

D: Uh-huh.

I: But there hasn't been stuff about Covid actually, as much, he hasn't send much things about...and he has...I haven't seen him around, er, talking about Covid with the local community as much. Yeah, that's another thing, er, he needs to come out, er, or at least his people with him need to come out and engage with the community and with the community leaders, erm, to spread the...you know, to get this information out, yeah.

D: Hmm.

I: Yeah.

D: **Yeah, yeah.**

I: Yeah.

D: **And did you have, I might have asked you earlier, but do you know if you had Covid at all?**

I: Erm, I, erm, thankfully I haven't. But I think my, erm, my son did have...you know, right at the start when everything was still a bit crazy...

D: Uh-huh.

I: ...er, I did...I, I got my son tested, and I think I found out he got Covid. But I don't know if he did have Covid, because everything was a bit all over the place, wasn't it, at the start?

D: Hmm.

I: But, since then...but, erm, my, my mum, my aunt and a couple of my brothers have had it, erm, but...

D: Hmm.

I: ...thankfully they haven't, er, been, erm, serious. Er, my sister-in-law had it as well, but, erm, she's got asthma, but, erm, thankfully she, she's recovered from it as well. So thank...we've been quite fortunate that, erm, either we've had...you know, someone's had it and not been serious, that serious.

D: Yeah.

I: It's, it's been like more like a flu-like, er, symptoms...

D: Uh-huh.

I: ...and...or we've just not had it. Thankfully nobody in, in my, my, my direct household hasn't had it, other than my son, who had it at the start. But I don't even think he had Covid, I just...I don't think he did have it. Erm, and I don't know how he would have had it, other than me giving it to him, but I should have had myself tested then, but I didn't. But since then we've had a...obviously we've had...done the lateral flow regularly...

D: Yeah.

I: ...and thankfully we haven't had it at all.

D: Yeah.

I: Erm, but now they're saying that lateral flow is, er, is what they, they want you to have done, but people, people can just manipulate that anyway, so, you know, but...

D: Hmm.

I: ...that is what it is, so that's, that's another conversation I think.

[General laughter].

D: But, erm, I know actually, er, I was just gonna ask you 'cause it's...did you notice any tension between communities in the pandemic...?

I: *[Over speaking].* Yeah, yeah.

D: ...yeah.

I: Yeah, there's been a lot, you know, like people...a lot of arguments and like, you know, there, there has been quite a few handbags and things like that happening. There, there, there have been because people...some, you know, people...some people are following the rules and then other people are not, and it's just obviously causing a lot of tension and things like that. And a lot of the, you know, anger because, you know, you know, there's us like following the rules, and then there's people blatantly just not following, and then there's no repercussions to that, you know.

D: **Hmm.**

I: Er, you know, obviously we don't know what's happening in their own household, but not...you know, they could be taking it home and things like that. And then...but then, yeah, just people just not following the rules at all. You know, there, there was a lot of that happening, a lot of that happening. Still is, er, happening, people are not following the rules 'cause they don't, erm...they don't care, or they...or whatever, they think, they think they're above the law and things like that. There, there was a lot of, er, rule-breaking, a lot of that happening, erm, during the, during the whole lockdown, and erm, even now, they're still doing it, and not people wearing masks and things like that. Erm, but it was quite...yeah, they, they weren't wearing masks, they were going out, 'til whatever time, and just, erm, just not following the rules at all. Erm, and this was more the, the you younger, you know, kids going out, you know, erm, just blatantly going out and, you know, in their cars and whatever else, just doing...breaking the rules basically, you know.

D: **Uh-huh, uh-huh.**

I: I did see a lot of that happen, yeah.

D: **And did you notice any tensions with other local communities? Was there anything like, you know, did you hear of any hate incidents or anything like that?**

I: ...well, erm, I, erm...to be honest not locally, I didn't see it as much, 'cause, erm, this is predominantly an Asian area anyway, so...but...

D: **Right, yeah.**

I: ...I, I, I had...to be honest, I haven't seen that, but obviously then you're seeing on the news and stuff a lot of, you know...how they said that you know Islamophobia doesn't exist, but you see a lot of, you know, tension where, you know, girls are having their scarves ripped, you know, ripped off and things like that...

D: **Hmm.**

I: ...you see it. Erm, but I haven't seen that in the, you know...locally. 'Cause I, I go to, erm, the Tesco's in, erm, in Stechford which is a bit of a mix, you know...

D: **Uh-huh.**

I: ...there is Asian, there are some like non-Asian people as well. But I haven't seen...to be honest I haven't seen any of that...

D: **[Over speaking].**

I: ...anyway. But just really hearing it on the news and stuff like that, you do see, you know...

D: **Yeah.**

I: ...not just the local...you know, local...'cause they, they don't tend to have it as much on the national news today...

D: Hmm.

I: ...about things like this. But then you...'cause you...when you, when you follow other news outlets as well, like, you know, Al Jazeera, and things like that...

D: Yeah.

I: ...you see it on there, and they, they brought...you know, report on, on things like this, so...'cause I've got that as well...

D: Yeah.

I: ...to...erm, yeah. But locally, erm, I don't...I haven't seen much...I haven't seen any to be honest, erm, just the...you know, the...you know, er, tensions between, er, you know, people in the, in the community because of the rule-breaking and things like that. But not actual hate crimes and things.

D: Yeah, yeah.

I: But obviously reading, you know, in the news and things like that, that's, that's obviously another thing in itself, Islamophobia, so.

D: Yeah, yeah.

I: Yeah.

D: Yeah, well, I think, I think that's everything, and I'm really, yeah, I'm really grateful for you taking the time, really interesting conversation. But, yeah, just I really appreciate you taking the time, it's been really insightful.

I: No, erm, thank you for doing, doing this anyway. It's, it's nice that there's, er, people out there who, who, who do actually wanna do things like this to help, erm, communities and things like that. So I do appreciate that you actually going out of your time to, er, do this as well. Hopefully you've had...erm, I've given you enough, erm, decent answers anyway for you to work with and, erm, so yeah,

D: Yeah, I know, it's been a good conversation. Hopefully we'll catch up, you know, another point, so yeah.

I: ...cool.

D: Okay. Alright, well, take care, and thanks again.

I: Okay, thank you.

D: Cheers.

I: Bye.

D: Take care, see you. Bye-bye.

INTERVIEW 3

Date: 27/01/2022

Duration: 1:37:20

Participant characteristics: Male, community member

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: Right, I think we're recording. Okay, so thanks for agreeing to an interview, I do value it. And, erm, I just wanna start by asking you what do you think the most significant impacts the pandemic have been? And you can think of that either in terms of your own individual experiences, people around you, community level?

R: I think on an individual level, erm, I've been affected by the virus itself way before, er, we had testing kits.

I: Yeah.

R: On testing kits. So I personally have given the symptoms that I had back in February 2020, and a month before the first lockdown was put, put down.

I: Yeah.

R: Erm, I experienced certain symptoms that I'd never had previously before, the loss of smell...

I: Right.

R: ...a funny taste. And it was two months after April 2020 when the World, World Health, Organisation declared the loss of smell to be one of the major symptoms of Covid.

I: Right.

R: So I had all that, so that's, that's me on individual level. And then I think on a family level, a year later, you know, my parents got it, my dad got it really bad, which I can speak about later on.

I: Yeah, sure.

R: I think on a community level, erm, it affected the community that I'm from, given that there's this narrative that Covid doesn't discriminate...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...it can affect all and kill all, but I do believe that it does affect certain communities, because of the jobs that they may do...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...the access they have to healthcare...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...erm, as well as other things that are kind of socio-economically driven...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...that I've been able to experience more in my community than in other community settings.

I: **Yeah. (Clears throat) So, so just sketch out for us, where d'you...whereabouts do you live in Birmingham? And kind of give us some insight into...touch upon socio-economic, er, issues in and around or intersecting with the community. So can you fill that picture out a bit more?**

R: I live in an area called Handsworth, which is north west, north west corridor of Birmingham, inner city area about two point...just under two miles from the city centre. Erm, extremely ethnically diverse, it has been ever since I've known it, I've been living in Handsworth, erm, for a combination of 21 years...

I: **Right.**

R: ...over two periods, so the late 90s, early 2000s, and then from 2011 to the present day. Erm, I'd say in terms of community, it's majority south Asians, yeah, the India is, er...Indians being, erm, the majority in terms of population, then you've got the Pakistanis and the Bangladeshis. I'd say the Pakistanis and the Bangladeshis probably there's...they're quite equal in terms of demographic, what comes above them in terms of ethnicity is probably the black community.

I: **Okay (clears throat).**

R: Erm, so it's extremely diverse. Erm, Handsworth has always had it's kind of issues with the...in terms of crime, er, it's, it's, it's known I think in Birmingham or in London as the Brixton of Birmingham, in that respect.

I: **Okay, uh-huh.**

R: Riots have happened in the 80s.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So riots tend to be synonymous with other riots that happen across the country, so whenever there's a riot in London, it'll always end up spiralling, like Birmingham, er, in Handsworth for some reason. Or, er, there's always been, like, you know, from, from the 90s generation...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...but in the 80s Handsworth was, a kind of, erm, a hot-bed for race crimes...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...erm, race, you know, race, race-related violence, whether it was the police and their...or whether it was the black community versus the south Asian community, that's died down.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And there's more the unity, and there's a collective is now than there was back 30 years ago.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Erm, but in terms of deprivation, deprivation is quite high, in terms of unemployment.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Schooling isn't that necessarily great.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, healthcare is, you know, in terms of GPs and access to GPs, it's not, it's not all that good.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: It hasn't improved during Covid either, and I can speak about that later on.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And, erm, housing, housing, erm, Handsworth is starting to become an area whereby there's been, er, in the last five years a proliferation of HMOs.

I: **Okay.**

R: And HMOs kind of bring much attention.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Er, tend, tend to house individuals that are from volatile or vulnerable backgrounds, and there's a mixture, and that tends to kind of become quite problematic for citizens. Er, and, and you're having a lot of the south Asian community leaving Handsworth now, because you've got an influx of, erm, eastern European migrants...

I: **Yeah, okay.**

R: ...in the area as well now. So that's the kind of...the current landscape.

I: **Yeah. And that's like a live question, but is there any sort of relationship between, or is there any more likelihood of higher incidences of socio-economic deprivation across or within, between those communities?**

R: Yeah.

I: **But is, is that something that's also present in Handsworth?**

R: I'd say so, in terms of, erm...I'd say that the Indian community is about 15 years ahead of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities.

I: **In terms of entrepreneurship?**

R: In term so entrepreneurship, in terms of housing.

I: **Okay.**

R: In terms of education.

I: **Right.**

R: Erm, I'd say in terms, in terms of migration, erm, from the commonwealth nations and Indian diaspora, Bangladesh is last...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...post-World War II, so that kind of makes Bangladesh 10 years behind...

I: **Okay.**

R: ...naturally, er, it's evident now. When I was growing up, you know, the Bangladeshis were solely restricted to the catering industry, restaurants, [unclear 06:14], er, children go to university or studying at a high level, now it's actually the norm.

I: **Yeah.**

R: If anything it's become a rule that you have to go to university...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...erm, back about 15 years ago, which is not that long.

I: **Yeah, it's not.**

R: It's not that long. Erm, the expectation was as soon as you finish school, yeah, you do college, but then, you know, work with your dad's business or work at a restaurant over the weekend...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...Friday, Saturday, Sunday, because...

I: **Okay.**

R: ...on a cultural level you have to start earning for the family.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And, erm, that's changing now, so that there is that divide, but then [unclear 06:48] as well, because a lot of the Indian community in Handsworth have now moved out, they've gone to the suburbs.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Whether it be Sutton Coldfield in the north side or Solihull the south side, and they, they put their houses for rent.

I: **Yeah, okay.**

R: And, and, and that's, that's kind of an indicator and a marker as to how far they are.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Whereas, the Bangladesh community are starting to finally become freehold...

I: **[Over speaking]. Yeah, yeah.**

R: ... and doing what the Indians did literally 15, 20 years ago.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So there is that noticeable growth...

I: **Yeah, yeah.**

R: ...within the Indian diaspora.

I: **Yeah. And I guess there's a...I guess, is the Muslim community is comprised of, er, significant members of Bengali, er, Pakistani and some of the Indian community? And what is the character of the Indian community in Handsworth?**

R: Community in Handsworth is Punjabi...

I: **Okay.**

R: ...it's not Gujarati, like, it's not, it's not like, like Leicester has a Gujarati Muslim...

I: **[Over speaking]. I was gonna say, yeah.**

R: ...stronghold community near Melton Road side.

I: **That's right, yeah.**

R: Or they're...or, or it's wide spread actually in Leicester, whereas, in, in...I'd like to think in that part of the city the north west corridor, Aston, that particular side has the Indian Gujarati community that are Muslims. Whereas, in Handsworth it's the Punjabi community, Sikhs...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and then you've got, erm, also the Hindu community as well.

I: **Yeah, okay, I'm also interested in your, erm, initial reaction or responses to the pandemic, so I know you say that you had, erm, strongly suspected you had Covid early on? Can you just walk me through that, your kind of initial sort of response to hearing about Covid, into kind of us actually locking down, kind of, how your...how that impacted you in terms of your wellbeing?**

R: I think the first lockdown happened 20th of March...

I: **Yeah**

R: ...if, I'm not mistaken, round about there. And, er, on an individual level I was relieved...

I: **Right.**

R: ...er, that we had a lockdown, because I was feeling quite overwhelmed at work.

I: **Right.**

R: I just made the change from [workplace] to [workplace]...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...a few months prior, and I was struggling with work...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and, er, I remember by January I was burnt out.

I: Right.

R: Er, I didn't tell nobody, but I was just burnt out. And, erm, I was just going through some personal stuff as well...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...with family and, erm, work has always been an outlet for me...

I: Yeah.

R: ...erm, but at that point work also became quite overwhelming as well. I won't say that I was thrown into the deep end, but work was just work at the end of the day.

I: Yeah.

R: So when, erm, lockdown, erm, started, it was actually a relief for me in many ways. Although I do think I remember conversations prior to the lockdown happening two, three weeks beforehand, I was hearing cases of Covid, er, in XXXXX University, University of XXXXXX...

I: Right.

R: ...and I was just thinking to myself, "When are we gonna hear about a [workplace] staff member or student that's fallen ill as a result of Covid?"

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: So it was a case of when. Erm, at that time my understanding of a pandemic or a virus of this kind that can just be widespread was very limited, it was zero.

I: Yeah.

R: I had no understanding of how this could be. I mean, I previously heard of, you know, Ebola and stuff...

I: Yeah.

R: ...and never taken it seriously, right, it's never affected me.

I: Yeah.

R: My initial understanding was that lockdown would happen, and by, by end of April, May we'd all be okay.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: We'd all go back to normality.

I: (Coughs).

R: And, erm, I partially thought that to be the case, because of the government's boasting...

I: Hmm.

R: ...they were very relaxed and chilled about it.

I: Hmm.

R: We were one of the last countries in this side of the world to actually close down.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Er, everyone had closed three weeks before, two weeks before. And I think for me it was elements of naivety, I thought to myself, right, we're an island essentially, erm, as long as airports and shipping ports are shut down, then this virus can't come in as...and you know, the kind of, the spread of it won't be deadly, it won't be fatal.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Few infections here and there, few people knocked down for a while, but then...

I: **[Over speaking]. Yeah.**

R: ...back up and move on. It's only when I started hearing fatalities and people dying, 10, 20, 30, 50, 80, that's when I started to get a bit concerned.

I: **Yeah, yeah. Did you...was that something you think that was shared in and around kind of in and amongst friends and family within the community? Is there something...was there...what, what was your perception of kind of how, how the kind of...how the pandemic was initially received within the community?**

R: I think the...for the most part, I think the community was suspect...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...and that was largely down to the fact that the government weren't providing adequate responses.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, there was a lot of conspiracy theories going around...

I: **[Over speaking]. (Clears throat) Yeah.**

R: ...about, you know, you had the 5G people, the towers are coming up at that time and people are thinking that it's linked to 5G. And then you had other people that were thinking that, you know, this is the government's way of controlling people. There's gonna be a financial crash coming soon. Or, er, it's, it's, it's, it's the start of a new decade...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...as well, there, there were all these things floating around. Because the government weren't doing anything convincing to say, "Actually, this is a serious health issue..."

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...that has, erm, implications that are catastrophic. Erm, and I think in my community what I tend to find is when it comes to healthcare advice...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...the elders, the generation above me, find it overwhelmingly difficult to be convinced by specialists or people in power...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...that are not from the same demographic, same background, same ethnicity. They need, like, how can I say it? A person that they can relate to...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and the government weren't doing that. The government were just speaking from 10 Downing Street, and they were holding these formal press conferences, and I think in my community people don't watch that kind of television, they don't have that form of consumption to begin with.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I think the governments were ineffective with their accessibility in conveying information to say, "Stay home. This is serious. People at risk. People are dying." I think there could have been things done better on a local level.

I: **Hmm.**

R: With local elective members maybe.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Or local representatives, people of influence and voice in the community.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: That could have spread the word and could have been more effective.

I: **Yeah. What kind of things, is it about the tone and taking things more seriously? What kinds of things would have been more effective than...er, you were asking what's more effective than essentially nothing, I guess, so it's a bit of an open question that might be tricky to answer. But what might have, what might have been better than, you know, what happened?**

R: What might have been better is for people to appreciate, understand its seriousness.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: 'Cause I think, especially in my community, if you don't see it, it's not true...

I: **Right.**

R: ...so to speak, and Covid is something that you can't see. So people were finding it extremely difficult to kind of get out of that mentality that this is something that you can't see.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: You know, it's beyond your control, and that information and that message wasn't being put forward effectively.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: I'm just trying to think, I can only speak from my own personal experiences of course.

I: **Yeah, of course, yeah.**

R: And, erm, I'm just trying to think about some of the conversations that people were having with me at that time as well.

I: Uh-huh.

R: And there was a lot of, well, the government aren't sure about this, but they're telling us to do this. The government aren't sure about that, but they're telling us to do this. Or the government didn't really have strong information. They weren't...so I think they weren't...dates were being thrown around of it'll be sorted out by then, it was, a lot of the information was unknown.

I: Uh-huh.

R: And that was largely due to the fact that the government didn't know what was going on, right.

I: Yeah.

R: It, it was something that needs to be investigated...

I: Yeah.

R: ...you need...it, it needed, it needed time to kind of understand the nature and extent and the meaning of Covid-19...

I: Hmm.

R: ...and, and, and, and, and, and all that, and I think people getting frustrated by the government's response is to...questions that people had...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...I think that's what it was.

I: **And has the impact of the pandemic for you individually changed over time? So I think early on you talked about that concern when you realise you start to see the numbers, and so on. How bad did that get? How, you know, to what extent was concern about the pandemic kind of playing into your wellbeing in the earlier stages? And did that change as things went on?**

R: I think earlier on, erm, so my dad works in the service sector, he works, he works for Tesco...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...so he's front-facing.

I: Uh-huh.

R: And my mum works at a school, she's a lunchtime supervisor...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...and she supervises the kids...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...picks them from their classrooms into the dinner hall, and everything in between.

I: Uh-huh.

R: So they were in close, close proximity to people, right, the public, it wasn't like us where we could just work from home.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And, erm, what, what hit me was when the local newspaper, *Birmingham Mail*, reported a bus driver dying as a result of Covid. And it so happened that I went to, went to college with his younger brother.

I: **Right.**

R: So, erm, the, the bus driver, he would actually, er, drive the route that would go past his house and, erm, you know, there was some concerns that he, he had fallen ill unexpectedly and had subsequently died.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And that got me thinking about my parents.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And that got me thinking about my dad especially, because of the close proximity that customers have with staff at Tesco's, especially those that are at check-out till.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So mum's work, erm, because of it, it being the education sector, closed down.

I: **Yeah.**

R: But dad's work was still continuing.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And then information needed to be, be...so then it...later on, well, not even later on, quite soon it was revealed those that have got underlining health issues, like diabetes are at more risk of not making it through.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: So then Tesco informed him that, erm, he'd be off for three months.

I: **Right.**

R: So they gave him that leave time, and that kind of made me feel good...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...a bit. I was working from home, they were working from...well, they weren't working at that time. And, erm, that kind of alleviated some of my worries, my stresses, but then what didn't help afterwards when I think during the second lockdown we had to go back to work again...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...but things were just getting worse.

I: **Yeah.**

R: The death rate, death rates were increasing, infection rates were increasing, you were hearing more people dying.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And I'm an individual that doesn't really flinch when it comes to death, because, because of my religious...because of my faith...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...we're often told like, just like those are stoics to think about death...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...to put life into perspective.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I think in the European world death is not seen as something to think about quite a lot, because of it being death right? It makes no sense to think about dying, because you've got something to live for.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Whereas my religion, erm, death is often considered to be a leveller and a reminder of how temporary the world is, so to speak. But it was just the kind of nature and the extent of the deaths that I was hearing, I was hearing people in their 20s and 30s dying...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...and that's what got me thinking, and that got me worried a bit.

I: **Uh-huh. So thinking about that, erm, did you, did you feel like, you know, this was gonna be a short-lived thing initially?**

R: Yeah, initially I thought it was gonna be a short-lived thing, I thought it was gonna last for about two-and-a-half, three months...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and then we'd be back to normal again. And I could have done with that break actually at that time.

[General laughter].

I: **Yeah.**

R: I was just stressed out.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I was really stressed out. I, I was burnt out. January 2020, two months with the job, I think, with the move and the changes, and everything...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...I was just working to the bone. I had a few publications and teaching, and all that, all the normal stuff that you have.

I: **Yeah.**

R: But I was just feeling the heat for some reason...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and I could have done with that two, two months, three months break. Don't forget also, sorry...

I: **No.**

R: ...I say don't forget, like as if you should remember, but Ramadan also...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...was round the corner.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So that affected me a lot as well, Ramadan affected me considerably during the first lockdown.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Not so much in the second lockdown, but definitely in the first lockdown.

I: **So how was, er...I mean, you know, kind of walk me through that. So, you know, kind of what was it like experiencing that in the context of lockdown?**

R: You just felt as though that you weren't fasting, it wasn't Ramadan...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...'cause Ramadan is all about giving, erm, it's all about being in the state of, erm, mindfulness, spirituality, meditation. It's about giving as much as you can, doing certain things at certain times. 30-day period, so you're fasting from sunrise to sunset which, in this country at that time was round about 18½ hours.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: So it's what you do outside of fasting that counts equally as you fasting, and that side of fasting, once you open your fast you usually need to go to the mosque to pray...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...and you do the late night prayer. And that's an integral part of Ramadan, although it's not compulsory...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...but it's...it only happens once a year, and you feel it.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: 'Cause the congregation, and the way things are, especially to the...especially, erm, especially given that I go to a particular mosque, that's very giving in that respect...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...and that wasn't there.

I: **Yeah.**

R: That wasn't, so you were just fasting, praying at home. Even Friday prayers, erm, highly miss Friday prayers because of the sermon attached to it...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...which tends to be quite thought-provoking.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...especially, erm, at the mosque that I go to.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Just new information, it's quite contemporary...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...so it applies to the real world, and that wasn't there as well. So you just felt as though that my responsibilities as a Muslim just disappeared, man.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: It's crazy. And the first lockdown, there was no...erm, Mosques weren't open, and in the third lockdown, which we can come back to afterwards, I know I'm skipping...

I: **No, it's fine.**

R: ...we were socially distanced. That in itself is a weird experience as well, because...

I: **Yeah, I can imagine.**

R: ...praying within congregation shoulder to shoulder, that's how it should be, but that felt a bit, you know, weird at that time.

I: **Hmm. So how, how was it in terms of, you know, thinking about, a bit more about your faith, what did the pandemic do in terms of your observance, how you felt about your faith? I know you talk about your responsibilities were taken away...**

R: Hmm. Yeah. Erm, I think it reconnected me with my faith in the sense that as a Muslim you're supposed...well, you're told, it's compulsory to pray five times a day.

I: **Hmm.**

R: It's one of the five pillars. And the pandemic made me realise that I can always make time for the five prayers, even post-pandemic, which at that point I didn't know when it would end. I had the mindset that it would one day end, although now, you know, it seems as though we're gonna have to live alongside the pandemic...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...live alongside Covid. But back then, I think the, I think the pandemic made me realise at the very minimum I can at least pray five times a day.

I: **Hmm.**

R: And I've got that luxury to do so.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And I'm blessed, because I'm alive and people aren't...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...so you just put things into perspective.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And I think I became quite binary in that respect, it's like you're here and you're alive, and you seize the moment and you do good. Or the extreme end, you die, and you can't do nothing.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And I kind of think the pandemic made me realise that it's very difficult to be a Muslim the way you should be one in accordance to the teachings by being at home.

I: **Hmm.**

R: And there were certain things, like I suppose my effective dimensions towards Islam, my moods, my feelings, my attitudes, they were starting to disappear.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Er, although there were like online sessions, Zoom sessions, there's only so much of Zoom that you can do after a full nine to five...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...in the evening, you know, there wasn't that connectivity. And the thing about Islam, what you tend to find as well, if you practice it in accordance to the teaching, it's a brotherhood.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: It's a oneness, it's a we-ness, it's a collective identity, and now you haven't seen your friends for three months and four months and five months...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...and you're not linking them up for prayers or you're not going to a funeral. And funerals a big thing as well...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...a lot of people died, and the restrictions made it difficult to actually bury someone the way you would...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...erm, and, and do the rituals prior to burial as well. So I, I'd, I'd say six and a half, a dozen, in the sense that in one way it kind of gave me more, more structure...

I: Hmm.

R: ...to my faith, that there, there are certain things I used to take for granted that I could easily do, and I'm doing them, not just 'cause I'm at home and it's convenient for me to just pray on time.

I: Hmm.

R: Erm, when I'm at work I have to [unclear] home, rather it's about making time and being...er, and appreciating that I can do certain things at certain times. But then on the other side I was lacking a lot, so I probably, I'd probably gained less, erm, by being in lockdown...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...than I would have, er, had I been out and about, erm, and practising my faith.

I: Uh-huh. So d'you think that's something that would have impacted... Is this something that was felt more widely?

R: Yes.

I: D'you know people who felt similar?

R: Yeah, my dad felt like that, you know, my, my dad prays five times a day, and most of his prayers, the majority of his prayers, three out of five, four out of five tend to be at a Mosque. Even the first prayer is round about four thirty in the morning, five o'clock in the morning, he'll go to pray in a mosque. That wasn't there for him anymore, I could see that was really affecting him, and it was, it was irritating him and he was getting agitated because he couldn't do that. And then there was other things, man, like the Friday prayer is a massive prayer, you know, that, that, that wasn't there as well, that's like a, a congregation prayer, you know, that was missing as well. And I think that was making me feel a bit unsettled in that respect, and there's not much that you could do, you know, you couldn't even walk past a mosque or drive past a mosque, because there was, there's an absence in your life, there's a void. And because of the way the government were dealing with things, and because of uncertainty of Covid, it wasn't even the case of: oh well, I'm looking forward to going back in six months' time or four months' time or five months' time.

I: Uh-huh.

R: It was just a period of unknown.

I: Uh-huh.

R: And I think with humans, when you're in...you're confronted with the unknown...

I: Hmm.

R: ...you know, it, it kind of brings a different side of you out.

I: Hmm.

R: And, you know, there was some conflict at home, it was like there'd be conversations like: oh well, you know, I'll probably be out praying right now. I'd probably be out doing this or that or whatever it may be.

I: Hmm.

R: So you could feel it...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...you could definitely feel it.

I: **And so was there, you alluded to earlier that there was stuff being provided on, maybe online, whatever. Was there...were there ways that, erm, the mosques or, or the mosque that you attend maintained relations with the, the community members?**

R: Erm, so for me I go to a particular institution that's quite progressive in thinking. It's not liberal, it's progressive. So what it tends to do is it applies the teachings of Islam with the current world.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Which is what most mosques don't.

I: **Hmm.**

R: So the, the institution that I go to pray at...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...erm, it's about eight miles from home...

I: **Right.**

R: ...so it's a bit of a trek.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And, and, and, and between that distance of home to that mosque there's probably 50 other mosques.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: But I don't go to them, 'cause I go to that particular one. But that particular one is quite outward facing anyway.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Er, they do a lot of international projects, regional projects, local projects, charities, charity works and local supermarkets, homeless, people, all that kind of stuff.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: So when they started doing the...they essentially did what we did, which is just put everything online.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So their legal clinics, the mental health clinic, their women's clinic, er, their coffee club, all of that was just online...

I: **Right.**

R: ...so just replicating that really.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I've never used any of them particular services, I've never needed to, but they were there at my disposal should I have...should I needed...like, should I need to...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...used them. I don't think I would have used them in hindsight, even when I was going through, you know, the most difficult time.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Like with my dad, it never, it never, it never occurred to me that I could, er, I should reach out to them or use them.

I: **Hmm.**

R: That's probably just me as, as an individual that likes to just deal with things myself...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...which is not often the right way, but them services were there. But having, having said that there's only...it's, it's all about, erm, consumption, right, and it's also the audience, so my dad wouldn't, I don't think, although he's quite religious and he's quite pious actually, in that respect, access those services.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: He wouldn't feel comfortable, he likes that human interaction, you know. This is a guy, for god's sakes, that still uses cash, as opposed to card or contactless, so he's old-school in that way of thinking.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Things need to be tangible for him, right, he needs to speak to you as opposed to you behind a screen.

I: **Yeah.**

R: It doesn't matter if you've got your camera switched on, you know, I think even for a, a, a person of his age in his early 60s technological devices can be quite intimidating as well.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So the very nature of the government just saying, "Oh, do things online."

I: **Yeah.**

R: Or, "Check your test results online." Or "Order a Covid test online,"...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...these...you know, and the amount of information that you've put forward in personal information...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and, and, and, and, and dates and times and locations and doctors notes and NHS number, is overwhelming...

I: Yeah.

R: ...for individuals who, you know, have never, ever needed to use a technological device for work, let alone for pleasure.

I: Hmm.

R: Whereas for me it was different. So there were service and provisions by certain institutions, but for the most part there weren't because they just didn't have the infrastructure.

I: Yeah.

R: Big mosques will...

I: Yeah.

R: ...mosques that, er, have a capacity of a thousand will naturally have other things that they can use their prayer hall for at different times. You know, it makes no sense of having a mega mosque that can accommodate 3,000 people, if you've got only five times in a day where you pray. What about the other 12 hours or 13 hours that the building will be open for, right?

I: Uh-huh.

R: So, yeah, you will have those online things, and you'll have those activities and events that outside people come into. But if you've got these house-converted mosques, for example, in inner city areas...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...and, and they're ran by individuals who are from my dad's generation, who are very paper...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...admin, as opposed to online tech-driven, you're not gonna get that support...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...that the government were thinking that everyone can just do...

I: Yeah.

R: ...er, overnight.

I: Yeah. Let's talk about your dad then. So...and, erm, so you, you initially were ill early, very early on?

R: Yes.

I: And so how, how bad was that physically?

R: So I, erm, I was still working...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...I was still working, like, I recall, I didn't take no time off. I initially thought I, you know, came down...was run down. I, I, I was telling you earlier on that January I felt burnt-out...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and I thought by February I was just shutting down, my body was shutting down, so I was just blaming it on just life really...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...everything that's going on in my life. Erm, but then it, it, it came to a point where I started to realise, you know, I'd like to think that I'm a physically active guy, you know, I go to the gym, I work out, I've got, I've got some strength. But the, the point that I got quite worried was when I was finding it extremely difficult to open a Lucozade bottle, I just didn't have the strength to open a Lucozade bottle. So forget get out of bed, I couldn't get out of bed, you know, er, I had this metallic taste in my mouth, and that was quite odd. And I was just thinking while going through them things, what did I eat the day before and the day before that? And it was all food that was, you know, cooked at home or I made or was made for me because I was ill.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And I just, I just, I just thought I was run down, but then I was getting, you know, erm, cramp, I was just feeling some tightness and feeling sore all over. But the fact that I couldn't open the Lucozade cap...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...like literally this, that was concerning for me.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So...and then I got better.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And then I just got better. Erm, colleagues got in touch, erm, well, colleague got in touch...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...and, erm, he never heard from me and he got a bit concerned, but I just said to him afterwards, "Look, just probably run down to the extent where my body's just saying, you need some rest," and I left it at that really.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And then a month later we were in lockdown.

I: **Yeah, yeah. So how was it when your dad got it, because...**

R: Hmm.

I: **...that's...we talked...you touched upon it as obviously one of the main things that you were...that when we initially started the conversation it was the first thing you alluded to, in terms of your anxieties and concerns?**

R: Yeah, so my dad, erm, got Covid February 2021, we were in our third lockdown then. Er, he had been only...when I say only, this country was like three-and-a-half months in the vaccine rollout...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...the first dose. And I was convincing him leading up to him falling ill to get the vaccine. And, again, there was a lot of whispers in the community and a lot of discussions about the vaccine coming out, erm, and how quick it's been rollout.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And there was a scientific discussion about it, how even just kind of getting the ethics of...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...this particular vaccine would take months, if not years, in the medical field, then how has it been just given like that? And how has a vaccine been approved? And all them kind of conversations.

I: **Uh-huh, uh-huh.**

R: But finally when I did manage to convince my parents to get the vaccine, three days before they were due to get it both caught Covid. Both caught Covid, dad got it from mum, mum was fine, then to begin with he got it, erm, he got it from work of course.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Erm, we did the track and trace and he wasn't...he was just travelling to work and back, work and back, work and back, so he got it either at work or on his way to work...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...something like that. I was working from home. And, erm he fell ill, and then we had to self-isolate, and at that point I think he realised its seriousness...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...and, erm, it got to a point where three, four days in they weren't improving, and at that time I was just reading stuff online, and apparently after the fourth day that's when you're at your worst, and then it goes downhill, or something like that. You know, these kind of things, we check online, you look at Google, you look at the NHS website, because you can't get through to the GPs or, you know, there's not much else that you can do, except for just check online.

I: **Hmm.**

R: And then, erm, while they were self-isolating, I think he started developing pneumonia, so my mum was saying...'cause I was video-calling them from the next room, it was crazy, man.

I: **Yeah.**

R: When you just think about these things, it's crazy...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...of how life was once. And, erm, I video-called, and they're in the next room, and you could hear the water, erm, entering his lungs, you could hear the gurgling, and, and it's just crazy, it's just such a distinct sound, man. It's like, it's like when you, erm, it's like when you just take the plug out the sink, kind of thing, and you hear that noise, and that, that was coming up and going into his lungs. And then a day had passed after hearing that initial noise, but during that period I was convincing him that the best place for him to be at, at right now is the hospital.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And I knew he was going to resist, and I knew he was going to say no, because, I don't mean to stereotype, but one of the things that we have in the Asian community is that you only go to the hospital two reason, one to give birth and two to die.

I: **Right.**

R: It's as simple as that really, because if you think about...giving birth, nothing could happen in the hospital realistically speaking, right...

I: **Hmm, hmm, hmm.**

R: ...so there's always that kind of fear and that dread. And even just, you know, just kind of whispers and more panics about: oh, if you go, and this will happen, and all that kind of stuff. So then, erm, I think it was the Wednesday night I, erm, called 111, and then I had to go through like, a 30-minute conversation about his symptoms, and then an ambulance came.

I: **Hmm.**

R: And at that time there was no contact between me and him, no physical contact, so I couldn't see them, they couldn't see me, because of the, of the rules...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...of the government rules, right. We, we live in the same house, but we can't see each other, and then, you know, visibly he looked very frail. Mum was okay, mum was, mum was ill, mum was ill, mum had Covid, it was bad, but it wasn't to the extent where she needed to be hospitalised. And, erm, I didn't realise he was having breathing issues...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...so alongside the pneumonia and the cold he was having breathing issues, and we didn't have any of these, you know, O2 measures...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...or anything like that. Erm, you know, the ambulance came and they did their ECGs and stuff like that, and then they, they did the oxygen saturation levels, and they realised that it was below 96, below 90, they were saying 80. And they were concerned at that point, they were like, "Look, you need to go."

I: **Yeah.**

R: "Need to go right now." And then even then he was unwilling to leave. And I think a discussion took place afterwards, like 30 to 35 minutes of me just convincing him, speaking to him in English, speaking to him in Bengali...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...telling him, "Look, this is the right thing to do." And, and, you know, I had to say things like, "Look, if I was in your situation right now, I'd go."

I: **Hmm.**

R: And I said, "Look, you've got nothing to lose, you speak fluent English," you know, "you can use your phone, and you can communicate with the nurse, they're gonna look after you, that's what they're there for, they're trained." But at that point, they had...they didn't have the remedy, he kept on asking, "What's the remedy?"

I: Yeah.

R: And the paramedics couldn't say that they had a remedy for him.

I: Yeah.

R: And then I said, "Look, I know nothing about the, er, anatomy or the physiology of someone that's going through what you're going through. But I could hear some fluid building up somewhere, so I think you've got more than Covid right now." 'Cause I didn't wanna say pneumonia in front of my mum...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...'cause that would worry her and scare her, because of previous experiences in family. So he went, he got ready, it took him 10 minutes to get down the stairs, one flight of stairs because he was so weak and so frail, and then, erm, he went to the hospital. And I think that night I fell asleep afterwards, I was just tired, I was drained...

I: Hmm.

R: ...'cause you have to understand they were self-isolating for, like, Saturday, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday – five full days I was running around...

I: Yeah.

R: ...up and down.

I: Yeah.

R: You know, cooking, cleaning, paying the bills. I'm the only child by the way as well...

I: Yeah, okay, right.

R: ...right, so I'm the only child, so I've got no external brother or sister support, cousins or extended family or whatever it may be, so there's no one. No one could help you at that time as well, 'cause of Covid, right?

I: No.

R: So no one's gonna exactly come down and knock on your door and say, "Look, I can just chip in now for like two days and, you know, get some sleep," it didn't work like that.

I: Yeah.

R: So, erm, I did all of that. And then, erm, he was at hospital and then, you know, they called me and they were like, "His oxygen saturation levels have gone to, like, 60% now. 50% now." And I'm like at that point thinking, "Well, you know, why on earth is he there then?"

I: Yeah.

R: Like, if he, if he keeps on going down, he would have been better off just staying at home, but then, you know, you don't, you don't...you tend to become quite defensive and critical. But, you know, I'm not looking at the big picture, I'm looking...he...I'm not even seeing it as the fact that, if he was at home, he'd probably be dead.

I: Hmm. Yeah, yeah.

R: D'you get what I'm trying to say?

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: So it was tough. And, erm, I have to give it to the NHS though, while he was at hospital, the communication was very strong.

I: Yeah.

R: It wasn't necessarily the most pleasant, in terms of the information that they're exchanging, or some things that they were doing at some times, but you could always get through to them...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...which was good. So then, erm, yeah, he was, he was there for like three-and-a-half weeks, man.

I: Right.

R: Three-and-a-half weeks, Covid, pneumonia, pumping steroids, went to the hospital, 11½ stones, came back at seven. Had to learn how to walk again. You know, aged overnight, man. He was a young 60-year-old, now he looks like a old 70-year old.

I: Yeah.

R: So he's got long-Covid.

I: Yeah.

R: So he's got, you know, scar tissue, he's got Covid. And then on top of that you're, you're having to also be at home, and mum's isolating as well at this point still, so her test has come back still positive, so she's extending her stay self-isolating, and all that. And then I'm not telling her that he's got pneumonia at this point...

I: Yeah.

R: ...so I'm just keeping that bit to myself, I'm just saying, "Look, he's got Covid, he's got breathing issues, and that's it."

I: Uh-huh.

R: And, yeah, that was...things happening between in the hospital, I don't know how much of that you need to know for the sake of this research.

I: No, no, it's up to you, it's up to you.

R: I think, you know, I think, you know, he, he had for the most part an experience that was good, because he's still alive.

I: Yeah.

R: Erm, but there were other times where, you know, he was, he was clearly struggling, you know, I think the configuration of the hospital settings weren't good for someone that was going through Covid, he witnessed death. He witnessed a woman die in front of him.

I: Right.

R: Who was perfectly able and happy and chatty 10 minutes before she died.

I: Right.

R: And he was feeling some resent towards her, he was saying, because he was like, "Well, what on earth are you doing here. I've, I've got breathing issues, and I've got lung-Covid."

I: Hmm.

R: You know, "What are you doing here?" And then she was like, "Well, I've got Covid too." But she looked perfectly able, and then she just died in front of him 10 minutes later. They took the body 12-hours later, so he, he, he had to just see her dead there. But because he was in so much pain he couldn't turn over. And there was, there was a battle between...I think my relationship with him, rather than it becoming father and son, it became quite, extremely argumentative...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...on the phone, phone calls. They were like heated conversations, you know, he, he...I, I, I could see then and I could see now where he was coming from, so I don't hold it against him.

I: Uh-huh.

R: But, you know, he, he was lying on his back, and, and the doctors were saying that the big portion of your lungs is at the back...

I: Yeah.

R: ...and therefore if you lie on your stomach, you won't compress your lungs. But it was difficult for him to breathe and he had...he was wired up, and all that kind of stuff. So I'd call him and I'd say to him, "Look, the doctors are kindly telling you to do this." And he'd be like, you know, "They don't know what they're on about. They're putting me through pain," and this that and the other, all that kind of stuff. "I wanna come home." And then I'd have to like kind of manage him, and I'd say...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ..."Look, whatever happens in two days' time, I'll come and pick you up," things like that, just to kind of keep him going.

I: Hmm.

R: Kind of keep him going, and then eventually started asking for food, which was good.

I: Yeah.

R: 'Cause I think he was sick and tired of hospital food, so he would ask for food, so, you know, I'd take him foods and stuff. And mind he'd ask for the most exotic fruit that there could be.

I: [Laughter].

R: Literally, like, you couldn't even make this up. Like, he'd, he'd ask for star fruit, like sea urchins, or something like that, man.

I: [Laughter].

R: So, so honestly, like caviar or something, like things that weren't available in, in inner city Handsworth, and literally you'd be going up and down the city trying to look for them, or making phone calls, like jackfruit, and all that kind of stuff.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: Like, I guess, you know, he needs to eat, and, and, and I tried to provide that to the best of my, erm, my abilities and, you know, it was, it was a struggle. But then what happened – and I think this may be interesting for your research – is, erm, towards the end he didn't wanna leave hospital.

I: **Okay.**

R: So at one point, you know, it, it was the first few days I couldn't get much out of him, then, then, then, erm, then afterwards, you know, for one week he accepted that he had to be at the hospital. Then I think it was just getting terrible for him and, and the doctors said, "Look brace yourself now, we're gonna call you at any given point, you may need to come down." 'Cause they weren't letting us see him...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...so I never saw him for that, for that period of time, I just dropped the food outside, and then they'd collect it and they'd take it to him to ward. And they were like, "Look, if you've got private blocked on your phone, I suggest you unblock it, 'cause the next 48, 72 hours are very critical." So I heard that twice, and that was difficult for me to take on board.

I: **Yeah, of course.**

R: Faith came into this a lot as well.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Faith came in, and I speak to you about that in bit, faith came in a lot into that. And, erm, erm, erm don't, don't forget I'm withholding this information from mum.

I: **Yeah.**

R: She's self-isolating, so she doesn't know what's going on.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I think she self-isolated for another 15 days before...self-isolated for like 25 days or something like that, in total, so I'm dealing with that. And, erm, then it came to a point where he got better and he was more clear, you could hear what he was saying, even if he had his mask on.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Then they were weaning him off the oxygen, and when they weaned him off the oxygen, I think they wanted to basically say, "Look, you can go home now 'cause you don't need the oxygen." But then he was refusing to go home.

I: **Right.**

R: Spoke to a consultant then, and I said, "Look, I think it is definitely affecting him psychologically now."

I: **Yeah.**

R: "He's been, he's been here for like three and a bit weeks, you can't just tell him he can go home now because you've weaned him off the oxygen.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Cannot you not give a few...they're like, "Look, I'm just gonna be straight with you, he said it's an administrative thing, as well as a health thing. He doesn't need oxygen right now. He doesn't really need our resources and our instruments to kind of keep him going. He can come home."

I: **Yeah.**

R: And then, erm, it was the Thursday and I don't know, somehow I convinced...well, I, I, I, I, I, I, I, I said to them, "Look, we haven't got...and we didn't have the house sorted out by then, because there was a, there was a, erm, an organisation, a private company that would come, that came and gave us bed rails and, erm, erm, erm, like a bath, a seat lever thing as well, that would go up and down for him.

I: **Uh-huh, uh-huh.**

R: Like, just kind of adjustments at home, like a toilet chair, and all that kind of stuff...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...because he needed it right. And, "Look, that hasn't come through yet. Can you wait for that to come through?" So they gave us the weekend, and then he came the Monday.

I: **Right.**

R: Yeah.

I: **And, and, and how was that in terms of, did that impact upon...maybe this is off track, but d'you think that experience and going through it as a family had an effect on how you related with each other?**

R: Well, in...well, now, no, it's, it's brought us closer and, and, and we're stronger than ever before. But at that time what family, you're doing this all by yourself...

I: **Right.**

R: ...so to speak.

I: **Right.**

R: You're doing this all by yourself, as in, I'm talking about myself.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Taking on all the responsibilities, having to open up letters just to, you know, see if you're on top of bills.

I: **Right.**

R: You know. Put, putting things under, under my name, the things that I can put under my name. Things that I can't put under my name I'm putting a bank transfer to my dad's account just to make sure that the money's there, just for the direct debits.

I: **Right.**

R: You're not thinking about family, you're just thinking about keeping afloat...

I: **Yeah, yeah.**

R: ...it's as simple as that. 'Cause like...'cause the configuration of this world is as follows, life goes on.

I: Yeah, well, you touch upon economic impacts there, or managing, well, managing economic stuff. Do you have friends or people in your networks who were impacted economically because of the, the impact of the pandemic?

R: Yes. So I was able to kind of sustain my family because of, you know, my work being online, I wasn't on furlough or anything like that...

I: Yeah.

R: ...the company never shut down. But there's a lot of, a lot of my friends had to, erm...they either lost their jobs, went on furlough, and although some form of income was coming in, every day there was this kind of, what they were going through,

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...they were worried about whether or not they need to apply for jobs.

I: Uh-huh.

R: If they need to move, whether or not they've got some stability at work. So different, different friends were telling me different things about how work was going for them.

I: Uh-huh.

R: That's whenever I'd communicate with them. Some had businesses.

I: Yeah.

R: Some had businesses as well, and I don't know to what extent I'm allowed to speak about this but, you know, some businesses you don't show everything on the books, and all of a sudden now you're in the middle of a pandemic, and the government are giving money away, and you can't claim for it.

I: Yeah.

R: That's the reality.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: You know, I'm not...I, I'm, I'm not saying this with, with the intention of incriminating anyone, but that's how...

I: No, of course.

R: ...some, some, some, some services work. Like the catering industry, for example...

I: Yeah.

R: ...whatever it may be, you know. Whatever you show, yeah, you, you can get money for that. But anything that you get cash in hand it's very difficult for you to show, if you...it's not in the accounts.

I: Yeah.

R: Right, so there was them kind of struggles.

I: Yeah.

R: Erm, I had some friends as well that, erm, were three, four months into starting up their business...

I: Wow.

R: ...and they couldn't get government money, because they weren't eligible for it.

I: Yeah.

R: So that was a massive hit. Erm, I've got one friend, a very good close friend of mine, er, he's got a chain of nurseries.

I: Uh-huh.

R: So, for him, he's quite...you know, philanthropy runs in his blood, so he wasn't necessarily just worried about keeping the nursery afloat, but also what he could do for pupils as well, like giving laptop, books and all that kind of stuff away as well, so he had them. So then, then, then he had some of my community friends as well that work as, erm, you know, erm, youth workers, have social enterprises, and one of them ended up giving away, not giving away, but giving away space in his youth centre to make it a Covid vaccination centre.

I: Yeah.

R: And that helped a lot of the Bangladeshi community take the first vaccine...

I: Yeah.

R: ...because of him, just solely because of him. Because he was a familiar face...

I: Yeah.

R: ...a voice of reason and someone the community trusted.

I: Yeah.

R: Literally, like, he got hundreds if not probably one or two thousand people vaccinated.

I: Right.

R: People that would, would not have been vaccinated, er, if it was...if it wasn't for his initiative.

I: Yeah.

R: *[Over speaking]*. That was a financial strain on him though.

I: ...yeah,

R: Give that space away.

I: Yes, yeah, yeah.

R: You know.

I: Yeah. But with the...I mean, you know, talk about organisations closing and stuff like that, was the character of, of the wider sort of character of organisations around the

community, did that change as we went in and out of lockdown, and you come out and see the various certain places no longer existing. How was that, how did that look...?

R: *[Over speaking]*. So, in the first lockdown in the main high street, erm, there was some shops, some supermarkets that increased their prices...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...people weren't happy with that, man. People weren't happy with that, and even in the present day, two years later, people still have boycotted those shops.

I: **Right.**

R: You have to understand these kind of communities, when they hold onto something, man, they will hold onto it until the cows come home. So them, them, them businesses suffered considerably, because they essentially are viewed by people as exploiters.

I: **Were those companies led by members of the community? Or were they bigger...were they bigger...?**

R: *[Over speaking]*. No, the business owners, yeah, they're nothing to do with the community...

I: *[Over speaking]*. **Okay.**

R: ...initiatives, just businessmen increasing their prices...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...independent business, whatever it may be. No, you can see from their perspective that they have to stay afloat, but it got to the extent where, like, the council got involved and, you know, Trading Standards and all that got, got involved as well, because with my community what you tend to find as well is a lot of people, you've got pockets of people that are quite savvy...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...when it comes to the legal side of things as well. So if you do, do end up doing anything unethical or incriminating, you will get exposed in that respect.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: In terms of other businesses, I'm starting to see...I'm, I'm seeing more businesses open during the pandemic than actually closing...

I: **Right,**

R: ...which is strange.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Right. Erm, so there's, there's more pop-up shops, dark kitchens.

I: **Okay.**

R: So rather than having a restaurant, individuals are hiring out space, dark kitchen, takeaway service only.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So people are kind of becoming or maintaining the entrepreneurship during lockdown.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm erm, erm, smash burger stands...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...you name it, all them kind of, er, calculated risks, so to speak, whereby you can set something up get the safe standards get the insurance policies whatever it may be and if you does go bust you don't lose much...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...because you're, you're not tied into a major lease or have you know a 12-month contract, it's something rolling really.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So...at the minimum you just sign sign months. So I'm actually seeing a lot of people taking advantage of Covid, especially the takeaway services, because people are just eating at home really.

I: **Yeah, yes, yeah. So in the times where things were locked down, I'm guessing the vulnerable members of the community older members of the community are sometimes living alone or with limited contact with other people. And so were there initiatives that were taken forward by mosques or other community organisations which were looking to address the needs of individuals who were gonna find the lockdowns especially challenging because of their living circumstances?**

R: I only know about my mosque that I go to, they were, they're offering like a food service.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Tin foods.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, and that was kind of an extension of the homeless project that they've got going on, so it was just a transfer really. Er, in terms of other mosques, I think some mosque spaces were used to provide hot meals with the NHS.

I: **Okay.**

R: Erm, but nothing for local citizens though.

I: **Okay.**

R: It was more for the NHS or, erm, if it was for the public, it would be tin food...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...them initiatives.

I: **And that's open to the...that's...initiative to address homelessness...?**

R: *[Over speaking]*. Yes, yes. Yeah, that was open across...

I: (Coughs).

R: ...a friend of mine again who has a social enterprise, remember him sending pictures in the Whatsapp group with a message, and he was just saying, "Look, whoever you've got in your contact list, even if they're outside of Birmingham, just forward it on."

I: Right.

R: And it was just dried food, pot noodles and stuff, erm, drink sachets that you can mix to make flavoured drinks, or whatever it may be, that they could pick up from his place providing that they adhered to social distancing guidelines at that time.

I: Yeah.

R: That was it really.

I: And was through, was that through a mosque or another organisation?

R: No, that was through, erm, a community initiative.

I: Okay. So were there other organisations that were doing things like befriending services or, erm, other things you were aware of?

R: No, no. No, just mosque that I know and the friend that I know, that's it really. A lot of the focus is on the NHS, man, feeding the NHS. No, no intention to disrespect, but hot foods and, you know, helping the NHS, there's a massive push and drive like. Even in my own family before my parents got...like, you know, Covid, one, one of the kind of recurring conversations I'd hear every other day was, look this person is now saying that they've given 20 hot meals to the NHS.

I: Uh-huh.

R: 30 hot meals to the NHS and whatever it may be. So a lot of, lot of attention was heading towards that way, it wasn't heading towards the community.

I: Right. So on, so on that note then what, what is the...what d'you think the general perspective was in terms of, the NHS in terms of how they responded to the needs of the community in the context of the pandemic? Also national leadership and initiatives that were taken on that level. But can you give us an insight on each in terms of the community perspectives on how each responded to the needs of the community?

R: I think the community are always sceptical of the NHS...

I: Okay.

R: ...to begin with. So the NHS could offer the community the world, and then some, the community would still have questions, it's always been a thing. Erm, this is why you've got a low intake or an uptake, I should say, of school children taking the meningitis jab.

I: Right.

R: Because parents in the Asian community are suspect of what's inside those jabs.

I: Right.

R: It's always been the case, even when I was a young kid, I'd be pulled out of school that day...

I: Right.

R: ...to avoid taking that jab, right. Erm, when it comes to hospital appointments, there's no privacy in the Asian community, man, like a family member will always go with you even if they're having to wait outside, just in case what may, what may come out of that. So the NHS cannot offer the communities that I'm from a lot, in terms of reassurances or even medical care, but there'll always be that kind of uncertainty. But I think the pandemic has made a lot of the older generation appreciate the NHS for what it is, which is a national health service, and it's there to help and provide for its citizens on a medical level and beyond. And, erm, so that's changing, that understanding's changing, people are becoming more receptive and embracing the NHS. My dad, you know, can't thank them enough...

I: Yeah.

R: ...erm, but he always, he still has, he's still a bit dubious of certain things, based on his own experiences, but he always puts it down to every organisation will have its limitations or challenges or whatever it may be.

I: Hmm.

R: But on, on a government level, you know, it's hard to say on a government level, because the community that I'm from won't watch stuff like PMQ, they won't listen to Boris' announcements.

I: Yeah.

R: They won't, you know, erm, listen to the conferences that Chris Whitty holds, okay, for several reasons. First of all they may not fully understand, er, there's a language barrier there. Second of all, it may not fit with their type of media consumption. So what tends to happen is when they do find out information that the government has put out, it's through a secondary source...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...and that gets misconstrued all the time, you know. So that's, that's, that's what the issue is. But I've noticed, and, and, and, and speaking to friends, they've also told me that their parents are more switched on when it comes to TV announcements, the five o'clock ones or eight o'clock ones, whatever it may be.

I: Hmm.

R: But they just...they have...you know, like, like most of us I suppose, they've got more answers, sorry, more questions than answers...

I: Yeah.

R: ...in that respect. I think generally the community feel that they've been failed by the government.

I: Yeah.

R: Even though that, you know, I've got some friends that are poster boys, they feel as though they've...

I: [Laughter].

R: ...you know, even they feel as though they've been somewhat let down by Boris. God only knows why.

I: Yeah.

R: But, you know, you've got that though, you've got that...and, and, and it's just only going to get worse over time with all these, you know, erm, these releases of new information of what happened during the first lockdown, the second lockdown or the third lockdown or...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...some of the, you know, parties or whatever they were having at 10 Downing Street.

I: **Yeah. What about mask wearing, hand washing, social distancing, How was that broadly received and, and later on, you know, appraised by, erm, you know, kind of within the community?**

R: Erm, mask wearing, erm, hand sanitising...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...I think it's embraced by the community, majority of individuals don't have an issue with that. I think some find it difficult to have a mask on for a certain period of time, but as far as cooperating with what the government have to say, they're more than happy to do so.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Erm, they're happy to do so, and they're happy to follow guidelines and all that kind of stuff. So the issue is, even, even those that are kind of the conspiracy theorist of does this thing exist? Or where is it coming from? Or is it actually from China, or wherever it may be? Or is it something completely, they'll still adhere to, you know, the face coverings and the hand washing, or the sanitisation of hands in public spaces, or whatever it may be.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: There's no issue there.

I: **So what's your, your kind of...I guess what's your view on some of the kind of...the, the more conspiracy end of the spectrum? And what do you think are some of the things that might have been circulating within the community...**

R: Hmm.

I: **...you know, on the conspiracy side of the spectrum?**

R: Let me just think about that for a second, interesting question. I think one would be the fact that the, the people that are dying, how many government politicians have died as a result of Covid?

I: **Okay.**

R: There's always comparison about them and us, the other, so to speak, so all those that are dying, they're dying from...you know, inner city community areas, the elderly, erm, you know. Even, even, even when Boris Johnson had Covid and was hospitalised, I don't think the...some, some parts of the community would believe that to be true, if I'm honest, they saw it as propaganda.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, largely because of the things that he did before and after...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...which didn't correlate with someone having Covid...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...you know, it was more of a behavioural thing. The, the more observant on the individual's behaviours as opposed to what they, what they're just saying, it's the actions, erm, following the message. Erm, I'm just trying to think. I, I can tell you one, for example...

I: **(Coughs).**

R: ...that really rattled the whole Muslim community, across the country perhaps.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Which is...let me, let me just do the maths. First lockdown, 2020 March. Ramadan May. Eid June...August. Second lockdown.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Is a localised lockdown.

I: **Okay.**

R: So, erm, they're just closing certain cities based on infection rates, or whatever it may be.

I: **[Over speaking]. Yeah, yeah.**

R: And I think the day before Eid the government tightened measures in Manchester...

I: **Right, right.**

R: ...and that really annoyed a lot of people.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Because there were few of the celebrations that happened beforehand, and there was no sign of tightening lockdown rules or whatever it may be.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And then, I think, there was...then, I think then, then several months later, during Christmas, I think that's when people were having a bit of a huff and a puff in the, er, in, in some, some of the communities, the Muslim community especially. Saying that why is it for Eid, the day before Eid a lockdown was put in place without any notice, because people were under the impression that if a lockdown were to be announced, there'd be a few days for people to adjust...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and then the lockdown would kick-start. But that was a 24-hour, er, notice only, and people were a bit annoyed with that.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So then I think people felt as though the, erm, the government were, was taking liberty with, with Christmas...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...but then obviously Christmas got cancelled in 2020 as well, if you remember in that...

I: **[Over speaking]. Yeah, yeah, yeah.**

R: ...Boris, Boris Johnson was under pressure...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...er, of, of, of household mixing, and I think...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...initially eight or six, and then he just reduced it, no mixing at all, or whatever it may be.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So that, that's what rattled a lot of people, because it was like, people seeing it as one rule for them and another rule for others...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...especially with minority communities.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: So I think that's probably a point of contention where everyone started to get rattled, because the first lockdown people weren't really I don't think...people I think just, I think...just this generic frustration with information...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...about when is this thing gonna end, erm, what's happening, what's happening moving forward, when are things going to open? Then the localised lockdown started becoming a bit of an irritant...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...because it started off with this impression of certain cities will be lockdown, but then it ended up being all of the cities except for London and Liverpool.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And I think that's when people started to get frustrated with: oh well it's one rule for one major city another rule for another major city so the more north you go the more restrictions there are...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...because of the population increasing in terms of minority ethnics.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And down south, not necessary the case, especially in the coastal areas, everything's open, but there's no...there's nothing there for, you know, the Muslim community or the south Asian communities or whatever it maybe. And then I think the final lockdown, that's when everybody lost hope in the government.

I: Yeah.

R: So to speak.

I: Yeah.

R: That's when individuals started getting irritated even mask wearing although I said earlier on people were quite compliant just don't care really afterwards.

I: Yeah.

R: Because all these fines and all these warnings and all these things people were, were just disinterested by then and they just lost complete faith in the government. And I think that's quite...that's synonymous to how people are feeling right now in our communities.

I: Hmm. What about vaccine uptake as a, you know, the, the ultimate, I guess, dividing factor in a lot of, erm, a lot of people's views on government responses. Erm, not so much uptake, but maybe perspectives on, on vaccines. What, what was your view? I mean, you talk about convincing your dad to have the vaccine, so, I mean, what's your view and also your experience?

R: Yeah, erm, what really hit me with the vaccine was I wasn't really concerned about myself, I don't know why, I was more concerned about people around me. And, therefore, I was sold on the vaccine idea as soon as I had, you know, not just taking the vaccine to protect yourself, you're taking the vaccine to protect others.

I: Yeah.

R: That sold me, there was nothing else behind it. You know, check the research, the science behind it of how they go about making the vaccine, and naturally I've got this curiosity as an individual who's always thinking about how things are produced.

I: Uh-huh.

R: So looking at the protein, the spike protein and what's injected and how it's done and all, all them kind of thing. My assessment was whether I get Pfizer or AstraZeneca, that was my worry. You know, because of Pfizer having more of a higher efficacy...

I: Yeah.

R: ...and, erm, all, and all that kind of stuff. Erm, I think that the uptake is low still...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...sadly still low. I mean, the fact that it took me a week and a few confrontations with my dad to convince him to take the jab, just goes to show that, you know, it, it was a fight in my own circle.

I: Uh-huh.

R: And then, you know, I've got friends that still haven't taken the first dose.

I: Yeah.

R: I mean, the example I gave about a friend of mine giving his community centre to, erm, individuals to be vaccinated, he, himself, hasn't even taken the first dose. So then, so then, you know, he frustrates me. It just really irritates me.

I: ...what...is it? Concerns about...

R: With women...

I: ...right.

R: ...with women I'd say they're worried about their fertility.

I: Yeah.

R: And it doesn't help that you've got certain influential women in our community that are talking about fertility issues and menstrual cycle issues.

I: Uh-huh, yeah.

R: There's no science behind it.

I: Yeah.

R: Again, it's just the consumption of news.

I: Yeah.

R: These individuals are more than happy to listen to someone that's got, er, er, you know, a respectable amount of social media following instead of just scientific evidence.

I: Yeah.

R: It's, it's a frustrating thing. It's, it's, it's an endemic issue in, in my community or the community, communities surrounding mine. Erm, so you've got that for the women. For the, for the men I think they're worried about stuff like blood clots.

I: Yeah.

R: Erm, again, probably I think there's this worry about fertility. But then coming back to my point that I made earlier on, some parts of the south Asian community have always been, er, reluctant to take vaccinations, be it mandatory or otherwise.

I: Uh-huh.

R: The only vaccination that they're prepared to take are the ones that you need to go to another country, honestly...

I: Right.

R: ...truth be told.

I: Uh-huh.

R: It's because they've got no choice but to take it, right. Example that I gave you about, erm, meningitis jabs, and all that kind of stuff...

I: Yeah.

R: ...the kids get pulled out of school.

I: Yeah.

R: That's been the mindset for a very long time, and it's not exclusive to the south Asian community even, erm, the Caribbean community as well tend to be quite circumspect of vaccinations, and stuff like that.

I: **Yeah.**

R: But, again, it comes back to my point. Sorry, erm, probably going over time...

I: **No, it's absolutely fine.**

R: ...considerably, so you've got a lot to transcribe.

I: **That's fine.**

R: But, what I find is, erm, against the education behind it, which the government lacks, which authorities lack in this country, you cannot have – erm, and this isn't...this, this will come across extremely racialised – a white representative, well, it's not, it's not even a white representative, it's a white person in a position of power speaking to a constituency that he cannot relate to at all by no means at all.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And that they cannot relate to him whatsoever...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...and that's a problem. I remember one of the things that actually got my dad thinking about Covid more seriously was a BBC, erm, snippet of a GP talking about Covid in Bengali, sold it.

I: **Right.**

R: Sold it.

I: **Yeah.**

R: It was like, well, now I can do my own research and check it online. Who is he? I just so happen to have his number.

I: **Right.**

R: Er, you know, a, a personal friend of mine called him, he called back on another day, he was busy that same day, spoke to my dad.

I: **Right.**

R: That's it really.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Representation, man.

I: **When you talk about, well, you brought racialised dynamics into things, and I guess it's, erm, another way of exploring that would be to look at the, the impact on the...or not impact on community, but between communities. Did you perceive any exacerbation of already pre-existing tensions or...?**

R: *[Over speaking]*. Yeah.

I: ...yeah.

R: Yeah, I, I, I, yeah. Erm, well, I, I saw it online, I saw it online.

I: Right.

R: I'm, I'm very low key online, but I, I saw it online of how, you know, the, the, the Muslim community are causing more harm than good.

I: Uh-huh.

R: Erm, there was, there was a chain message that was forwarded and a few screenshots forwarded, er, from, from a group to me about individual talking about how, you know Asians live in, er, multi-generational households and that, in itself, is causing more harm than good. Because you've got the elderly that are, you know, at a vulnerable position and, you know, you've got individuals going out and about and that's kind of infecting more people. This was before the first vaccination by the way...

I: Yeah.

R: ...first rollout, so you had that, erm, definitely 100%. But at the same time, curbing this, I remember one particular talk that took place online which was trying to get people to understand that although it's important to be religious and to have a faith-based background, essentially the imam was saying that God has placed people in certain positions as a voice of not only reason, but also for help.

I: Hmm.

R: So I think the point that he was trying to make was that – let me think about this, because I don't want to manipulate the words.

I: Uh-huh.

R: So the, the saying essentially, if I can paraphrase it is, "go to the person with knowledge".

I: Uh-huh.

R: Okay, so seek knowledge from the person that has the wisdom. And it was the case of, if the medics are saying that this is beneficial for you...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...who are you to say no?

I: Uh-huh.

R: Because in essence if you end up going against what the medics are saying, and they end up being right, then in essence what you're doing is more harm than good. Not only on, erm, erm, a health level, but also on a spiritual level, because essentially he was kind of trying to say along the lines of suicide.

I: Right.

R: So say, for example, you know that there's a vaccine there, there's something there to help cure this illness or this disease, because he was making references to plagues that were happening during the period of when Islam started.

I: Uh-huh.

R: And these are versus that are in the *Qur'an* about plagues, and all that kind of stuff. So about, you know, thousands of people being wiped and killed because of an illness that, that, that spread across, you know, the Arab peninsular. So he's making reference to that, but he's bringing it to the present day, and he's...and, and that, I think that kind of helped people understand that if there was a person of knowledge or wisdom and there's something there for you, and you reject it, then it's a form of suicide in a sense, which is forbidden in Islam, right?

I: Uh-huh.

R: So there was a very...he said it in a more articulate way, of course.

I: Hmm.

R: But again, right, it comes back to the accessibility of that information and the consumption. My dad never listened to it.

I: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

R: Simple as I did.

I: Yeah.

R: You know, he just kind of consolidated my thoughts and reaffirmed what I was thinking about with the vaccine, that when it does come out we'll take it.

I: Yeah.

R: But with others, again, they won't have access to XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath], you know, they may not...they may find it difficult to understand the English speakers.

I: Yeah.

R: And they may find it difficult to kind of comprehend the sermons that take place, 'cause the sermons that take place in these household mosques that are being converted, they tend to be quite *Qur'anic*.

I: Yeah.

R: So they just get a snip of the *Qur'an*, and then talk about something that happened 1400 years ago.

I: Uh-huh.

R: Whereas, XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] a bit more progressive and dynamic in its thinking...

I: (Coughs).

R: ...so it'll take a snippet that happened 1400 years ago, but then he will kind of apply it within the context of real world now.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: That's the difference.

I: Yeah. So d'you think...I mean, in, in terms of returning to thinking about kind of inter-community relations, was there any kind of tension within and between minority ethnic communities in and around Handsworth? Is there anything to do with... you kind of alluded to things having 'settled' in recent years anyway?

R: Hmm. No, no, I don't think...I think, I think my community is quite strong.

I: Hmm.

R: I think it's quite strong, I think. Erm, those tensions that we once had about 20, 30 years ago, they're no longer there now.

I: Hmm.

R: Primarily because the people are no longer there.

I: Right.

R: Like I said to you, there's been an influx of eastern European coming in and...

I: Right.

R: ...erm, erm, residing in Handsworth, erm, renting out properties.

I: Hmm.

R: So a lot of, a lot...Handsworth is not what it used to be once, it's changing, 'cause, I mean, I've...even I'm thinking about moving out of Handsworth and putting my house to rent.

I: Uh-huh.

R: So I'm doing essentially what the Indian community did 20 years ago, 15 years ago.

I: Hmm, hmm.

R: It just so happens that I can do it now because I'm in the financial position to do so, so to speak.

I: Uh-huh.

R: So, them, them issues aren't there anymore. Them, them tensions aren't there, no.

I: So what do you think has been the greatest need, the, the greatness need within the Muslim community in your experience, as, as a result of the pandemic?

R: I think on, on a community level, okay, so start from the government level, the decisions that have clearly been made, a lot of the community feel as though it's economical.

I: Uh-huh.

R: So it's, it's, it's for the sake of sustaining the economy...

I: Yeah.

R: ...so to speak. And you can't help but think that to a certain extent they're right, because some of the decisions that they've made, even in recent times, they're not thinking about individual's health first and foremost. They're thinking about how do we keep the economy afloat.

I: Uh-huh.

R: Right, and it's...I have crazy conversations at the gym when I'm not getting beaten up outside. Like, for example, a Kurdish guy said to me...and, and...look, the thing is, I just wanna give it as an example, because these are conversations that I hear on a regular basis.

I: Uh-huh.

R: So he, he was saying, look at the petrol price, for example, it's gone, it's spiked up by like 20p since the beginning of pandemic, and now everybody needs petrol right...

I: Hmm.

R: ...so there are two things that have happened. First of all, apparently there's a petrol shortage...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...so more panic started and people started buying petrol and selling petrol, and selling petrol, which is illegal. But he goes second of all, the prices haven't curbed down, and now...so I'm just there on the cycle warming up, I'm like, "Oh, so why do you think this is the case?"

I: Uh-huh.

R: 'Cause I know he's a conspiracy theorist from a mile out, right. And he was like, "Oh well, because they're trying to recoup the money that they lost in the past 16, 17 months."

I: Right.

R: Because they haven't been able to sell petrol.

I: Uh-huh.

R: So they've, they've, they've started a small panic, petrol shortages now. So he's not, he's not correlated the fact that the price of living has just increased generally with gas and electricity...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...and all that kind of stuff, right. He's just seeing it as who is it affecting the most? It's affected taxi drivers. Who are these taxi drivers? From ethnic communities.

I: Right.

R: Right. Er, er, the delivery drivers, who are they? Erm, from the ethnic communities, right?

I: Yeah.

R: So he's seeing it from that perspective, right?

I: Yeah.

R: So saying, "Look, look, it's, it's purely economical, there's nothing about health there to consider."

I: Right.

R: Right. Now, the government, the irritating thing that I found based on...based on my own impressionist, observations of Boris Johnson's announcements and when Chris Whitty spoke, and

when they've taken Q&As. And, and even the Q&A, for example, when they get people from Zoom to ask questions...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...hardly did you see a, erm, erm, er, erm, erm, a minority ethnic representative.

I: **Hmm.**

R: They were all white...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...male or female. Erm, you, you can even tell by their voice sometimes and the pitch and the tone and the direction that they're from a very affluent background or middle class background, or whatever it may be. There's no representative at all. I think what the government could have done better is to take a more culturally-acceptable or culturally-appropriate understanding of this situation. Erm, more could have been done in terms of getting resources out there, even if it meant, you know, erm, a dedicated YouTube channel in Bengali or Pakistani or Hindi, or whatever it maybe that focuses on just Covid news, that individuals could subscribe. Everyone can go on YouTube, you don't need to be, you know, you know, er, competent with technology, something like that, them kind of provisions that could have helped people get the relatability better.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: I'm probably going off question, I'm just thinking about things that the government could have done...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...at certain times, in terms of getting the information out there.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I think from a religious perspective, I think, if I'm being critical, I think mosques could have done more.

I: **Yeah, okay.**

R: I think what XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] ...the mosque that I go to for example, er, I probably shouldn't name, but...

I: **No, we can anonymise it if you want us to?**

R: ...yeah. They, they...

I: **(Coughs).**

R: ...they were able to...and, and they do this anyway, so for them it was just kind of transferring from the analogue world to the digital world...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...the provisions that they had in place and the way that they go about packing information and complex social problems by taking a verse out of the *Qur'an* and then making it applicable in the present day, I think that more of that needs to be done.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So I think, I think less, if, if I'm being honest, that's something that the government can't do, that's something that the community needs to do better.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Which is to provide that education...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...'cause that education tends to be the education that my parent's generation feed off more, as opposed to the TV. So I think that's something that could, could have been, erm, encouraged by the government better...

I: **Yes.**

R: ...to get local...the mosques and community centres to... multi-agency work all day long, man.

I: **...yeah, yeah.**

R: Multi-agency...it has to come down from somewhere...

I: **Yeah, yeah.**

R: ...that leadership needs to come down from somewhere, right.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So you, you only need to do...basically that's to kind of to get an understanding of how many people can speak English in a particular location of 100,000 you know if you find that 20,000 can't speak out of 100,000 that 20% you need to get information to them...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...that's accessible...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and that they can be educated, essentially.

I: **Yeah.**

R: That's all it is.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Some people, you know, you find that their, their, their mother tongue, erm, they're illiterate with that as well, they can't read or write...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...but they can speak it. So multi-agency work is key, man, or was key, and to a certain extent it's still not too late, you know, there's a very low uptake of vaccinations. I know some people that haven't even taken the first, first dose yet.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Maybe that needs to be put forward. But, yeah, with them, with them people they tend to allow...or their family members have taken the first vaccine, that are older than them, like their parents, but they haven't.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: So it's about also busting those myths and those conspiracies alongside the information that's relevant for individuals with Covid.

I: **Hmm. Were you...I, I just wanna kind of recap and maybe you've already covered this but was, was your mosque particularly, er, active in using social media to stay connected with...**

R: Yeah.

I: **...community members during the pandemic?**

R: YouTube, YouTube live.

I: **YouTube live.**

R: Instagram, Instagram live.

I: **Okay.**

R: Facebook and Zoom.

I: **And what kind of activities were facilitated?**

R: Erm, so they had the legal clinic.

I: **Yes, okay, you did talk me through this.**

R: *[Over speaking]*. Clinic for women, females.

I: **Yeah, yeah.**

R: A clinic for people with mental health.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Er, a clinic for I think miscellaneous, other, other things.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And then they had like, erm, classes on how to learn Arabic...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...entry level, intermediate level, expert level.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And then they just had conferences.

I: **Yeah, okay.**

R: They had themes, they had themes, like a winter conference, they had a summer conference, they're basing it on certain things.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Yeah. And they actually had a few Q&As with doctors.

I: **Right.**

R: Yes, they did. And, erm, a local councillor, he also used to hold surgeries as well...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...with, erm, another local councillor, as well as two GPs.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And, again, I used to attend them frequently, 'cause I'd ask questions, erm, especially with the data, the information that they were collecting, I'd be always quite curious about that.

I: **Hmm.**

R: And that's about it really, yeah.

I: **Uh-huh. Is there anything else you wanna talk about that we haven't covered?**

R: I think, you see, you mentioned here religious community organisations interventions.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Right. If I'm being honest...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...the background that I'm from...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...I don't think people expected religious community organisations to provide interventions.

I: **Uh-huh, uh-huh.**

R: I'm just saying.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Er, the reason why I say that, is because if you think about the practicalities of a religious institution, it's purely spiritual.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And, again, the majority of the inner city...for every one, for every one progressive mosque that provides a very multi-faceted analysis of things, whether it was through activities or sermons, we'd have like 10 or 20 corner converted house mosques.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And this is also something to bear in mind when it comes to far right extremism.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Far right extremism is often targeted at what far right people can see.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And they can see all these mosques were once...you know, you know, Pat's chip shop or you know, David's corner house...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...or Mark's booze, or something like that, or a pub or something that has been converted. But then it's, it's, it's the type of people that are actually, erm, leading these mosques, like sharing these mosques.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And they tend to be individuals that are from, erm, first generational post-war backgrounds.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Second generation, I'd say, maybe, that have, have got very little connectivity or make connectivity between Islam and the, and the common world, the real world, the world that we live in. Because ultimately, the thing that I say to people that tend to confront me with...or that tend to ask me questions that are quite confrontational or uncomfortable. Whether it's about sexuality or, you know, stoning people or killing people...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...I always say to them, "Look, you have to think about the *Qur'an* as not just an entire book, it was revealed over time and it's multiple stories that were put together in one entity."

I: **Hmm.**

R: "And these stories are about a particular time, a particular period that cannot be compared with the present day."

I: **Hmm.**

R: "And something that happened like 1400 plus years ago." Right, and a lot of these stories that you find in the *Qur'an* are quite synonymous to the Torah and the Bible, 'cause they're the three Abrahamic religions. So the conversation that you're having with me, you can have that with a Rabbi or a Priest...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...but it's the application that's important.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: So it's like even when I'm confronted with questions about homosexuality...I'm know I'm, going off...but I feel like...

I: **Yeah, yeah.**

R: ...I feel the need to say this because I come back to...it's a wider issue that I come back to the, the subject area.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Like homosexuality, I have no issue with homosexuality in terms of people being people and who they choose to love.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: They're human at the end of the day.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: The way I see it is, I don't see them as homosexuals...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...I see them as people that have been created by God.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Who am I to say that they should be stoned or killed or whatever it maybe, they're God's creation.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: Right, so it's about the application...

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: ...that's extremely important for me, right.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: And we don't even live in a *Sharia* society anyway. So you ask me that question, you're asking me because of my faith and my belief and something that was written 1400 odd years ago, right.

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: I have no issue with that individual by no mean whatsoever...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...right. And the reason why I mention what I mention is, that kind of understanding, we get that in XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath].

I: **Uh-huh.**

R: You'll get that in a mosque that's, erm, multi-purpose built.

I: **Yeah.**

R: With these corner converted mosques, they won't talk about homosexuality.

I: **Yeah.**

R: They won't be against it, they won't be for it, they just don't wanna speak about it.

I: Hmm.

R: Right, so it will be a conversation that won't ever happen.

I: Yeah.

R: And that, in itself, is dangerous, I personally think, because these conversations need to take place...

I: Hmm.

R: ...for us to be able to get an understanding of the people that we interact with.

I: Uh-huh.

R: 'Cause ultimately regardless of whatever your political, religious, ideological beliefs are, I don't need to necessarily agree with you, but I have to respect you.

I: Yeah.

R: And the religion ultimately is hinged on respect, right. And we have to rub shoulders, we have to get along, we have to co-exist. So coming back to your research...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...I feel as though that, if there is something that should be expressed based on my own perspectives, the reason why I no longer go to these, er, corner house mosques, that's what I call them...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...or converted mosques, and I'm more than happy to travel eight miles out and eight miles back home, 16 miles...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...just to go to a mosque to pray, is because I learn new things.

I: Uh-huh.

R: I can apply it to the real world. I'm able to understand and appreciate what was mentioned 1400 years ago and how you can apply it in the present day. It's who I am, it's the very reason why I behave the way I behave towards you the way I do.

I: Uh-huh.

R: Which I'd like to think is with respect.

I: Uh-huh.

R: And it, you know, is, is, is, erm, fair and right and just...

I: Uh-huh.

R: ...and I like to try my best to do that with everyone. I'd do that with your kids, I'd do that with your family members, whoever it maybe. 'Cause the way I behave and project myself, is based on my teachings.

I: Uh-huh.

R: And, and, and that's what I have to say, because if there's a, a shift in thinking, it needs to be the fact that some of these institutions need to do more to marry what the religion says and teachers and apply it with the real world.

I: Uh-huh.

R: And that's that disconnect that you've probably had because of Covid as well...

I: Yeah.

R: ...ultimately.

I: Yeah. Well, I think, I think that's about everything. And just thank you.

R: No, you're welcome, man.

I: No, thank you, I appreciate it, appreciate it.

INTERVIEW 4

Date: 24/02/2022

Duration: 01:05:45

Participant characteristics: Male, community member

Key:

I =Interviewer

R=Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: Erm, so, okay, initially then I guess we'll, we'll get started. Erm, going back to thinking about the beginning of the pandemic, erm, what were the most significant impacts do you think for the Muslim community, erm, taking it back to sort of March 2020. Erm, what were the biggest impacts do you think around that time?

R: I think the biggest impact would be the readiness to really accept the condition as it was, the, erm, the pandemic and the kind of impact. Erm, that may be largely down to the sort of information that was kind of filtered through local organisations from mosques.

I: Right.

R: But I think initially there was a real kind of misunderstanding compared to, erm, the sort of the wider population about the kind of impact of COVID, what it was, the potential impact, er, erm, and the consequences of the actual pandemic so I think there was that kind of potentially misunderstanding which led to a lot of misinformation as well.

I: Yeah. So can you unpack that a little bit? What kind, of, erm, differences were there in terms of, you know, the local understanding versus maybe a wider understanding? You mentioned also about information that was put out through community organisations so can you just give a bit more detail on that?

R: So I suppose, erm, what I, what I mean by that is like, erm, there was sort of misinformation as to what the pandemic actually was, and that is like, er, in, in some quarters there, there were even belief that actually it was, is a kind of a mild illness and you know it's just, er, er something that we don't need to worry about when in reality it was much more serious than just a mild illness.

I: Hmm.

R: In some quarters there were even people who played in to like a lot of conspiracy theories as well.

I: Yeah.

R: But it was just like a, I don't know, erm, you know whether it's like a global attempt for, to control people, if that makes sense, so there was like two, two sides. There was the one side there was a, a lack of information as to what the actual pandemic really was and there was also a lot of kind of risks of people falling into, erm, you know, misinformation. Erm, I mean you could argue, that actually, well, that's, you know, in the national picture there were people who were falling for misinformation, people who didn't know enough about it.

But I think when you think about the kind of vulnerabilities that, erm, the Muslim community faces with all the kind of health inequalities that already existed, erm, I think there was, erm, and coupled with a lack of education, I think when you pull all of that together there was more of a risk of them not really understanding the nature of their, their condition and a kind of ramifications of what

would actually happen if it did become serious and there was a tendency to, to fall into misinformation as well.

Erm, so that's kind of my initial kind of experience of, erm, the pandemic itself. Erm, yeah. I mean I don't know if I've kind of unpacked that as well enough as you would have wanted but, er, that was just my initial taking of how I saw the pandemic unfold.

I: Yeah. Sure. So in terms of kind of these ideas that were sort of shared in terms of misinformation side of things, is this stuff which was being shared within and between community members? Or do you mean that, were there any, you know, kind of organisations which were maybe validating some of the misinformation?

R: I wouldn't say the community organisations, erm, validated any of that information.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Er, but definitely social media had a big part so when you look at the kind of younger demographics within the Muslim community itself...

I: Yeah.

R: ...and the kind of reliance on social media, you know, seeing it in school as well – I'm a schoolteacher – I see it as well there.

I: Hmm.

R: Erm, there was, erm, I, I wouldn't go as far as saying validation. There may have been the odd kind of religious leader who would have spouted some you know, er, erm, conspiracy theories but, erm, social media did play a big part in the kind of understanding and some, some cases the response from within the community. Having said that, the more well-established organisations like mosques, erm, and then you've got Muslim Council Britain did play their part as much as they possibly could in trying to ally some of those misconceptions, in trying to use a lot of religious rhetoric, a lot of religious edicts to kind of, erm, make people understand the seriousness of you...seriousness of the condition.

Erm, but I think when you, when you look at within the community when you look at, erm, things like, erm, existing health inequalities, lack of education, there was a kind of, erm, reluctance to accept the pandemic as it was. Erm, er and I think that some people were even drawn by the fact that, you know, er, religious kind of conviction made them also think that actually we can fight this, this illness without taking any precautions. So I think that was another issue. Erm, I certainly saw it in my family, certainly amongst all the family members, that actually it's, it's, you know, it's a, it's an illness that's come from, come from God and therefore we can, you know, we will be protected, we don't need to take any precautions so there's that side of it as well.

I: Yeah. Yeah. So for you what were the first impacts for you then? I guess, looking at the news and, and everything that was going on before we go into that first lockdown? What were the first...your personal experiences early on in the pandemic?

R: Erm, I think there was, erm, what, what I would think back to sort of like late December/January 2020, erm, I guess there was a feeling of unease...

I: Hmm.

R: A f-feeling of unease and also like this, almost like an intrigue as to, you know, I've never lived through a pandemic and I don't think anyone has really, erm, lived through a pandemic of this scale. So I think initially there was, there was a lot of unease especially when you think of, erm, when I consider the fact that I had, you know, relative family members, erm, and so – not relatives; family members – and vulnerable family members, erm, that made me kind of feel very uneasy and obviously initially there was a lack of, erm, information about the scale of this pandemic...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...because all, all we knew about was, er, I can't remember the region it was in China and where it started off, erm, there was like a mass, er, you know, erm, lockdown in, in China.

I: **Hmm.**

R: And, erm, slowly that was filtering through into, into Europe so I think there was that kind of unease about, you know, how this will impact more vulnerable family members and obviously from about March onwards the full scale was more understood.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, from a schooling perspective, because as a school teacher I think we started to see, you know, things being put in place in school, erm, you know, things like, erm, social distancing and I think, I believe it was mentioned, erm, before March. Er, I can't, I can't remember it truly but, yeah, the, the way I would experience is feeling that unease, not really knowing what was, erm, about to hit us, yeah.

I: **Okay, then so going into, I guess once lockdown kicked in and so on, I guess things change in a number of different ways for you in terms of work. So I think thinking about sort of going into lockdown what were the major sort of, the most significant sort of impacts of actually having to live through being locked down initially? I mean and also what was your perspective; was it the view that this was going to be a short experience or that it was going to go on for an extended period of time?**

R: Do you know I felt, erm, it was going to be quite a, you know, a, a temporary measure, erm, but obviously it didn't. It went on into, into the summer, didn't it. Erm, and I think, erm, when I think about the, the impact itself – not being able to see vulnerable families, not being able to go to places of worship, erm, those kind of things would have probably impacted, er, you know, to an extent the psychologically. And not going, not being able to physically go into work as well because we're a front-facing profession, er, whereas my wife, on the other hand, erm, she was made permanently to work from home so she was, she was absolutely fine with that.

But myself being, erm, a front, you know, work for a front-facing profession, if that makes sense, and it was very difficult to kind of adapt in that sense. Erm, and, yeah, not being able to see like, erm, other family members, vulnerable family members, not being able to go to places of worship, erm, you know and connect with friends, all of these things I think did have psychologically an impact and although we tried to, to, to, to stay in contact, erm, via you know, erm what was it Teams, or Zoom, whatever it was, erm, it's not the same, is it?

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, so I think, erm, I would say my experience would probably tally with largely the, you know, a lot of...what a lot of people were facing. Erm, the one thing that was interesting was Eid prayers.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Eid prayers was very interesting because, erm, I think at the time, if I remember, erm, the restrictions sort of started to ease and we were able to have about six people in the house I think. I, I can't remember.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, but, er, I, I might have got that wrong but having to sort of pray, sort of the Eid prayers at home was kind of unprecedented...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...er, because it's a prayer to...it, it's a public affair so to speak, Eid prayer. Erm, so we, we prayed it, er, er at home and that was, erm, that was, er, you know, uh quite a, quite a, an unprecedented thing. But in terms of like the main lockdown, what I would say is that, er, we, we lost someone very close to us, erm, over lockdown. Erm, they had, erm, been diagnosed with lung cancer at the end of January of 2020 and, erm, they died around the beginning of June.

I: **Right.**

R: Erm, I think personally, you know, I, I might be going slightly off tandem here but not being able to see him enough during lockdown did...was very upsetting because obviously we were unable to, erm, er, see him, er, towards the end of his life. Erm and also I think that the pandemic did have an impact on his treatment which in some ways I feel like accelerated, erm, his own decline. Erm, but again I might be going off tangents here.

I: **No, it's not, it's not off tangent and I'm sorry to hear of your loss. But, erm, yeah, so I think, I think as things go on...er, er, sorry, I didn't mean to –**

R: No, no, I, I just want to add to that, if you don't mind.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: So I think, erm, again this is er, an experience, er, within, er, family sort of experience but I, I do think that as a Muslim community especially, erm, because a lot of, er, erm, you know, er, community members they tend to have low paid jobs...

I: **Right.**

R: ...working extremely long hours.

I: **Hmm.**

R: A lot of them sort of, erm, tend to neglect, you know, erm, their own kind of, er, some, some major symptoms if you like, erm that they might be experiencing because there the, the kind of urge to, to work over health is so great. And I, I can tell you, er, at least of one experience of someone who is currently in hospital terminally ill, who, erm, for the past year neglected their health, not really taking consideration of some major signs. Erm, I mean, you know, knowing you get, erm, sort of symptoms that you need to, you know, erm, er, get some professional opinion on.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Well, they neglected their kind of health, erm, issues, er, for, for at least a good year or so. And again it's because the, erm, to, to seek treatment would mean to stop working because they're self-employed.

I: **Right.**

R: Er, and that would have, erm, had a, had an impact on, on obviously their income and, because they neglected themselves for so long, erm, they, erm unfortunately now in a situation now where they're terminally ill. And I think that is probably, er, you know, er, a, a picture, if you like, of a lot of cases of people within the community who are, you know, in lowly paid jobs where they've got the choice between not working and seeking help, er, seeking treatment for actually, erm, er, working and to the point that things get quite, er, quite serious. Erm, that's just an example of, er, you know people neglecting their health because of, you know, economic factors.

I: **Yeah, but I mean economic factors, in the context of some of the interventions, erm – I say interventions but the idea of furlough, for example.**

R: Hmm, yeah.

I: But is there...did you have any sort of familiarity with issues around furlough or how that might work for self-employed people and so on?

R: Erm, not necessarily, erm, er, myself obviously being a school teacher we didn't...wasn't affected at all and likewise, erm, I think the only sort of person that was impacted was probably one of my brothers and, er, er, again it appeared to be a short-term hit, if you like. I think it was for a few months before they were able to go back to work, erm, fulltime.

I: Yeah.

R: So I think we, we were very lucky; financially we weren't impacted as much, erm, by the pandemic but I know that, erm, when you're reading about, you know, experiences of other people in the community was quite devastating – the taxi drivers for instances...

I: Yeah.

R: ...erm was a big one. We had people working deliveries, erm, you know, they, they were to an extent impacted, erm. I don't know how because, er, when you look at the, er, you know, delivery service, that went through the roof, didn't it, during the pandemic, during the lockdown so I think there were still some people who within, erm, you know, who do deliveries who were impacted quite surprisingly. Erm, so, yeah, I think there were, there were impacts within the community itself...

I: Hmm.

R: ...er, in that sense but I think we were lucky quite, you know as a family we weren't as impacted by furlough.

I: Hmm. Hmm. And I think going just, er, momentarily going back to thinking about the lockdowns coming and going and lasting for sometimes, how did that impact on our wellbeing, erm, during those times? You know, going from thinking it's going to be a short thing to realising that this is something which is, is more drawn out?

R: I mean psychologically it's made me a lot more anxious if I'm honest.

I: Hmm.

R: Erm, not being, y-you know you saw the same kind of routine where you started work at 8, erm, in the same space with no movement...

I: Yeah.

R: ...and you finished at what, five or six or a bit later if you were a teacher because of the nature of what we were doing. I think I found myself, erm, firstly working longer as a school teacher from home. I think I was working close on 14 hours at some point, er, because of the, erm, impact but psychologically I think I, I felt a lot more anxious, erm, er, because of not being able to, to, you know, the same kind of routine essentially, er, kind of doesn't happen psychologically and I felt, definitely felt more anxious through the lockdown period.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Yeah. And there's no way, there's no way of accessing, erm, mental health services either was there. I mean I can't, I wouldn't go as far as saying it was so bad that I needed to have intervention but even the thought of accessing mental health services was out of the question, wasn't it, you know.

I: Yeah. Yeah. And did you have, I mean, were you directly impacted by contracting COVID or did you have close family members who contracted COVID?

R: Erm, so again we were very lucky not to have caught COVID, especially pre-vaccination...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...if that makes sense. I mean some of did get it. I mean I got it over Christmas but then I think half the nation did because we had an outbreak *[laughs]*.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, but, er, yeah *[chuckles]* so pre-vaccination, erm no-one in the family got COVID, thank God.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, but it, it was more post-vaccination.

I: **Yeah. Erm, so thinking again, I think, about sort of economic impact a bit more widely, were there impacts in the community in terms of local business, and what were the economic impacts more widely, erm, as a result of lockdowns and that kind of stuff?**

R: Erm, would I have said businesses, er, er...I think that's a question I wouldn't be able to answer I'm afraid because, erm, erm, the thing is that the, especially the area that, er, my mum lives which is quite, erm...because during lockdown I actually, er...my wife and I were living with my mum and then we moved out, to-towards the end of the first lockdown...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...erm, we moved elsewhere. But the community that my mum lives in, erm, you see a lot of kind of, erm, businesses opening and closing, whether that's because of the pandemic or not...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...so it's difficult to, d-difficult to say. Er, but I would say that there were people who I was aware of who'd lost their jobs...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...as a result of the pandemic, er, and probably struggled a good, erm, few months to actually find another job and I'm not talking about retail...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...because actually, erm, although retail was hit there was a period, wasn't there, where there was a lot of vacancies available but, erm, no-one was taking them up.

I: **Hmm.**

R: But I think, erm, I, I know at least of two people who, who've been impacted, erm, er, by, er by the pandemic and losing jobs. What I would say, though, erm, now I don't know how to actually phrase this but I am aware of businesses that did make full use of the furlough.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And whether that was honestly or dishonestly I couldn't say.

I: **Yeah. Yeah. So what area are you, you living in now and what area were you living in when you moved here?**

R: So I, I lived in the, erm, Hodge Hill ward which is one of the w-wards that you mention in the information sheet.

I: **Oh.**

R: Yeah, and, well, you didn't mention it but the four wards...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...are typically, basically Hodge Hill would be one of them, which includes Washwood Heath and Alum Rock so I live there.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And now I live just outside of Birmingham.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Er, erm, in an area called Great Barr which is more towards Walsall.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And I think – I'll be honest with you, I think we saw the r-the response from the communities are very different to what it...er, between where we are now and to where we are, were initially.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, and I think that is largely down to demographics.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: Largely down to demographics and in the, for instance, er, even like things like vaccination take-ups and...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...when you look at the data now, sometimes I'd look at the data and, and the vaccination take-up in where we are now is, is considerably greater than w-what it is in my mum's area, for instance.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Yeah.

I: **Yeah. So could you, er, in terms of work. Were there impacts in terms of having to make that transition to working from home? Were there new challenges for the job etc?**

R: Yeah, I would say so, so a large part of my day-to-day job was, er, monitoring attendance...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...er, and, erm, basically following up with, erm, in one day you might have had a dozen phone calls, erm, trying to kind of, erm, how shall I put it, erm, you know, pick up children who weren't engaging online...

I: **Hmm.**

R: And there's a myriad of reasons why people wouldn't...I mean the students weren't engaging online.

I: **Hmm.**

R: And there was still, however, that pressure to kind of monitor online activity, having to provide timely feedback which isn't the same as providing feedback in a book, for instance...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...compared to go online. You know I, I found that the online, erm, process was a bit more protracted and that service took far longer to provide feedback, individualised feedback...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...er, to, to, erm, children who were working in books so I think that had an impact in terms of workload and, erm, sometime I found myself working till 10, 11 in the evening.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I was waking up again at 8 o'clock for morning registration so it was, it was very busy, er, very pressurised, er, and I would say psychologically quite...did make you very anxious at times, yeah.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: A-and so it's...just to add to that point...

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, at the time there would have been a lot of kind of inequity in terms of, erm, children having those devices and being able to engage as well, erm, but when I reflect on it now those children, a lot of them would have come from very busy households where there were probably three generations living under one roof.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, there would have been...erm, I know at least of a few cases where, erm, you know, erm, some students had lost family...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ..., con-consecutive months had lost family members so that had a, a big impact on their engagement. Erm, so again you were kind of, er, following these up and making sure that pupils were alright. And you know it was, it was, you know, they were important calls but, you know, again it placed you under a lot of pressure when, when you think about the other responsibilities you had as well.

I: **Yeah, absolutely. One of the things that we have been pursuing, erm, and gain some insight in with the project, is, how organisations, mosques, in particular, might have had to find ways of facilitating appropriate sort of, er, rituals around burial, facilitating burial and that kind of thing and how funerals played out. Do you have any insight into what that might have been like, erm?**

R: Erm, I mean, have, you know, having been through erm, er, you know, a bereavement myself during this period I think that obviously the difficulty was around the number of people that are allowed at funerals and even through the actual, erm, er...the thing with like the, erm, the Muslims funeral process, the actual preparation of the body itself for burial. I-It's a very private affair. It's not something that's I-left with the undertaker. It's so the, you know, the family, close family members partake in the actual rituals before the body is prepared for the burial itself and then, then you've got the funeral and the burial.

So I think when you...the first thing that I would say was the, the impact on the limited numbers of people that, you know, erm, the, the limitations on the numbers definitely did have an impact on a lot of people, including ourselves, erm, on that process. Er, but also the, you know when you consider the, the number of deaths that took place in the community I felt like, erm, you know that being able to afford to bury someone was obviously very difficult for a lot of people. Erm, I might be wrong but there was a mosque in Small Heath, and I don't if you're familiar with the XXXXX XXXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath]?

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Yeah, a very well-established mosque and I think at one point, erm, they were asking for donations for their funeral service...

I: Yeah.

R: ...people simply couldn't afford to bury their, bury their dead and, erm, they were even asking for volunteers to support with the process as well. So, erm, I think in that, I think in that sense the, the, the burial process was quite a devastating one and, er, what was very stark for me was going through like, you know, erm...our local cemetery, Handsworth Cemetery there were, erm, mass graves dug up...

I: Hmm.

R: ...erm, before the burial process and I think when you put all of that together I think the kind of, erm, facilitation of burials were also very difficult experience for a lot of people...

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: ...you know.

I: Yeah, and, erm, in terms of thinking about, erm, faith. I think you've alluded to this, but were there impacts in terms of your own religious practice? You've said not being able to attend collective religious worship and so on, erm, what, what were the impacts there? You know, how was, how was faith and, you know, kind of religious practice impacted by the pandemic do you think?

R: Erm, I would say that, er, from my perspective it's not being able to, to, er, attend collective prayers, erm, did obviously impact on my practice because you're having to do it at home and, you know, the, the, the nature of our faith is that it is a very much a collective...

I: Hmm.

R: ...erm, to worship and so I think that was, er, a kind of like psychologically that wasn't, you know, particularly great, erm, having to, to pray, erm, constantly at home where, you know, erm, when you've got a local mosque just down the road. Erm, but I think the other thing was the, the, erm, I, at times, did feel kind of hesitant when, erm, you know, the things started opening up again and going to the mosque and seeing, you know, erm, I definitely – sorry – was I taking precautions and worn masks at the mosque and other people haven't, for instance, and again it was, er, er, because of that idea that, erm, you know there's no such thing as a pandemic.

And, erm, people... there are some people who weren't...didn't wear masks, and depending on the mosques – sorry, masks – depending on the mosque itself, er, that wasn't as well-enforced in some mosques than others and, erm, that kind of made me a bit hesitant, erm, to attend mosque after, erm, you know, erm the pandemic ended but as I say, the more established mosques were very, very, erm, you know, erm, how shall I put it, er, er, very, very astute when it came to, er, you know, implementing these, these, er, procedures. Er, for the first time ever you had to book a place to go to the mosque which was quite interesting...

I: Right.

R: ...and then, there was a certain number of allocation and if you didn't meet that allocation then obviously you couldn't, you couldn't attend prayer; you'd have to do at our home, erm, so I thought that was, that was very, erm, you know, er, that was very interesting to, to, to say the least, but again it was because of the nature of the pandemic, you know.

I: **Yeah. Yeah. And, er, do you think faith had... Is it...I guess I touch, I'm trying to touch on the role of faith in a time of crisis, you know.**

R: I think the, the, the, erm, faith for me at the time of the lockdown was, you know, crucial really...

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, in trying to kind of steer through the pandemic. Er, and I tell you what, although I couldn't go to the mosque and that did have psychological impact, erm, I think, erm, many consider, for instance, in my home, erm, the idea of, you know, erm, protecting vulnerable families I guess, erm, and although a lot of them did, er, you know, erm, were protecting in some ways I think faith also had a big part to play in, erm, you know, getting you through, getting through the pandemic as well.

So, er, erm, I'll give you an example, er, of being psychologically when you're anxious or, you know, feeling low, erm, prayer is something that's like a great release...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...and I found myself drawn to prayer more during the pandemic...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...er, you know, even not being able to go to a mosque but it, it did have a big kind of impact in trying to navigate through the, erm, through the pandemic as well. I think prayer was, was for me a great release and in some ways I became closer more in practicing than I was

I: **Erm, yeah, so were there initiatives that were taken by mosques to maintain a sense of community connectedness in a time where collective worship wasn't a possibility? You know, kind of... was there online provision or were there, you know, kind of...were there things that were provided by mosques which were intended to help people continue to feel connected?**

R: Yes, there was and I saw an explosion of that really...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...erm, but again it, it's down to how established the mo-mosque itself is...

I: **Right.**

R: ...erm, the larger mosques and all well-established mosques were more...what they did was they had online provision as you say. There were online sermons. Erm, there were also, erm, you know, certain charitable works that were taking place, erm, during the pandemic as well...

I: **Hmm.**

R: Certainly I think when you look at the, the differences, erm, between the more kind of larger, well-established mosques and the smaller ones, I felt, erm, you know, erm, being able to go on to like, for example, XXXXX XXXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] Mosque's website...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...and having sermons, live sermons being delivered, I thought that was, you know, fantastic.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, so that was, erm, that was my experience of being...feel connected to the, to the mosque as well, and the mosques did do as much as they possibly could to, to connect with people and the online provision was very, very important. I guess the difficulty would be to, you know, to older worshippers...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...you know, how that would have affected them, erm, especially as the don't know how to access, erm, devices as well as the younger generation but certainly the mosques through online sermons in particular...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...you know, did a lot to, to, to connect people, yeah.

I: **And what about Whatsapp groups and sort of immediate communication; is that a feature that, you know, pre-exists and was just, you know, carried through in the pandemic or was it more significant for people do you think?**

R: I mean I, I tend to get a lot of updates through text messages...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...erm, from, er, from the, er, from, for instance XXXXX XXXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath] Mosque. And, erm, I would say that it was being accelerated more during the pandemic...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...erm, compared to, erm, before. I mean it was a pre-existing, er, feature but I, I would say it was accelerated further during the, the, the, erm, pandemic, yeah.

I: **Yeah. Yeah. So was there any perception of tension between communities or tension towards the Muslim community during the pandemic itself do you think?**

R: 100%, yes. 100%. I felt that for certainty.

I: **Okay.**

R: Erm, and the reason why I say that is because, erm, whether it was nationally or globally, there was this kind of finger-pointing as to, you know, people in the community weren't necessarily taking...er, there was that perception that people in the community weren't precautions.

I: **Right.**

R: Erm, but it was always going to be difficult because when you look at, erm, the state of a Muslim house, a typical Muslim house where you might find two or three different, different generations living in one household...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...and, er, someone like might go out and, be, you know, work in a low, a low-paid job, erm, out of necessity and sort of carrying in some ways the virus and then spreading it within the household, and to some extent, within the community.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, there was a lot of kind of finger pointing and actually the nature of the community itself and the way, the lifestyle choices meant that the pandemic was more easily spreadable. That's kind of the finger-pointing that, erm, that I found. But also the I-you know with the vaccine hesitance I mean one thing that you find within our communities is that there's vaccine hesitancy rather than necessarily following wholesale basically, if that makes sense...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...through things and, erm, because of the, the vaccine hesitance and that's another reason why I think a lot of fingers are being pointed toward Muslim community as to why, you know, w-with regards to the pandemic almost being like a, you know, a Muslim problem, if that makes sense.

I: **Right.**

R: But you look like globally, for instance, there was a case where, in India where there was a religious gathering. Was there a religious gathering? I can't remember if there was a religious gathering but I think there was a religious organisation, a Muslim religious organisation that was blamed for the spread of COVID in India which was quite ludicrous because actually India's, erm, response was quite lapse and, you know, regardless.

I: **Yeah.**

R: But our Muslims organisation was, erm, you know, erm, erm blamed and I remember that filtering through on social media and being used as kind of like information here as well, er, you know, the pan, pandemic, i-it has to be blamed on Muslims because they're not taking precautions, they live in, like overacted houses. They have low-paid jobs and really that's the reason why many of them are being killed so that's the sense that I got from that kind of finger-pointing, if that makes sense.

I: **Were you aware of any actual, people who have directly experienced hostility based on those sort of ideas?**

R: Now, I don't know if this was related to the pandemic itself...

I: **Right.**

R: ...erm, in fact I don't think it was, erm, related to the pandemic. There is one incident where a friend was, erm, er, subject to, er, racial abuse. He was, in fact was one of XXXX. Er, but wouldn't say it was connected to the pandemic itself, erm, so I can't, I couldn't say that there were any particular cases...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...of, erm, you know, erm, hate crime towards us. There might have been but I'm seeing it a more from kind of like a conspiracy theory point of view, erm, if that makes sense.

I: **Yeah. Yeah. Erm, so what kind of interventions then did mosques or other community organisations sort of put in place? We talked a bit about sort of online provision, er, facilitating collective worship or an online sermon, sorry, erm, but were there other practical things that mosques, erm, did to respond to community needs, er, during the pandemic?**

R: Erm, I mean so the only one that I would, would have been familiar with would, would have been the texting and the, the messaging and the online prevention. Whether there were other alternatives who are taken, erm, I couldn't say if I'm honest with you, because myself, I was so, you know, you know, erm, er, how shall I say, erm, you know, erm, sort of, erm, influenced by the, the...if that's the right word by the online kind of, erm, you know, efforts by local mosques.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, I didn't see any other kind of provision so to speak but that's not to say that there weren't others.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, I think as I say the more established mosques did run a quicker slick in some ways, erm, online, erm, campaign to, to sort of, erm, support the local communities with the pandemic, er, but again accessibility is always going to be the big issue, isn't it?

I: **Yeah, yeah, and I think, well, we did a, we did a questionnaire, erm, and there were a number of things which came out in that, erm, in terms of things like providing a food bank, erm, befriending services, erm, you know, delivering shopping.**

R: Yes. I would, I would say that there was, erm, certainly an explosion in the food bank, erm, linked into mosques. There's an organisation called The XXXXX XXXX [a Muslim charity organisation], I'm not sure if you've heard them.

I: **Okay.**

R: They, erm, they run a lot of delivery services, you know, really supportive local community as well. So the XXXXX XXXX [Muslim charity organisation] is one org...they're a community organisation, erm, and I believe they are linked with some of the local mosques as well. So you're absolutely right and, erm you know...but again there's a difference here, between the more established mosques and those which aren't because we have a lot of pop-up mosques in the local community...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...erm, that might sort, erm, evade, if you like, erm, local authority knowledge, erm, and a lot of that is because, erm, you know, there's a need in certain areas. There's, there's, there's a need for like a little mosque for convenient sakes. But these little mosques might be popping up in, in, in houses that might not have, erm, be able to connect with the immediate community as much as the more established ones, if that makes sense.

I: **Yeah, yeah. Sure. Erm, how, so how do you feel about government responses then? What kind of, you know, initiatives or...what's your general perspective on the initial sort of government guidance I guess leading up to lockdown, erm, and then the measures that were taken – lockdown, social distancing and mask-wearing, etc?**

R: Well, I think initially it was very slow, wasn't it? Erm, I think, erm, Europe had lockdown at least er, a week or two before us. I think at least a week or so before...

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, and even like Scotland had taken measures before us so I think initially the response was very, very slow. Erm, in terms of, erm, the kind of impact more widely, erm, for instance from an education point of view, erm, if you remember, there was a catch-up Tsar wasn't there? They'd employed, the government had employed a catch-up Tsar...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...who'd, erm, made recommendations on how much funding is required for pupils especially in deprived communities and how, you know, how they can catch-up and the funding required. Erm, what he'd suggested as a, you know, an amount of I think it was 15 billion was nowhere near what the government had offered which was 1 billion. Erm, so I think that, that in terms of like a future of education, and that, the response hasn't been particularly great. Erm, even when you think about the rollout of devices the impact has been variable.

I: Yeah.

R: I mean the impact has certainly been variable. I've seen that within my own school, for instance. Erm, then you've got like your furloughed scheme was in theory fantastic but it, it didn't stop people from abusing that, you know, so whilst there is a big kind of push on, erm, you know, finding benefit sheets there wasn't enough for, erm, kind of an emphasis on COVID sheets if that, if that makes sense.

I: Yeah. Hmm.

R: So I think, you know, when it comes to priorities, you know, I, I don't know if the, the government has always got it right. Erm, there was also, erm, an opportunity for the, erm – I remember this distinctly, erm – I think it was around October 2020 during the half-term there's an opportunity for a fire breaker, er, lockdown...

I: Yes.

R: ...which does, so yeah, the government, er, you know refused to have that fire break and I think, er, leading up to Christmas that had a big impact because obviously after post Christmas, around Christmastime there was a deluge, wasn't there...

I: Hmm.

R: ...of COVID cases so I think there were opportunities and what the government had missed, er, er from an education point of view, from, from, you know, the initial start, er and I don't know how much. And although there's a report, isn't there, government based report on the impact of COVID on, erm BAME communities. But, erm, I don't know how much, erm, real kind of...a lot of that would have been heeded towards the, the Muslim community because, if anything, the pandemic has, er, exposed a lot of the pre-existing health issues when the community and health inequality so, yeah, so I think those were probably sort of my headlines if you like.

I: Yeah, yeah. And then how do you feel about the NHS response, erm, or the NHS in general in the context of the pandemic, yeah, what are your views on their role?

R: Well, I think you, firstly, I mean, they would have been the brunt of a huge amount of pressure so I don't necessary blame them and I think it's, you know, quite easy for a lot of people to, to blame the individual when it's a structural issue.

I: Hmm.

R: But, erm, just trying to get things like appointments or being able to see a specialist in hospital, erm, that has been a particular challenge as a result of the pandemic. Erm, obviously during the pandemic itself, erm, er, you know, visitations were limited. I mean to, to some extent I, I think that, erm, not only just visitation being limited to, to, erm, to, to hospitals but I do think it had, had an impact on certain can-cancer treatments. And I gave you the example of that family member who passed away and, you know, it was, er, only at er, an earlier stage and I do generally think that if he had survived in pandemic he would have possibly lived longer because the treatment were more available. But I do think from an NHS point of view that, er, you know, treatment was, erm, delayed for a lot of people. Erm, visita- you know, being able to see a specialist was really difficult and even now, face-to-face appointments is not ideal....sorry, over the telephone, erm, consultations are just not ideal

I: Yeah. Erm, so do you think there are...if you had to highlight some gaps in terms of the government response in meeting the needs of the Muslim community in the pandemic what kind of gaps would stand out?

R: Yes, apologies with that. I seem to have had a loss of connection there so, er, apologies.

I: No, that's fine. Erm, yes, so I want to think about government responses. Er, what kind of gaps stand out in terms of the needs that were present in the Muslim community at the time?

R: Erm, in terms of gaps I'm thinking more from like, er, erm – and I don't know if this will kind of answer your question – more from a kind of an education point of view because, er, I say this because, erm I work in an area which is, er, you know, predominantly Muslim. It's a Muslim population, must be in excess of about 95%.

I: Right.

R: Erm, and I honestly think that, erm, at the time the, the sort of the lack of provision, and even now, for instance, from an education point of view will impact Muslims er, pupils more than any other, erm, you know, obviously generally within the BAME community they're more...when you, when you look at historically, er, people do struggle with finding jobs and probably all the, the, erm, the highs in terms of employment rates in the country.

I: Hmm.

R: I think the pandemic would have accelerated that and I don't think enough has been done, erm, to actually, erm, you know, you know, er, resolve that issue. Erm, and I'll tell why because if I, I still remember this back in, erm, it was April or May, 2020 where schools were using something called centre-assessed grades to...

I: Hmm.

R: ...to, erm, er, you know, generate, er, er grades for, for, for schools. Now what was very stark for me was that within the algorithm for what we call the candidature centre assessed grade, ethnicity was used as part of generating grades.

I: Okay.

R: So I still remember very distinctly where, you know, you had the kind of teacher-assessed grades and you know kind of like the target grade for the pupil and base grade. And I remember being told that, you know, please make sure you put the ethnicity of the child in there as well. So it's almost as if the ethnicity...you've just got to think of 95, 96% er, you know, er, you know, Muslim population it's almost like the ethnicity would have played a part to, to, er, to, to generate that grade as well so, erm,

I: Hmm. Were you aware of what impact it has, in which direction it influenced the grade?

R: Well, I'd...some pupils they would have got lower grades than, than the deserved and whether that, erm, was dependent on that particular algorithm of the ethnicity, erm, I couldn't say so but I, I just find it quite surprising that ethnicity would have been part of that process generally.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Er, er, and I think when you really look at the difficulty western people have generally on finding jobs and not then having an accurate grade itself would, would, you know, have a significant effect on, on, on getting the future, you know, employment, being in future employment. So I think from that perspective and from an educational point of view I think Muslim community, Muslim pupils in, you know, in particular, will probably have been, you know, er, a sort of dealt a very harsh hand from the government, if that makes sense.

I: Yeah. So let's talk about vaccines, so you've already spoken a bit about sort of vaccine hesitancy and so on. So, were you aware of vaccine hesitancy? Were there differences in terms of, for example, how older community members might have a perspective on this versus younger community member?

R: Oh, definitely, and I think, erm, when you look at the sort of the, the, you know, differences between the older generation and the take-up compared to the younger generation definitely there's a difference there. With the older generation, especially those with underlying health issues, erm, er, there is a kind of like a hesitancy because of that, those underlying health issues. Erm, this idea that this, this vaccine will adversely affect me in other ways...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...erm, and, you know, to an extent, er, I, I get the argument because, erm, obviously, er, there's not been a lot of research in terms of, you know, the effect on underlying health issues, so, erm, I, I do understand it from that point of view but certainly the, erm, the, the vaccine hesitancy amongst the older generation would have been because of the underlying health issues and the unknown impact on those. Erm, for the younger generation those who weren't necessarily vaccine-hesitant, erm, I think there was a tendency more to kind of fall toward, erm, conspiracy theories in my eyes, in my eyes.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And I remember, er, reading a little kind of a post on Youtube actually, of, erm, someone claiming that, er, you know, the vaccine was actually, erm, the work of the, er, – I can't remember, the, er, basically a mythical creature, a mythical creature, and you know, a creature, some sort of a mythical creature who's out there trying to, you know, stop, er, people from, erm, living normal lives or being, you know, er, you know, curtailing freedoms and, erm, it's there to, the vaccine is there to kind of, erm, er, you know, insert chips in people, you know, microchips and all that kind of thing. So I remember reading those and then the younger generation is more likely to fall into that but the older generation, from my experience especially, the vaccine hesitancy was in relation to underlying health issues and the potential impact on them.

I: **Yeah. Erm, so, looking forward I guess, erm, or [clears throat] you know kind of thinking about a two, a two-part question I think, erm, for us to round things up. What do you think the main needs were, er, in community during the pandemic and what do you think the main needs are now looking forwards?**

R: I think it's the accessibility to health services...

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, I think when you look at the, erm, the underlying health issues our Muslim, erm, people face, there that made them more vulnerable...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...to the pandemic than any other community so I think it's the accessibility to health services then as it is now.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, that's probably the major contribution. Not being able to see doctors face-to-face, that's another issue I think with, within, within the Muslim community and I say that again because this is a community that's more likely to be impacted by underlying health issues than any other community, erm, more vulnerable in that sense so I think, yes, the accessibility to the health services would probably be the most underlying issue facing this community.

I: **Hmm. And do you think there's...are there things that mosques or other community organisations could do to respond to the sort of on-going needs or on-going concerns around COVID from this point onwards?**

R: Erm, you know I've seen like, erm, recently, er, if I'm, er correct like, erm, er from a health point of view like, erm, religious, religious, erm a-advice is being given but then also I, I remember reading recently of, erm, erm, young people who're invited for like employment skills, workshops.

I: **Right.**

R: Erm, I mean we're giving, giving some, some mosques, er, the opportunity to, to volunteer, you know, improve volunteering skills and all that kind of stuff. But I remember – if I can find it I'm more than happy to send it but there's like, erm, a mosque offering employment, erm, advice as well and some workshops on how to live, you know, live beyond, beyond the pandemic. But when you think of our like, erm, even throughout the pandemic mosques were kind of, erm, er, quite upfront in providing religious advice from a health point of view.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, erm, into...I mean in some cases successful, the other cases not so successfully, erm, and it all comes down to the kind of of, erm, the acceptance of what the pandemic is. But, erm, there'll be certainly like, you know, erm, the role of mosques providing religious advice on, on, on health, so, you know, erm on health, but providing workshops on, erm, you know, employment services and, you know, how to generally access services. I remember, because I worked for the NHS some years ago, I remember one of the local mosques suggesting that because the, there's a lot of undocumented people in the community as well having like, erm, health profession based in certain mosques...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...or certain health and, and you know, community centres might be a way of addressing health inequities as well.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, so yeah, I mean that might be k-kind of a, er, a suggestion that the NHS could take up, erm, but again, you know, resourcing-wise I don't think that's particularly, erm, going to be, er, a practical thing to do.

I: **Hmm. Hmm.**

R: You know, so...

I: **Is there anything else you want to talk about, er, that we haven't touched upon that might be relevant?**

R: Well, I was quite interested in talking about more of a health being perspective and also the kind of education side.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Er, er, and, erm, you know I'm hoping that I've covered both, both areas, both areas in some, some extent, erm, but I do, I do think that, you know, the pandemic has in many ways, er, exposed the existing health inequalities within Muslim community.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Yeah. So, erm, now I guess the next question would be, what the kind of next steps are with my kind of interview.

I: **Yeah, erm, well, this would be sent away for transcription, erm, and once it's been typed up it will be returned to us. All participants will be given pseudonyms, erm so there won't be any identifying, any identifying information will be removed, erm, so we provide as**

much anonymity as we can. And then we will draw upon these to, er, we're, we're developing a number of outputs which are, erm, associated with the project so the first is to write a report. The report is generally going to draw upon the questionnaire data more than the interview data.

The interviews, though, erm, they'll be typed up and then they'll be used to generate at least two academic articles, so we will be looking to write at least two articles, erm, to be submitted to academic journals based on the interviews.

Er, there will be some focus groups afterwards as well so if you'll...you'll probably be contacted again and asked if you would be interested in taking part in a focus group or basically a group interview.

R: Yes.

I: Erm, and, erm, yeah, essentially that's... er, and we'll be looking to put some toolkits out so that's our intention. That's our intention.

Interview 5 – written notes, not audio recorded

Date: 07/03/2022

Duration: 40:00

Participant characteristics: male, community leader

Can you give me an insight into your role in the community?

I'm a Brummie, born and bred, grew up Bournville Quintin, the only non-white boy in schools I attended. These were days of extreme racism, pre-Islamophobia, yet there was lots of racism. It shaped my world view, and from the age of 16, after GCSEs and A-levels, I got involved in community organisations and inter-faith work. I joined voluntary organisations and worked in the community for 32 years. I studied Law at XXX, but I didn't want to be a lawyer, and delayed my qualification and worked with voluntary organisations. I ended up with Commission for Racial Equality, then qualified in law in 2000, was a founding member of Association for XXXX XXXX [a law organisation], I set up XXXX FM [Muslim radio station], I'm a Trustee of XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city near Highgate], the XXXX foundation in Markfield [Islamic educational organisation], XXXX XXXX [a Muslim charity organisation] as a director for 7-8 years. I was then a self employed consultant, adviser to XXXXX Trust [a Muslim trust organisation]. Also continued my academic work and undertook 4 years of a doctorate on religious discrimination against Muslims, but didn't complete as we adopted the European Convention. The doctoral focus was that there was legislation on race but not religion. I have done lots of inter-faith work with the Bishop of Birmingham, National Vice President and Council chair of XXXX XXXX of Great Britain [national level Muslim society]. Day job now for 7 years is head of West Midlands region of general XXXX council [health organisation], looking at health inequalities. Invited to help West Midlands to set up of the 44 police forces, West Midlands is the first to set up an independent advisory group to look at inequalities in policing – I am chair. For many years I was also a safeguarding school governor.

What are the most significant impacts of the pandemic on Muslim communities?

It's multifaceted – you have the individual health impact, in the first 12-18 months there were massive inequalities in deaths from Covid in BAME communities. There were lots of theories around in medical communities - was it a disease impacting people of a particular genetic background? Was it societal like multi- generational households, educational literacy and awareness? Disregard for following guidance – are BAME groups breaking the rules? Many different theories. It's interesting that the perception and the way they were propagated through media or campaigns

was often with a healthy dose of stereotypes, bias and racism. I've spent my whole life on race inequalities, there are racists in all types of communities, and I have also met people that are so anti-racist that they would never question their own integrity. I don't know if it was not noticing the impact of their words and wanting to do good, or whether it was actually racist views. But what you were hearing as a BAME person, was that they are dying more, we need more campaigns in minority ethnic languages, they're not following the rules, older people live with young people so they are passing it on. That is the BBC reporting etc, and if you look at right wing media all of that is worse. So people went to online spaces and were fed conspiracy theories, including plans to depopulate the world, they were fed mistrust and lack of faith and confidence in healthcare as well as government and the executive. I have worked remotely since 2020, and my Mum is 82 years old and vulnerable. Working in the Police in the pandemic was an interesting time. In the Muslim community we would see a massive effort to coordinate Mosques to coordinate keeping people safe and using social media. Worshippers couldn't attend prayers or funerals, but even the most least savvy Mosques realised they needed to get online. There was a huge surge in technological communication, initially this happened slowly as they started to open there was a fantastic effort from Mosques in the community to raise awareness which massively counter-balanced the conspiracy theories. If you are an Imam or Priest, and you show by example that a vaccine is safe, that has a massive impact. Muslim charity sector as well has massive reach into peoples homes. For example, Islamic XXXX, Bordesley, reached young people who were more likely to be tuned into that sector. Then you had those who didn't care about faith, but who were born Muslim. For that group there were social factors which were important. They were badly affected because they didn't have good spaces to hear positive narratives, also they mostly lived in socio-economically deprived areas. These conditions encourage mistrust, distress, people being deeply upset and engaging or entertaining conspiracy theories etc. Then you have middle class Muslims who were much better in their understanding, educated enough and comfortable economically enough to take it at face value. The communities that suffered the most were those without religious support or charitable foundations, those who were isolated and there were massive bereavements. My wife suffered 11 bereavements, and it was hard to not be able to visit family. Some communities suffered all of this and then had no one left to trust, and conspiracy theories took hold as they were left to suffer. There were a very large swathes of Muslims and all groups who didn't have access to support from Mosques and organisations.

What were the main impacts on Mental health in the community?

In the middle of the pandemic, around December 2020 health professionals were saying that 'the real pandemic will start when this one finishes.' Numbers of individuals with mental health issues are far higher as a result of the pandemic, but

there are also elevated levels of anxiety and depression. Grief has been allowed to go on where people are isolated, and intervention comes much later on. The figures for self-harm are up and Muslim communities are not immune to that. Communities which are active in their faith are probably better able to deal with those issues than isolated Muslims who didn't have a place to reach out to - its a huge lost voice in the city. Where I work people bang the drum about the good stuff they are doing, but it's preaching to the converted. I'm also working with the police violence reduction unit, they are doing some good stuff, but they're not touching 10% of the population because most young people involved in violent crime are not engaging with that kind of support. It is a hugely lost voice, some of the not for profit organisations specialise on reaching out to schools and engaging where people have addiction issues or homelessness. Of course there are Muslims included in that. Sometimes faith groups tend to resist recognising there are people in their communities with problems, the homeless, alcohol problems, there is a need to put in place interventions.

It was interesting reading the project piece as it reads like the focus is 'what did religious organisations do to address needs of communities?' This is important and the time and to recognise the effort, but also how many doctors died? The first 10 or so to die were Muslim. The reality that can be presented to government is that community organisations which are characterised by a range of stereotypes stepped up to meet needs that government should have been meeting. But there are much wider issues as well. I use academic work in policy work etc. I'm a huge fan of academic work because we need it to make points and it gives rigour to things we might already know. But there is a lot more that needs to be done on a lot of issues.

I would love for someone to do work on 'what impact did the pandemic have on individual faith?' I've personally seen extremes of people of different faiths losing their faith due to losing loved ones, through until probably the majority across faiths in my circles who have really found comfort and solace. We call people who are rarely religiously active 'Eid Muslims', but more of them became more practicing of their faith, I would say everybody's faith went up by 20-30% because you're constantly reminded of the frailty of life. Also when you can't see people you realise you love them. In the Asian Muslim community when you're parents are elderly you keep them at home and look after them. The stories of people dying in care homes didn't happen for Muslims, whereas it did for my colleagues who were not Muslim. I never heard of that in a Mosque or anywhere else. What you did have was parents dying overseas because flights were down etc. In times of adversity that faith is tested but it also grows, and the prayers you make are far more heartfelt.

What do you think have been the main impacts of bereavements?

Now is too early to say what the impact is. I remember people, close friends, my wife's first cousin, the family spent 17-18 months shielding and out of the blue the father got Covid and died within 7 days. He left behind children, none of which were able to visit him in hospital. The rites of passage which are important, washing the body etc are so important. The trauma is horrendous. If you talk to nurses holding the hands of people who were dying with a phone in the other hand... Many people left the profession because of the trauma. GPs have a personal relationship with Muslim families. My Mum's GP looked after her for 50 years. They were being badgered by people asking for advice and from people in desperate need, and having to explain that they cannot help, the GP cannot leave the house. Medical directors would ring me in the pandemic in tears, people leading the hospitals who were mentally physically and emotionally exhausted. There were huge traumas...

The GMC website contains research on how the pandemic affected trainees. When they graduate they are an FY1 but because of the measures brought in by the government some would register 6 months earlier. This research showed the two extremes: one group who couldn't take the emotional drain and who left and/or were traumatised, and those who gravitated towards it. Also funeral directors would broadcast on Zoom and closed YouTube channels so that wherever you were you could witness a burial that you would never normally have done.

Interview 6

Date:17/03/2022

Duration: 01:10:01

Participant characteristics: male, community leader

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: Okay, thank you for taking the time. Erm, I think it's probably useful to give a, a little bit of a, of insight into the project. We're looking to capture the impact of COVID on Muslim communities in Birmingham. Obviously it's not homogenous religious identity, but it's our focus to sort of bring, er, an insight into the dynamics of what happened with the Muslim communities specifically, and, and also how organisations responded.

So with that in mind, if we go back to the beginning of the pandemic what do you feel were the most significant impacts early on for the Muslim community going right back to the new stories initially coming out, the first indications that something would hit UK soil and then into lock- that first lockdown, what do you think were the first significant indications?

R: Erm, so again, b-b-before I begin I just wanna –

I: Yeah. *[Clears throat]*.

R: – erm, kind of, er, just to make you, er, er, just to alert you to I have, erm, speech dyslexia.

I: Okay.

R: So sometimes it will be lots of erming and ah-ing or I'll answer something completely different to what you've said because my brain hasn't processed it.

I: Yeah.

R: So, erm, if something doesn't make sense, just, erm, ask me to repeat it...

I: Sure.

R: ...just say "XXXXX, you're talking crap."

I: *[Laughs]*.

R: I don't know what you'd say *[laughs]*...

I: *[Laughs]*.

R: ...can you repeat it again *[laughs]*.

I: Okay, yeah. Yeah, okay, no problem.

R: Okay. And, erm ...

I: *[Clears throat]*.

R: ...obviously, er, I was right in the heart of the Muslim response and there's so much that happened at different stages so some things may just come apparent later.

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...as I think about it. Erm, so, so the question was how did it impact the Muslim community? Erm...?

I: **What were the impacts, you know, the things that stood out as specifically affecting the Muslim community?**

R: Okay. Er, I mean the, this, this was, er, see COVID, when it first landed on our doorsteps here, it wasn't like a, you know, a, a two-minute earthquake and then suddenly, you know, you've got all this chaos that you then...it's a slow-moving flood where in the beginning we all knew it was coming from obviously news and, you know, where it started in China and it went through Asia and into Europe. Erm, and I think it was the slow response that people struggled to kind of get their heads around, around what is it we need to do. And I think there were, there was lots of confusion in the beginning, erm, lots of, erm, not so clear on what the, erm, the government wanted for us to do, what not to do. Erm, and then obviously dur-during lockdown itself, er, when the lockdown kicked in it was, it was a mixed bag. Er, erm. you know from an information perspective there was so much information out there that people...there was information overload...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...and there wasn't the correct way of filtering that information out because if you don't trust the government a graphic from the government isn't going to help...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...erm, and if you don't trust the, you know, the, the chief medical scientist...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...erm, or the chief medical officer putting out, you know messages from him isn't going to help.

I: **Hmm.**

R: You know, you have to...so I think, erm, a lot of misinformation ended up taking over because these people have a lot of time on their hands are very good at putting messaging out.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, but equally, you know I'm not going to blame...I, I don't like blaming misinformation because that's disregarding people who have concerns...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...you know, we're then saying that, well, they don't know how to read information properly.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I think, erm, Muslim communities tend to, erm, live in deprived areas, er, quite often so they've all-they've always suffered health inequalities and social injustices, so if...they've lived with COVID-like symptoms all their lives, you know, whether it's heart disease or diabetes or, erm, other chest, TB, so for them this is now, okay, what's different; you guys have never, never cared about me. Now why all of a sudden do you want to...are you caring about me?

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, but then as time went on, erm, I think the death rates, you know, erm, people's anecdotal evidence was more stronger than, erm, er, what was coming from the news. People could see people falling ill.

I: **Yeah.**

R: People could see, erm, people are dying. I know, er, we're based in, er Balsall Heath. Balsall Heath was one of the, er, er, highest hit areas when it came to deaths.

I: **Yes.**

R: And then, um, and it also didn't help, erm, where quite often Muslims were blamed.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm. You know extra measures were brought in like a day or two before Eid in some parts of the country.

I: **That's right, yeah.**

R: Erm, or the, the, erm, you know we, we had, erm, an MP in Birmingham who blamed Muslims.

I: **Okay, so, so let's unpack that because I wasn't aware of that. Er, we've, er, obviously I'm aware of a wider sentiment that's starting to come through in the interviews that it wasn't just a subtext in the news media that kind of was indicating some sort of, er, negativity towards South Asian communities in general and within that, so, so therefore, certain proportions of Muslim communities.**

R: Yeah, but specific example, so, so, so what was going on with this MP and is this somebody who was actually, erm, you know is this an MP who's running, is this an MP who has, who has been, er, secured a vote and, er, you know, has some sway? You know, he, he, he...

I: **[Clears throat].**

R: ...without mentioning names – you'll probably guess who it is, anyway – he is the longest-serving Muslim MP probably.

I: **Right, okay.**

R: Erm, he's the MP for Perry Barr, Khalid Mahmood.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, and he had made a statement in the early days that Muslims are, er, I think he said Muslim and Sikhs, I can't remember but if you google...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...or I will try to find it for you and I'll send it to you.

I: **Okay, thanks.**

R: He said one of the reasons that COVID is, erm, spread...either, he said either spreading or, er, more hospitalisations...

I: **Hmm.**

R:is because they're not sticking to the rules and they keep going to the mosque.

I: **Right. Okay.**

R: Erm, I had to, erm...I was invited, er, to BBC Radio 4 to defend the Muslim community and I had made it clear that, look, not just Muslims but South Asians are social animals. We're very community-based. You can't just suddenly pull us apart. Even to do that it takes time. Like if we had a pandemic second time, for instance...

I: **Hmm. Hmm.**

R: ...we'd know what to do now...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...because we've been through it once. Like this is the first time in our lives we are having to do something on such a drastic measure, but equally, Muslims tend to get affected more quickly because we've got all this, we suffer from all sorts of respiratory issues because we live in high air pollution zones...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...er, or we suffer other, er, health inequality so naturally people from those communities...

I: **[Clears throat].**

R: ...are likely to be, erm, hospitalised or have the high impact, erm, and then afterwards clearly when you had, erm, Ramadan or Eid there were concerns. Yet in Birmingham, for instance, if you...I don't know if you reached out to XXXXX XXXXX [director of the local public health authority]...

I: **No, not yet.**

R: ...erm, but, er, he will tell you that the mosques were amongst the most active of all the faith groups, erm, and, and he believes...I mean this is on record where he had predicted, erm, Birmingham to suffer at least 9,000 deaths but it was, erm, i-it ended up being 3000 deaths...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...and he credit that mainly to the Muslim community...

I: **Right. Okay.**

R: ...yeah, because he said, "You guys have been more active in the way you've all coordinated, erm, and how we've all unified. We were not very unified *[laughs]* when it comes to things during COVID. Erm, so I think...

I: **So that was, so, so that was in...just so I've got absolute clarity because we're going to have to come back to...**

R: Yeah.

I: **...you know, transcripts and so on...**

R: Yeah.

I: **...so that, so that was the, the lower number of deaths was, was attributed to the community pulling together?**

R: Yes. Yeah, yes.

I: Okay, cool. Okay.

R: So, I mean so, so there were, there was issues that impact poor people in you know we had, like even the first few high profile deaths in the medical field were Muslims...

I: Yeah.

R: ...if you, if you recall and it was being highlighted and then we'll get stick for saying, "Well, why're you making an issue that they're Muslims." Well, for us it was a sense of pride that, you know, s-some people in our community are on the front line and they are sacrificing themselves and they have, erm, and there was a mental health impact, erm...

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: ...erm, yes, so, so there were all these, all these impacts in the medical and a big, a big part was the PR stuff that when it came to like V Day or VE Day or when it came to going on the beach –

I: Hmm.

R: ...the, the media would celebrate it but when it would be something in a mosque or in the Asian community it would be, you know, seen in a different light.

I: Yeah. Yeah. There's, there's so many things you've touched upon there. One of the things that stands out and of course is, is very interesting is misinformation and how people engaged with misinformation. But if you could unpack that a little bit more? It's interesting to hear from your perspective the kinds of things which were circulating maybe within some sort of sub-sections of the community and also I'm interested in age. Was this a generational thing? Is his something which is more present in one particular age group? Erm, was there, there anything like that, er, that stood out?

R: No, I don't particularly think so. Er, I didn't find it was related to age. I'm mean I think young people tended to ignore some of, you know, the social distancing rules, erm, mostly because it's within their nature to be active...

I: Hmm.

R: ...erm, not because they're being reb...I mean even if they're being rebels it's in young people's nature to be rebels, to be explored, not to be bound down...

I: Yeah.

R: ...to meet with friends, to be, erm...

I: *[Clears throat]*.

R: ...and then if they had conversations, erm, o-okay, h-how do I put this? Y-you know if I was to give you some context, and, I'm...erm, because we suffer again all those social deprivation issues...

I: Hmm.

R: ...those are factors in how we deal with things.

I: Yeah.

R: We don't communicate well. We're not educated as well. We have low literacy so if we have a concern we don't bring it out properly. It takes a good moderator to unpack it and get them to

think actually you have a good point, you know. So, erm, so if they have concerns the first thing they'll say is, "Oh, the government are trying to screw us over."

I: **Hmm.**

R: Well, really deep inside they're confused, they don't know what's going on.

I: **Yeah.**

R: You know, but their way of saying it is, is the quickest literate way for them to say that they're confused about what's going on.

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...er, and then when you're sitting with other people of similar language that snowballs into something bigger.

I: **Hmm. [Clears throat].**

R: Erm, and that's why, like, erm, in our mosque we took a neutral stance to a lot of things because we found that by having a neutral stance it gives you room for engaging and talking to people rather than having one stance...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...on something...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...erm, and that was, that was easier said than done but we, you know, it took us about six months to master, you know. Erm, but equally, you know, we had to go by what the law was telling to do...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...so we had to do the social distancing measures, we didn't have an option. We didn't say, "Look, if you don't believe it, it's okay. That's the law; you have to follow it." Erm, but see that in terms of age I mean there was so much in-misinformation out there around...and it was done in different ways...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...whether it was through memes or whether it's through other scholars or whether it's through pictures or things, and I just feel that people are not interested in medical facts.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, people need narratives, people need trusted people to tell them.

I: **Hmm.**

R: So having, y-you know, er, getting pr-Professor Witty give a boring speech on, you know, a 20-second advert doesn't make any difference. Erm, you know, having...if you, if you're worrying about the vaccination, you know, erm, having a doctor tell you it's the right thing to do doesn't work so well. You know you need someone trusted within the communities whether it's the imam or the priest or the aunties...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...you know, erm, or the uncles, or families, t-that's the best way to deal with misinformation.

I: **Hmm.**

R: People need one-to-one, just keep sending people PDF fact-finding, erm, er, er the fact sheets wasn't the answer.

I: **Hmm.**

R: You know, having behavioural, er, psychologist experts I think should have been the way forward, erm, and I think this is where places of worship played a really good role...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...where they would speak from a narrative perspective. Like the imam, for instance, would not give the medical factor on why a vaccination is good...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...you know, is worth taking.

I: **Hmm.**

R: He, he stood up and he, he told the congregation. He said, "Look, I've trusted my doctor. I had so-and-so operation before. My doctor told me it was the right thing to do. I need to trust the doctors. Just like you trust me for your spiritual help, trust your doctors with your medical help.

I: **Hmm.**

R: You know, erm, I have put my trust in the people. If you don't trust your doctor then change your doctor but don't, don't be in a, in a middle place."

I: ***[Clears throat].***

R: Those sort of information helped, erm, and then even messages from social influencers that were not patronising.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Sometimes when I say, "Oh, you're stupid, you don't know what you're talking about," you've switched off straight away.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: ...you know, erm, so do we, you know, attacking information in a, erm, in an, erm, empathy and, you know, showing empathy, like I'm understanding your perspective. But fear, fear works. When you put fear into people, you know. Equally that's worked the other way. Erm, you know, COVID, there some of the information has put fear into people and they become more reserved where they're still struggling with it now.

I: **Hmm. *[Clears throat].* Yeah.**

R: Erm, so I, I take it's, it's a two-way thing. It's not misinformation versus good information. It's the way we've handled it...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...erm, has impacted people.

I: Yeah, so there's two things there. I guess it would be interesting to explore what the content of some of the misinformation that was sort of maybe most, er...

R: Correct.

I: ...you know, kind of, er, well, shared or discussed or whatever.

R: Yeah.

I: And then also there's something else that you've implied there about *[clears throat]*, which of course is, is starting to come up through the interviews anyway, about wellbeing, erm, and you know, mental health and so on and so forth so, but, yeah, if we go...what kind of content then of misinformation?

R: Okay, erm, I mean, there as, there was some content in the beginning which people had concerns about but then was very, I think very quickly became old news like, erm, the microchip in the vaccination...

I: Yeah, okay.

R: Bill Gates.

I: Hmm.

R: I think 5G had a role to play in the early days, erm, about, you know, them doing the rollout because I think 5G maps were being rolled out while...

I: Yeah.

R: ...everyone was in lockdown. I think there could have been better information around what that means, erm...

I: Hmm.

R: ...because, er, information around COVID, for instance, the lockdown, what's happening during lockdown, why're we locked down, why're the military being bought out, erm. You know, I, I know here, for instance, in the mosque we did a lot of work around, erm, you know, allaying those fears. Like the military have always come out...

I: Yeah.

R: ...erm, like when there's floods, in flooded areas. The military's come out with their, er, militaries are based in the hospitals...

I: Hmm.

R: ...and they help out, you know, when it's needed so it's not...we're just not used to seeing them on the streets.

I: Yeah.

R: Erm, and I think that there was, there was a time where the community had an issue with the military being in Birmingham...

I: Yeah.

R: ...but it was done in an underhanded way, like with the mosques we, erm, we work with public health; on a weekly basis we would have high level meetings.

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...and they never brought it up with us...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...and then I think the following day the military was out on the streets in Alum Rock.

I: **Hmm.**

R: So one person got booted off quite forcefully. Someone made a video. It was in the news that the Muslims community are attacking the military in Alum Rock.

I: **Hmm.**

R: In reality it was a refugee who had a traumatic time in a war zone and just seeing a military fatigue had triggered him.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: Erm, but they hadn't told us any of these things in the meeting so then it makes you think, well, what's going on?

I: **Hmm.**

R: So there were these kind, these kind of things but then as time went on it wasn't those particular things that were a concern.

I: **Hmm.**

R: People had got over that. The concern had become about the quick rollout of the vaccination...

I: **Hmm.**

R: The forceful nature of the vaccination that no longer exists now...

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, it was the role of the pharmaceutical companies. Erm, it was seeing double standards from people in power and what they're asking. It was seeing...so then people started asking more legit questions which no-one would give a right answer for...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...and those, unfortunately, feed into conspiracy theories.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Okay, I probably had a point earlier, erm, you know and now it's coming out that while everybody else was lockdown, you know, people at the heart of government were in parties.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, so now when you look back, people were right to have concerns, if not the right reasons to have concerns if that made sense.

I: Yeah. Yeah. Okay, yeah, and that's, that's really interesting. What...can you just give me a bit more detail because a military presence thing is something that I hadn't heard of, haven't heard accounts of yet.

R: Yeah. Okay, so, erm, if we were to go back a little...

I: Hmm.

R: ...so when, er, when they put the first lockdown and the Prime Minister made this big speech around what the new COVID Bill is likely to have...

I: Hmm.

R: ...and that included, you know, the power to do mass graves, the power to, er, cremate bodies...

I: Hmm.

R: You know, these are worst case, having military on the streets to enforce...

I: Yeah.

R: Erm, there was certain things that people had picked up and turned into social media graphics. And I can understand why there would be a concern, like people are thinking oh, the military are going to be out on our streets. So there was lots of misinformation around the army coming out now...

I: Hmm.

R: ...and that was then, erm, like if you're seen on the street, I-like the police had the power to lock people up.

I: Hmm.

R: You know, where they had the power but they very rarely used it. I think they had a number of stages and they, er, they didn't want to use it but then, you know, there, there was information around, well, if the army see you there'll be shoot-to-kill policies, all these nonsense which came about because of that and so it put fear in people...

I: Yeah.

R: Like where are we leading to, what's going on because the lockdown was a state of "How, w-where's we're headed, where's this going, how long is this going to be for?"

I: Hmm.

R: You know, erm, er, what's going on, why are people dying in hospitals? Are they being...er...that was another big concern that people are being forced to die.

I: Right.

R: I don't know whether you heard that in the very beginning.

I: No. No.

R: You know, they're being forced to go on ventilators and they're dying and families are not being...and I think there was confusion in the hospital where, where loved ones couldn't be with them...

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, and people were dying and again all these were then conspiracies would fit into people's minds...

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, even in my own household, erm...sorry, I'll come back to your question.

I: **No, no, it's fine, it's fine.**

R: Yeah. In the very beginning of COVID, like, er, a week into, erm, er, the first lockdown where everybody, you know the streets were empty, me and my wife had caught COVID and we had it very severe, very severe, literally. We had two kids at home. We couldn't send them anywhere. We had to look after them and we were crawling from room to room. That's how bad we were. Erm, my wife is normally good health. She, she has...she's into holistic medicine. She eats well. She, erm, she's a textbook, erm, er, health freak in that sense.

I: **Hmm. Hmm.**

R: Erm, I'm asthmatic. I have, erm, I have pretty bad asthma. It affected me more than her, erm, but equally I'm...if I can't breathe properly I have techniques to...I don't panic because when you panic your breathing is restricted even more.

I: **[Clears throat].**

R: Erm, but my wife's biggest worry was that if I go to hospital I will end up dying...

I: **Right.**

R: ...and she kept saying, "you are not calling a hospital, you're not calling an ambulance..."

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...because I don't know what will happen to you there. They don't talk to anyone. They don't speak to anyone. They'll stick you on a ventilator and most people don't come back from a ventilator.

I: **Hmm.**

R: You know there were all these things going and some of those were stories that we were hearing from people...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...erm, who still have concerns about that.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So this coupled with other things so the-the military, there was things going around about what is the role of the military.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Now in principle the, the Muslim leaders who were around the table didn't have an issue with the military being on the streets.

I: **Hmm.**

R: They had given some advice that if the military are going to be there they should be doing it in civilians so as not to alarm and there's always been this, erm, er, perception, erm, and again rightly so that the military is always used for wars in Muslim countries.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So then having them mainly in Muslim areas isn't the right way forward. There's plenty of other...if you do it, let us know so we can let our congregation know and we can find volunteers to join them.

I: **Hmm. Hmm.**

R: So but there was an anti-military sentiment there. It was just the way that the one, in particular, had been done about I think it was to push the vaccination.

I: **Right. Okay.**

R: So a coupled with military and using the vaccination, it then puts fear into people more.

I: **And that was, that was notional rather than realistic? It was an idea or was there some...**

R: No. It was put in practice.

I: **Right. Okay.**

R: They hadn't informed anybody...

I: **Okay.**

R: And we don't, and they did, I think it was brought up very forcefully by the Muslim leaders, especially the mosques leaders...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...saying, "What are you guys playing at? We've been working with you. We've done everything perfectly..."

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...why are you suddenly ignoring us?"

I: **Hmm.**

R: And they did apologise. I think it was.. I, I want to talk about something later...

I: **Sure.**

R: ...about the role of the politicians and the role of public health.

I: **Yes. Yeah.**

R: There was, it was a massive disconnect...

I: **[Clears throat].**

R: ...and it was the politicians who had made that decision, not the medical so they had apologised and they pulled back on that after they felt the wrath.

I: **But that was the sort of...but so that was the military being used to support, what, the expansion of vaccination centres or, or pushing the narrative of...**

R: Either it was test and trace or vaccination but I'm pretty sure it was vaccination.

I: **Okay. Okay.**

R: But even test and trace...

I: Hmm.

R: ...people are not...like test and trace was...at that time I think you had to, erm...no, this is what it was...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...they wanted, er, to take...they were doing random sampling in every household.

I: **Okay. Ah!**

R: Erm, er, so they take your, your saliva sample...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and then they send it off for testing.

I: **Right. Right.**

R: Then it comes down, "Why you taking my DNA?"

I: **Hmm. Hmm.**

R: "Where's it going? Why you taking this?" And then there were other things that come out that – erm, I think again if you google it, it will be up – where they had used the same swab on different people *[laughs]*.

I: **Oh, gosh!**

R: So all sorts of kind of things came out of it so I don't think it was just a military mess-up.

I: **Right. Right. Okay. Yeah. Yeah.**

R: They've gone into areas and used the same swab like three, four times *[laughs]*.

I: **And that was, that was observed? That was real? That wasn't, er...? *[Clears throat]*.**

R: That was real. It was... they, they ended up apologising and saying, "Yeah, we're looking into this and, erm..."

I: **Right, okay. *[Laughs]*.**

R: Yeah, but if you, if you google these they'll come up...

I: **Yeah. Okay.**

R: ..they will, they will come up if you google it.

I: **Yeah, and I'll refer back as well because obviously this is all recorded...**

R: Yeah.

I: ...so I, I'll go back and follow up these lines of enquiry, you know. Erm, and I think, yeah, so I don't, I don't want to derail your, your kind of, er, your train of thought because there's some really interesting stuff that's coming through. Erm, I do have a series of questions which are, you know, kind of around wellbeing, mental health, you know, the impacts of lockdowns...

R: Yeah.

I: ...the impact of all of the contextual stuff that you've been talking about, you know, and what the sense of the impact of that was within the community. I'm also interested, though, and I'm just mindful of time, erm, that the second half of our project is looking at what the community organisations do to respond...

R: Yeah.

I: ...and, and, and also that's in the context of I think some of the things that you might talk about with regard to public health...

R: Yeah.

I: So may-maybe, maybe let's start to work backwards and, and think about, you know, kind of what were the areas of need that I guess you would have identified through based on all of this stuff, erm, and, you know, kind of what measures were taken, erm, in the context of, of what it is you might be thinking about with regards to the local government public health and so on. *[Clears throat]*.

R: So I mean I've spoken a lot about the negative things but you know I don't want to lose track of a lot of the positive stuff that also happened.

I: **Sure.**

R: ...erm, which...so the XXXX XXXX [Islamic Trust Organisation] was very instrumental in bringing the mosques together...

I: **Okay.**

R: Erm, and this is off the record now...

I: **Is it...are we, are we back on record now or...?**

R: We're now back on record, yeah.

I: **Okay. Cool.**

R: You can...just remove the bit I want to delete.

I: **No, that's fine. I'll delete that. I'll cut it out of the thing.**

R: Yeah. Okay. So he called a physical meeting of the mosques to say, look, we need to start preparing for this. Erm, and only three mosques turned up and so what, what we as the XXXX XXXX [Islamic Trust Organisation] did was, erm, individually phone every single mosque and make a plea to them to say, "Look, we need you for what's about to come. We can't do it without you," so made them, empowered them.

And then I think, erm, we held a meeting with the council. All the mosques came together and before the lockdown, er, you know and I think XXXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, located near Highgate] also played a role in some of the...by this time a lot of the mosques

are together now, you know, so I, I won't take full credit for that. Erm, we've all met in a physical meeting and before the lockdown was called the mosques, yeah – note this on record – the mosques before any other places of worship in the country had...what's the word when you do something unilaterally, erm, decided to voluntarily close their mosques.

I: Right.

R: Yeah, which is unprecedented for us to make a decision like that.

I: Yeah, and that's pre-March 2020 first lockdown?

R: Pre-March, yeah, pre-lockdown, yeah

I: Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Yeah.

R: So we took proactive steps before any other place of worship...

I: Yeah.

R: ...yeah, in the country, erm, and, erm, you know, we, we all did that and it worked really well, you know, so, so we did that. Erm, and then, erm, the XXXX XXXX [Islamic Trust Organisation] facilitated...okay, here's the funny thing, is Zoom was a new thing in that time...

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah? XXXX XXXX [Islamic Trust Organisation], we've been using Zoom for about two years before then.

I: Okay.

R: For us it wasn't a new thing.

I: Hmm.

R: So we introduce b-uh, because Skype is terrible for group meetings...

I: Yes, yeah.

R: Even Teams is.

I: Yeah.

R: Er, I understand why they don't use it, because security concerns and the servers, etc, so we introduced Zoom to them and they didn't have a clue and they weren't doing it so the council were using the XXXX XXXX [Islamic Trust Organisation] Zoom facilities...

I: Right.

R: ...for not just their mosque meetings but also for all the other faith...

I: Right. Okay.

R: ...so they had a...we were facilitate...in fact, we were training council officials how to hold Zoom meetings...

I: Right. Okay.

R: ...for the, for the, erm, some of the cabinet members I was writing greetings, "How to handle meetings, how to handle Zoom chat," and in fairness to them I'd get a nice email from them

saying, "Thank you for this. Thank you for facilitating." And I did and that was our bit, you know, and I think it as only six months later someone from the council paid 120 quid for a Zoom account.

I: Yeah. Okay.

R: Erm, they, they went through a whole load of bureaucracy but that was led mainly by the Muslim community who helped the council reach out to the wider community, and again they will testify to how we supported them in doing that.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Erm, and that led to so many meetings and a lot of it was down, down to the XXXX XXXX [Islamic Trust Organisation] and down to the Muslim community.

I: Hmm.

R: So that worked really well.

I: Yeah.

R: Then XXXX XXXX [director of the local public health authority], as a senior leader...

I: Hmm.

R: ...made himself available every single week to the Mosques meeting.

I: Right.

R: In this instance I think the council and [the Local Public Health Authority] need to be commended...

I: Hmm.

R: ...because it's not often that we know the face, let alone the name, of a senior leader in the city council.

I: Hmm.

R: You know, erm, and he would give very personalised information to how the mosque should be dealing with things.

I: Right.

R: Yeah. He helped us in-interpret the, the law and the rules that were coming from the council that were vague.

I: Hmm.

R: He would help us make internal policies in grey areas...

I: Hmm.

R: ...that we would be unified. He would go out of his way to...

I: *[Clears throat].*

R: ...erm, er, learn about the Muslim faith...

I: Hmm.

R: ...so he could personalise information. Er, him and another Muslims officer called XXXX XXXX [community engagement officer]...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...who really bridged that gap that made the Muslims be unified...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...how to deal with funerals, how to deal with burials, how to deal with Ramadan, what is it we can do, what we can't do. There was give-and-take.

I: **Yeah.**

R: But it worked really well and I think because of that the Muslims remained really unified. We have never been closer as Muslims in Birmingham than we have as a result of how we worked in COVID.

I: **Right.**

R: And we had a leader in the council who, who was listening to us.

I: **Hmm.**

R: And the funny thing is he's an LGBT champion. He's an LGBT, openly gay, you know?

I: **Hmm.**

R: Er, he, he would sometimes talk about his husband *[laughs]* and, you know, I'm just looking what of the other Imam but no, nobody cared two hoots. They had so much respect for him.

I: **Yeah.**

R: You know it kind of broke barriers without trying to break barriers too at the same time.

I: **Yeah. Yeah. Hmm.**

R: Erm, so I think that was...and then, you know, we were able to get through the pandemic, you know the, the, the restrictions really well together...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...because of that, and because we did have councillors and politicians involved...

I: **Right.**

R: ...in those meetings.

I: **Yeah. Yeah. So those meetings were, they were...so where, so they were hosted by XXXX XXXX [Islamic trust organisation] or they were sort of , they were under your direction or even though...**

R: They were initially. I would, erm, er, if I give you, I'll, I'll, I'll give out the email address of XXXX XXXX.

I: **Okay. Yes.**

R: He, he was the community lead for [the Local Public Health Authority].

I: **Yeah. Okay.**

R: And I think it is worth having a conversation with him as part of this research...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...because he worked very closely with the Muslims.

I: **Yeah.**

R: He'd be able to give you an authority perspective.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, and he witnessed and he saw a lot of things and, er, about, you know, the pros and cons to everything and even how we had to deal with things from a council perspective, also from a Muslim...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...because he could see some things were not fair but he couldn't say as a council official...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...because politicians are his bosses...

I: **Hmm. Hmm.**

R: ...so he had to stay, stay, stay quiet.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, but equally he would tactfully make sure that the Muslim community were aware of some of these things and, erm, you know, deal with it as, as necessary.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm. Sorry, was your question again, you asked me?

I: **What I, well, what I was, I was going to ask, I guess and it, and it is part of the same question is, so, well, one thing's a technical thing was how many mosques were, erm, you know, kind of party to these meetings and were on board with the kinds of, erm, the, you know, the, as you say, the kind of unified, er, strategies and grey areas and all of that.**

R: No, no. that's a very good question...

I: **[Clears throat].**

R: ...because we went from having just three mosques in an official meeting, to having weekly Zoom meetings where, erm, maximum we would have around 30 or 40 mosques attend at peak.

I: **Okay.**

R: We then also developed a, erm, an email distribution list of around 100 mosques.

I: **Right.**

R: Because we had a lot of mosques who, who take the leadership of other mosques. Even though they're individual but if XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath]

mosques are there or the XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] are there or XXXX [Islamic trust organisation] Mosque are there, they're happy to take their mosques direction...

I: **Okay.**

R: ...because they follow their school of thought so although they're not at the meeting...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...they know they'll hear from the XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], the XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] or XXXX [Islamic trust organisation] Mosque...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...or from others and they're happy. So then all the information would be shared to them via email...

I: **yeah.**

R: Erm, but then we also have a separate Whatsapp group...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...with all the mosques.

I: **Right.**

R: And then in addition to that, all our meetings that we, er, hold with the council we record them all so they're recorded with everyone's permission.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, we put it on YouTube.

I: **Hmm.**

R: And then we put it on the email to everyone...

I: **Right. Okay.**

R: ...so they can all watch, so it not just my account...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...they compare it.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: Erm, and then, you know, if, if mosques needed separate. Erm, and then what that led to was the mosques helping other mosques with risk assessments, with COVID regulations.

I: **Hmm.**

R: You know we were sharing good practice.

I: **Yeah.**

R: We were sharing templates. We were sharing pictures. We were sharing things that are not going well. Like, for instance, I think, erm, you know, like closing a mosque isn't easy, like, you know, according to Sharia Law...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...the mosque doesn't belong to trustees, it belongs to God...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...yeah, and no government. So f-for closing for Friday prayers is not within a person's remit...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...unless the government of the land said it needs to close.

I: **Okay.**

R: Yeah, so during the first two lockdowns the mosques had to be closed. We had no choice.

I: **Hmm.**

R: During the third lockdown we had to cl- we were allowed to stay open.

I: **Right.**

R: Now, what had happened was, erm, in Balsall Heath the rates of death were rising.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Now for us to say we are closing our mosque and no other mosque is, was a very difficult decision to make from a PR perspective and a, erm, spiritual perspective.

I: **Yeah.**

R: But we did, we made that decision that we're closing our mosque, we're closing Friday prayers down...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...which was like, wow. It's like...erm, and other mosques didn't look at that favourably...

I: **Okay.**

R: ...because they say, "You're putting us under pressure," but we'd made that decision based on a local Balsall Heath decision, er, medical.

I: **Hmm.**

R: But then what, what was a good thing that even though not publicly, privately we were getting a lot of messages from other mosques saying, "How have people taken it? What have you done? Do you think we should do the same?"

I: **Yeah.**

R: And it led to them closing their mosques...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...which for us was when, one, took pressure off us but it also...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...you know, we were glad that people were confiding in us. Erm, so those are the good things that came out of it.

I: **Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.**

R: Erm, so, yeah.

I: **There's another question, about the impact of family members being, which we've touched upon before, family members being in hospitals alone with, er, and unable to see loved ones and, and that kind of thing. So I'm just interested in, in what you've observed around that in terms of how mosques responded to...**

R: Yes.

I: **...the, the spiritual need, the, and what the...yeah, it's all of that stuff basically.**

R: Okay. So there were, erm...I mean one, there, there was issues around COVID, like everybody was being classed as a COVID death...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...regardless, so that obviously heightened people, "Why, why are you saying it's a COVID death when we've seen them have a heart attack at home?"

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...or so-and-so, so this is before any testing had become a bit more possible.

I: **Hmm.**

R: So this led to conspiracy theories around "Why you making COVID death numbers look higher when you're classing everyone as COVID..."

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...who's died because everyone who died is now being...so then people were thinking, well, we don't believe this COVID because you just...

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, but equally there was a sense of, one, there was a sense of loneliness around, okay, now that someone's died I couldn't be there at their hos- at the hospital...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...I can't be there at the, erm, the, erm, the ablution of the body...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...because that's a big part of the religious, erm, er, the jurisprudence of, er, dealing with the body and purifying the body but it's also a way to say goodbye to your loved one, your final act of service...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...you know, bathing them.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, and then only six people can be at the, erm, at the funeral.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, and then equally I can't go to the mosque...

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, so there was a huge sense of loneliness...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...erm, that was taking place, erm, and then they...different councils have different rules, like in Sandwell, y-you know more people were allowed to go to a burial than Birmingham.

I: **Right. Okay.**

R: Erm, and not, not everybody understands that a risk assessment in Sandwell would be different to a risk assessment in Birmingham for instance. It would be based on different factors.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, but the council don't always get that out properly to people and people want to be there and, and I do believe the council try to be as, erm, compassionate as possible...

I: **Hmm.**

R: But it wasn't just about that. It, it was I think the mosques had a big role to play in being there for everybody, the role of the imam talking through people, just letting them know it's okay.

I: **Yeah.**

R: You know, erm, you know they're in God's hands now. You know that spiritual and mental support, speaking to them, helping them through the process, talking to them, explaining to them why there going through these rules. Erm, there was so...see, what, what was happening, erm, the biggest fear wasn't so much in the rules but in people who break the rules.

I: **Okay.**

R: So, for instance, erm, say the funeral company...

I: **Hmm.**

R: So the onus was put on them that you would be prosecuted if you did something wrong so if somebody gets COVID from the body...

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, you would be prosecuted according to health and safety laws.

I: **Right.**

R: So they are covering their backs even if they've done everything perfectly...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...you know, because the rules were not that you can't...see, erm, let me clarify, so there was lots of issues like catching COVID from a dead body was very minimum.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Catching COVID from other people doing the ablution was where you have to mitigate.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So even if the, erm...so part of what the funeral directors would do is say, "I won't have anybody in there. I will do it myself otherwise I will get prosecuted.

I: **Okay.**

R: you know, so everybody was in this fear of not knowing where they stand in the early stages. I think over time people became better at dealing with this but mosques had to play a big role. But then also our imams are elderly. You know, being at a funeral they're thinking should I really be going there. Am I really...?

I: **Hmm.**

R: But I think, you know, imams were brave...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...you know, they went.

I: **[clears throat]. Yeah.**

R: Played a full role on telephone conversation and even though there was a lockdown, er, I think it would be fair to say that there was tweaking of the rules sometimes.

I: **Hmm.**

R: So the imam, you know when you've had your one hour walking...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...they would go do their walks together with a member of the family...

I: **Hmm. Hmm.**

R: ...and say "Come on, let's, let's walk, erm, you know, together. Let's have a chat," because you can have as many conversations on telephone or Zoom, it's not the same.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: You can't cry. You can't express your emotions.

I: **Yeah.**

R: You're still a screen, you're still 2D

I: **Yeah.**

R: You know, so there were things like that, you know, that the, a lot of the mosques were doing and I think the mosques had handled this really well and, you know, families would come. In the, the, the first lockdown it was difficult for everyone.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I can't say everybody got it right. E-everybody was in a state of confusion trying to work out...

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: ...you know there were, there were debates amongst each other how to interpret the rules.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: You know and the council had to be careful about what they could say you're allowed to do, what you're not allowed to do.

I: **Yeah, and also the implications of that for jurisprudence as you say. I mean, I think a- and with regard...I mean this may sound like an ignorant question but is...do funerals, do funeral homes normally...is it normally funeral home, homes who will do the ablutions or is it families at home and, and how, you know?**

R: Yeah, yeah, they, they would normally manage it but what happens is, erm, just say I'm your brother, you know, erm. You pass away, erm, and it would be we, we bury straight away the next day so you...we're not kept in funeral homes for long unless there's the coroner has ordered it because there's investigation but you will be brought to the funeral parlour...

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, and then the family members would prepare the body so ie, brothers, children, would spend an hour with you, erm, you know, they would, er, bathe you, erm, you know, touch up any parts of your body and then, you know, just wash you, dry you, put some nice, er, perfume on you and then shroud you in two...so we don't dress you up in any suit or clothes. It's in two shrouds. And then they're put in the cof-coffin. Er, it's taken straight to the mosque.

I: **Hmm.**

R: The prayer takes half an hour and then straight to the burial. The whole thing is over within a couple of hours.

I: **Yeah. Okay.**

R: Erm, so, er, so in the early days, erm, they weren't even allowed to come to the mosque for bur- for funeral prayer. It had to be done in the cemetery outside.

I: **Okay.**

R: But then I think over time, you know, there was a faith kind of advisory group, erm, and then they, they, they restricted, they, er, unrestricted some rules...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...like more people were allowed to come to the mosque and it was a bit easier for us to provide even more support.

I: **Yeah. I mean clearly, you know, obviously within the community where people were passing away within the community, that, the, line of connection with, with the mosque and the funeral, erm, home, er, would be very clear. W-what was the relationship between hospitals and were they working in a way that facilitated the right jurisprudence?**

R: Yeah. Yeah. I understand what you're saying. Okay, sort of...okay, I know we all love the NHS and it's very patriotic to clap for them and so the...

I: *[Clears throat].*

R: So the, the criticism is at the system not at people working.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: Yeah? I think the system is very uncompassionate.

I: **Okay.**

R: And, er, does not take any regard for what people are going through, yeah. That's not to say that staff at NHS are not working hard. Yeah, they're working hard, they're doing their thing, erm, and they're bound by their limitations, erm, you know and I think they're still going even though COVID is kind of over but this is still a mild threat.

I: **Hmm.**

R: You know you still can't visit loved ones in hospital, you're still not allowed to go in. Erm, and I think there's ways of dealing with that that would make things easier for them. You know we know now how to reduce, erm, and I think, erm, I don't know...I don't think the NHS dealt with it well, at all.

I: **Okay.**

R: Yeah. Do I fault them for it? I can't, I can't fault the individuals.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Erm, you know equally, y-you know, you can say they saved people, equally you can say you know at the time 100,000 people died too.

I: **Hmm.**

R: You could argue was it because of the negligence, was it because, you know, 111 wasn't responding, the ambulance service wasn't responding. All these will come out you know, because I'm not in a position to tell you why...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...but I do think that the NHS has been terrible in responding to the community concerns, erm, even in our meetings everything is very clinical, very defensive...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...while [the Local Public Health Authority] was very compassionate.

I: **Okay.**

R: And the two of them had very different ways, and they are two very different authority bodies.

I: **Yeah.**

R: But, yeah, I have, yeah, it's a bit critical. I, I think they could have been better in dealing with things but e- but equally, you know, erm, you know if it comes to dealing with people who have died I can't say there was a major issue. Bodies were dealt with quickly. The funeral directors dealt with it. Yes, there was confusion. You know there were issues where people say, well, the council didn't deal with this properly, they didn't deal with that. Erm, in essence, in, in general I think, erm, between the council, the coroner, hospital bodies were released quickly. I don't think they

had...and I don't think at any, you know Birmingham City Council had set up the, the morgue at Birmingham airport for an overflow and the fire service were put on, er, standby to transport bodies to take away. Erm, I believe that was never used...

I: Right, okay.

R: You know. I also believe I think some of the other mosques had set up extra capacity for bodies in anticipation. I don't think they were ever used I think because the system itself just kind of broke. Yeah.

I: Yeah. So I think so you've talked about having, erm, you know, influence in terms of co-ordinating strategies and, and the, the significance of taking a decision to close, er, mosques and so on and so forth. Are there other particular things which had a coordinated response, er that, you know, I'm thinking about getting into some of the, the detail as we, we're probably getting towards the end but I think are there particular things you can name in terms of practical things I guess that we can sort of identify?

R: Okay, erm, so there was, there was the preventative stuff.

I: Yeah. [Coughs].

R: Erm, there was the technological stuff.

I: Hmm.

R: Helping other mosques, train them up in how to move, erm, services on Zoom, how to use madrassa classes, how to train teachers, er, how to make the best of online tools. Erm, there was also the mental health support. Erm, the XXXX XXXX [Islamic Trust Organisation] did lots of animated messages on, erm, er, test and trace, on, erm, er, social distancing, er, you know to make it very public-friendly on vaccination.

I: Yeah.

R: They're very cartoony messages so it comes much friendlier and not has the "Oh, you must do this." Erm, I'll send them to you. Actually do watch them. We were commissioned by the council to do it.

I: Yeah, that would be really useful, thanks.

R: And we translated them into Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Arabic, er, Swahili and w-we, er, erm, we were...I mean this hasn't been picked up anywhere. We, we, we were, we got paid quite a lot of money to do it...

I: Hmm.

R: Er, I mean I think we were given a grant of around £50,000.

I: Okay.

R: 10,000 for each language but rather than...and part of that money was for to pay TV channels, radio stations...

I: Hmm.

R: Erm, but instead what we did we thought we're not paying them. We are going to pay local people who are struggling.

I: Hmm. Hmm.

R: So we paid local people. I think we must have paid about a thousand people 50 quid or 100, I can't remember the exact figures...

I: **Hmm. Hmm.**

R: ...because they're better at communicating...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...you know, so we said to the aunties who struggled during COVID, you've got 100 people on your Whatsapp.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Send these videos to them. Show us proof and we'll give you 100 quid for doing that.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Why should I pay the TV channel?

I: **Hmm.**

R: I mean, I mean they deserve it too and we'll give them a chunk of it...

I: **Hmm.**

R: But we want to distribute the money as much as possible to the community so they're being empowered.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And it worked wonders for us because all...and it allowed us to reach out to, erm... and none of it was religious-based.

I: **Hmm.**

R: It reached, allowed us to reach out to a community who isn't involved in the mosque.

I: **Yes.**

R: And they were then grateful because they had a bit of money in their pocket and they could then feed their families and, you know, these who are influential but not so well off?

I: **Yeah.**

R: Er, and I don't think the council has picked up on that and we don't mind.

I: **Hmm.**

R: We're, we're proud of a lot of our community member and we've got records of all them. Erm, what else did we do? Erm, we had, er, a one-to-one so we have, erm, what's known as a compassionate upper officer.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Someone to just go and talk to people about COVID so we've got a full-time member of staff saying, "How are you? What can I do to help? How can I support? We're working with other mosques to do that. Erm, we're now, what we're also doing is because we worked with [the Local Public Health Authority] closely...

I: Hmm.

R: ...we've got to know them. We're working with other mosques to get them involved in the wider public health issues...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...you know, the wider determinants of, you know, the low literacy rates, you know how do we work with other mosques to improve that, the social inequalities, the factors that lead to crime. Erm, er we're working on those things, erm, and all of these have come about of that united approach during COVID. Vaccinations we're taking a neutral stance to vaccinations which is working better for us rather than saying, "You should take the vaccination because it allows us to empower people to make the right decision so even if people don't...so people are not taking the vaccination because they don't believe in COVID. Far from it, they do believe that COVID exists. They just don't, erm, believe that the vaccination is the solution but then what we do is we work with them to say how can they reduce, erm, how they can catch COVID. So they're happy that we haven't pushed something on them and then we find a month later they'll come and say, "can you help us book a COVID vaccination?"

I: **[Laughs]. Alright. Okay.**

R: You know that for us is better than, erm, someone just blagging us.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Erm, what other things. We've, erm, we have a better coordination now of working with issues around crime and young people.

I: **Okay.**

R: You know we, erm, as a result of, of that, er, we've got to know y-younger people more and then they start talking to us about other issues related, like when we talk to them about, you know, them, you know we've had lots of meeting even during er, er COVID when we've ask them about why're they're congregating on the streets, why they're not following the rules.

I: **Hmm.**

R: That has led to other things that has led to them talking about why they've had to, er, earn money because they don't get any form of COVID support...

I: Hmm.

R: ...and then they start telling this other things that they shouldn't be telling us, you know, in a, in a kind of private space and then we're now working with them to come out of a certain lifestyle. I will send you some, er, a lot of information on what we've done around serious and organised crime...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and with childhood experiences, erm, you know how, erm...because I think all these things are related even to COVID .

I: **Yeah. Yeah. Okay.**

R: Erm, it's not...and I did email (the Co-Investigator) about it a month ago saying, look, erm, I need your help on certain things because we want to be evidence-based.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: At the moment it's anecdotal. He, he's like the prime minister he's so busy.

I: **[Laughs]. Tell me about it.**

R: Yeah.

I: **Erm, but, yeah, so, yeah, that's, so that's really interesting. I think, erm, is there anything else that you wanted to talk about that hasn't been covered yet, erm, that you want to draw attention to in terms of whether it's the role of XXXX XXXX [the Islamic Trust Organisation], whether it's the influence, the reach of the activities that you're involved with, the legacy of those activities? Erm, looking forward, you know I think, we said a little bit about this but what do the Muslim communities in Birmingham need, looking forward you know?**

R: I do think, erm, I mean my...if, if there was to be a recommendation, like I have two major recommendations that I would give that, er, again based on what I've seen is...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...erm, keeping politicians away from these sort of meetings works, tends to work quite well because the, the officers tend to give you the real information that we have to act upon. Politicians try to play politics with what we should do with the information and they confuse you. They'll want to keep so-and-so. And I think dealing with [the Local Public Health Authority] was really good, even separate to, say, NHS. NHS are very clinical. [the Local Public Health Authority] was very good because they gave us information that was related...

I: **Hmm. [Coughs].**

R: Erm, they, they, they took...what we told them as Muslims they took on board and catered for different groups.

I: **Yeah.**

R: There wasn't one information fits all.

I: **Hmm.**

R: They understand that communities are different and I think that was down to two people, in particular...

I: **Hmm.**

R: And the reason I'm saying that is people move on.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: And it's important that they learn from that.

I: **Yeah.**

R: You know, XXXX XXXX [director of the local public health authority] had commissioned the Hindu community, he had commissioned the Sikh committee, he had commissioned the, er, Christian community because he knew they know how to work in their community and I think that was very unique in that sense.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: My other recommendation would be, erm, around learning, like you know all these things, all we've learnt about the health inequalities, COVID has a light on this. That's nonsense.

I: Hmm.

R: We've known about these things well before COVID. For us it's not new but all the things that they're saying they're learning we can already see they're starting to unlearn.

I: Right. Okay.

R: Things that we are telling them they're starting to ignore.

I: Hmm.

R: Where we can be an influence on them for good they're not listening, they're going back to their own model of just going through the clichéd methods of, erm, consultation. Like if you want to stop people in the Muslim or in, in, er, deprived areas from being impacted...

I: Hmm.

R: ...erm, by pandemic or other health issues, don't effing commission people from outside of the areas.

I: Hmm.

R: You know, er, commission people from within the communities, yeah. Don't give them a solid tendering process that only a consultant organisation from London or elsewhere can fill...

I: Hmm.

R: Then give peanuts to local organisations because we've seen people in the mosques and communities can help sort out issues very quickly. They just don't have the capacity to, erm, er, to do your big forms and to, you know, write about input, outputs, erm, you know, all these things.

I: Hmm. Hmm. Yeah.

R: Now we were given those, er, in terms of we had to employ a big writer who wasn't cheap.

I: Hmm.

R: They had to do our monitoring and evaluation for us again, you know, erm, but that was money that can go into the community.

I: Hmm.

R: Erm, now I'm not saying there shouldn't be a control mechanism...

I: Yeah.

R: But, but there has to be a way, like during COVID erm, we had organisations from outside of Birmingham get in touch with us about, er, health, erm, activities but they wanted us to arrange all, erm, er focus groups, erm, er, they wanted us to arrange interview like this, erm, and also arrange activities like activities that they had been commissioned to do...

I: Hmm.

R: And in return they were giving us pedometers.

I: Okay.

R: So I wrote back to them telling them to do one *[laughs]*.

I: Yeah.

R: You're being commissioned to do this.

I: Yeah.

R: You must have made the argument that you have access to the community. Why you asking us now?

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah? I then wrote to the council saying why are you still commissioning people from outside to do work in our...I got no response to that. Then a month later we have a meeting where an assistant director in the council is saying, "Give us your views, give us your opinion" and I'll tell them, "Well, we've given you our views and opinions. You're not listening." Then they're saying, "Well, have you given us an example?" I'll show them screen shots and they'll say, "That's a good point. We'll get back to you." No-one gets back to you. It's a cycle. Then six months later you have a new assistant director because that one's walked you know. It's the same cycle.

I: Yeah.

R: Erm, and then what happens is being able to influence policy is just not possible for us.

I: Right.

R: Influence change and then it just goes to that same...so that's why Muslims just think, well, is there any point...

I: Hmm.

R: And I think there, there needs to be learning and I do suggest, please, do have a chat with XXXX XXXX [director of the local public health authority]...

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Reach out to him. I will also email him.

I: Yeah.

R: Like would you guys, like, erm, Professor [the Co-Investigator] who, one, is a trusted person for us. We'll happily get involved in research. We don't need anything in response. You know, we know, er, it's in our benefit. Er, we've done other research on behalf of XXXX [director of the local public health authority], you know, but he has an insight I think that we need to capture, erm, XXXX XXXX [community engagement officer] who also worked very closely, who'd have a different view on how the Muslims community worked; I think you should definitely talk to him.

I: Hmm.

R: Erm, And I'll email you his details and the consent form.

I: Yeah.

R: But those are my two that they need to learn and not go back to the, the old way of doing things which I can very quickly see is happening.

I: Yeah. Yeah. Is there, just as a detail on that is there a distinction between as you say keep politicians out of it and, you know, there's obviously frustrations with local council and so on but is there, er, is there a distinction of levels within the council in terms of, you

know, there is a subsection which actually listens or responds because I know you've, you've pin-pointed individuals who influence...

R: Okay, like you know, being unified is not easy. You're always going to have disagreements.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: You learn to compromise.

I: ***[Clears throat].***

R: But say in meetings we've agreed to accept certain things that we know are difficult...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...you know, a politician in order to gain votes, will publicly say, "We'll hold other people in the council to account," so publicly they will say, "this is not good enough. We need better facilities." You know, we need you to, er, er, "why are only six people allowed in the graveyard, for instance..."

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...in the cemetery when we know that in our meetings with the directors and the council we know exactly what they have justified to us why they've done that and it's our job to then explain to the community why that's happening.

I: **Hmm.**

R: But the councillors will undermine that in order to show their constituency that we're standing up for your rights...

I: **Hmm.**

R: ...during difficult times.

I: **Hmm. Hmm. Hmm.**

R: You know, so they're pandering to their constituents rather than, you know, the certain, certain unified communities.

I: **Yeah.**

R: You know. They'll turn up to a meeting because they know it's being recorded to say "I represented" even though they've hardly been there or we'll, you know, on Eid will get a message from the Lord Mayor or from someone. Erm, and it kind of worked without them being there.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I'm pretty...like we hardly ever heard from our councillors or our MPs during COVID.

I: **Hmm.**

R: We never received anything, "Oh, can we help you? What are you..." we had nothing from them.

I: **Hmm.**

R: Do you know, erm, and I think it worked well because we had access to the main people we needed to.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: You know, erm, and again, off the record...

I: Okay, so as we wrap up, erm, yeah, I guess, I mean I feel like I could talk to you four or five times over. I'm going to stop recording now and then I, I...let me just see. Stop recording.

Interview 7

Date: 27/03/2022

Duration: 01:13:32

Participant characteristics: male, community leader

Key:

INT: Interviewer

RES: Respondent

s.l. sounds like

INT: Okay, so thanks for taking the time, I do appreciate it. So I think ... if we go right back to the beginning, thinking about the earlier stages of the pandemic, what was the-the initial, sort of, response, I guess, what was the feeling in the community around about that time?

RES: I think it only really hit when, um, 'cause I know there were some discussions around it about a month or so before we started acting on or before there was talks about lockdowns etc. and, erm, I think it really hit home when, er, we were planning to do a Pilgrimage to Mecca ...

INT: Oh okay.

RES: ... and this was at the start of March and we had, like, 50 people booked to go and the flights all scheduled, erm, and I think it was the Thursday or Friday that week, er, we received news that Saudi Arabia had stopped all flights ...

INT: Right, okay.

RES: ... erm, and then there was the international flight ban in different places, er, and then we were hoping that, you know, it would just blow over, it was something that was temporary ...

INT: Yeah.

RES: ... and we didn't know whether it was going to last days or whatever it was, erm, but then, like, a few days later we were told, look, it's definitely not going ahead. Now, whilst that was all happening, erm, Public Health England got in touch with us, er, Public Health Birmingham ...

INT: Yeah.

RES: ... erm, and they were talking to us about, er, what might be happening, you know, the coming, er, you know, days or weeks, erm, and, you know, potentially Mosque closures, er, so we, very early on, we, er, met with other Mosques, erm, we invited them to a meeting at XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] to decide whether we were going to, er, what action we were going to take ...

INT: Yeah.

RES: ... erm, and initially it was about the Friday Prayers, erm, you know, should we close down the Friday Prayers, er, we had Doctor XXXX XXXX [director for the local public health

authority] come in as well, erm, and, er, you know, it wasn't, then after speaking to him, we realised it was much more serious, it wasn't just going to be about Friday Prayers ...

INT: Right.

RE: ... potentially, you know, all Prayers during the week, so we took the decision quite early on and this was, I think it was about a week or two weeks before the Government announced the official lockdown ...

INT: Yeah.

RES: ... er, that we decided to-to close.

INT: Right.

RES: And, er, you know, it was-it was, obviously, people were anxious, they didn't know what was going on, they needed guidance and some sort of leadership, erm, so, you know, as-as one of the—the main Mosques in the City, we had to, er, provide that.

INT: Yeah, as it became clear there were going to be lockdowns and those kinds of things, what were the initial impacts on the community, do you think? Including the impact of having to think about closing.

RES: Yeah. So-so, the community was worried, erm, you know, initially. Erm, they were sceptical as well, erm, they weren't sure whether this was something genuine, whether it was real, you know, what's going on, you know, why is it affecting us, erm, and then, I mean, in the months that followed, that initial, sort of, like, reaction, you know, people in the community started getting the virus ...

INT: Yeah.

RES: ... people started dying, people were being hospitalised, so then it became very clear, okay, this is something serious, erm, er, so when people were experiencing it first hand with their families, erm, members of the community were well known were getting sick, or, you know, even members of staff at the Mosque, you know, people contracting the virus, so, er, it then became, you know, there was a bit of fear, er, within the community about what was going to happen, erm, a bit of panicking again, people talk about it, but, you know, we had to provide that leadership.

INT: Yeah, and so in terms of, the impact within the community initially, were people becoming unwell, what was the, what was that picture like? You know, how did that play out and-and what were the impacts..?

RES: Yeah. It's like nothing we've experienced before. It was, like, crisis mode and, you know, people were literally dying, people were getting sick, er, people were unable to leave their homes, they'd nev-never experienced it before, er, the elderly, vulnerable, you know, people, needed support, so, you know, almost immediately, we launched a-a-a foodbank service and delivery service seven days a week, erm, so, for the people, er, you know, we had volunteers coming out to collect the food parcels and delivering them across the City, er, so we initiated that on straight away. Erm, you know, as people who, you know, elders who would go and collect medicines and all sorts of things, you know, we had to go out and support them. Erm, you know, it was-it was, yeah, it was panic, people panicking, you know, weren't sure what was going to happen. I think, we saw the supermarkets, there was panic buying and people fighting for items, er, so there was, yeah, it was a chaotic, sort of, like, period, erm, you know, people were worried about, you know, how to stay safe, you know, families who, er, who maybe didn't live together, you know, were then worried am I going to pass it on to my loved ones, etc. Erm, so it was-it was a-it was a difficult time.

INT: Yeah. And so, what was the initial perception, of how long lockdowns might last for and how long you might be providing...

RES: I mean, the, you know, we, you know, and because we were discussing it with Public Health Birmingham, you know, we realised that this might go on for some time, but I think the perception from the community was, er, you know, it's not going to last that long.

INT: Alright.

RES: And they were, like, getting fed up almost straightaway, er, and we had to, you know, advise them to be patient, erm, and just take precaution, to listen to the experts and, you know, not to, you know, make judgements based on emotion as it was very important we did-we did that and-and provided those messages because, er, you know, people were, after a week, were saying, well, how long is this going to last? You know, so nobody could, I don't think anybody could have, er, foreseen that would have lasted, you know, or, you know, for the last couple of years and longer, so, yeah.

INT: And so, I think, thinking about the interventions that mention, what were the main areas of need that, kind of, became apparent as the pandemic, sort of, played through? What were the areas of need that really stood out?

RES: Yeah, I think, you know, the busiest, or the busiest service, well, we had two of the busiest services. One was our foodbank and the second was our funeral service, erm, so, at that point, erm, I was the Head of Youth & Welfare and it was really the welfare side of things that were, you know, I was, you know, I spent most of my time during those months, I think, when a lot of people were furloughed, erm, a lot of people had to isolate, erm, you know, I was-I was, er, I was fortunate enough to be still here helping the community, erm, erm, so, yeah, seven days a week, the food provisions was really important because people had suffered from loss of work, er, due to the lockdown, erm, you know, many people who perhaps work cash in hand or people who were, er, employed and-and, you know, businesses had to close down, that, you know, it was shut because of the lockdown. Er, people were losing their income, erm, people also worried, they didn't want to go out to shops and supermarkets, erm, so they heavily relied on the foodbank and the food service and then, like I said, the funeral service, you know, we had to, we've got a-a-a-a mortuary, er, and we had to, er, extend that and have a temporary makeshift mortuary in the car park, er, which had storage for, like, 30, er, 30 bodies. Now we currently hold 6, er, our maximum capacity, but because of, er, of how many people were dying in the community, er, we had to have that refrigeration unit temporarily installed, so, on one side of the car park you had foodbank running, the other side, you had all the funerals running, so it was a, it was a, yeah, there's a story of also, like, er, a situation to be in, 'cause, you know, you'd see coffins coming in on one side, people dressed in PPE and then on the other side, it would be us, you know, managing the foodbank and volunteers and we had a, I think, we had around about 150 people, er, come forward as volunteer drivers to deliver the food parcels.

INT: Yeah. So, I mean, that's a pretty significant, highlighting the foodbank service and the funeral service as being two things which were, I guess, most significant. Is that something which lasted for an extended period of time and, er, you know, kind of, at what point, I guess, did that start to look like it was returning to normality?

RES: Yeah, I think, erm, so the first few months, I mean, it lasted a few months, erm, and, you know, I think, I think it was round about June or July-time, we-we saw, you know, the highest number of, er, well, it was around May or June, the highest number of funerals. Er, the foodbank situation continued, erm, you know, we were running the foodbank seven days a week for the whole of that year, erm, and then I think it was only towards the end of the year, erm, it started to get a bit better and then the following New Year, erm, you know,

it worsened again, erm, so-so, yeah, it was, it-it did go on for an extended period of time. Fortunately, the funerals, sort of, like, started quietening down, erm, 'cause that really was the-the-the, obviously, you know, that's where the biggest impact on the community was, so, I think, post-July or August, it started to calm down a bit. But with the foodbank situation, it just continued.

INT: Well, give me a sense of what the experience was within the community, in terms of being aware of, you know, that there were deaths and what the impact for the community was?

RES: Yeah, I think they were-they were shocked, you know, a lot of the elders passed away, erm, you know, it was, like, every second day, you know, there'd be a message on Facebook, disappeared another pillar of the community has lost, you know, passed away and the family have lost loads and, er, you know, you had people who were, you know, professionals educated, you know, had passed away. There were people who weren't as well known in the community passed away, so it was, you know, there was no, you know, the Covid didn't discriminate, it was just, you know, across the board and in some families, I mean, in several families, it was more than one person at a time, erm, and, you know, you just ... every time you'd pick up your phone, you'd hear, this person's passed away, this person's grandfather's passed away and it was just, like, never ending, you just seemed to be one after the other, erm, and families were fearful about, you know, who would be next and, you know, you know, because it was elders ... I mean, there were some, you know, younger people, erm, you know, like, 30's/40's, er, who were also hospitalised, erm, you know, we have, you know, doctors who attend the Mosque and, er, you know, Chaplains were working. University Hospitals, Birmingham, who work closely with the Mosque and they were painting the picture of it being, you know, really chaotic inside the hospitals and, er, you know, staff becoming sick, you know, wards becoming packed and not being able to take anymore people, it was just, you know ...

INT: So, was it, I mean, I guess, there's a direct relationship between the community and the Mosque, erm, in terms of people who passed away. But what was it like for families where people were in hospital for extended periods of time? I guess, how-how were, sort of, the appropriate rituals and everything that needed to be done, getting a burial done in that circumstance carried out?

RES: Yeah, again, it was really difficult, erm, you know, the community-the community were talking to us about not being able to see loved ones, er, you know, many of the funerals that came through, er, you know, we had people speaking to us about not being able to say goodbye to their loved ones and, even then, when it was, where the restrictions were very strict, er, they were still unable to see their loved ones, er, you know, you know, to give you a picture of what a traditional Islamic, sort of, like, funeral looks like, or, you know, the build-up to the burial, er, you know, we would have a ritual wash at the Mosque where family members could come and help to perform that wash, erm, and then, after that, you know, family members would come to-to view, er, the face of the deceased, er, in the coffin at the Mosque and-and sometimes it can go up to 100s, you know, over 1,000 people with the popular funerals, popular people, but definitely in the 100s, erm, and, er, you know, and then, you know, obviously, being able to pray the few more prayers is a very important ritual, erm, you know, it's the final prayer that you make for-for the deceased, er, and then also, attending the burial, so it's-it's all encouraged in our faith to participate in the funeral rites, because it reminds you of death, it reminds of, you know, that everybody is going to face the same outcome and what's important is to reflect on what you see in front of you, so that you can improve yourself as a person and-and be a better Muslim, so, you know, it-not only is it important for the family to be there, but also for the wider community to come and attend the funeral services, er, whereas, throughout the pandemic, or, at least in the early stages, er, there was none of that, so, the families couldn't come and perform the rit-the ritual wash, it was our operations team wearing PPE, er, performing it, families not being able to say goodbye, erm, you know, er, not being about to attend the burial, the Mosque

being closed meant there was no funeral prayer, erm, and it was literally a few handful of staff were performing the funeral prayers, er, so it was a completely different, er, you know, situation to what we'd normally be in. Erm, another time, as things eased, then we opened two, you know, in stages, we gradually returned back to normal, but, for a long period of time it was very difficult and, you know, we did have people who were-who were getting upset and emotional, er, you know, who had served with the Mosque and-and-and telling us another funeral's, er, Funeral Directors, you know, what we were doing was wrong, er, but, unfortunately, you know, our hands were tied and, you know, we couldn't risk it, especially when people are dying of Covid, erm, you know, it would have been impossible to allow, you know, those, sort of, numbers or people to come in. And we had to remind people that, you know, you know, whilst it's really sad that people, you know, your loved one has lost their life, you know, we-we don't want the same thing to happen to you, so, er, you know, it was a very sensitive, er, time.

INT: Yeah, I guess, in the context of all of that, you know, kind of, what was your perception of-of the impact to the community in terms of wellbeing and mental health and-and those kinds of issues?

RES: Yeah. Well, I mean, prior to the pandemic, you know, for many years we've been running free counselling, erm, mental health counselling, er, with professional Counsellors, erm, so, you know, we're aware of, er, the demands for mental health support in the community, erm, and, you know, we knew that it, er, the problem's only going to get worse and, erm, you know, we-we held some online seminars/webinars on mental health and wellbeing during the lockdown, you know, what can you do to keep yourself, er, in a positive state of mind, er, what, sort of, things you can do, what, sort of, activities you can do and also spiritual reminders as well, er, you know, this is a time where, er, our faith is really being tested, erm, and to reflect on, you know, things that have happened in the past and stories from the past where, you know, the prophets were tested and-and, you know, people were tested in the past and how they overcame it and this is really, you know, a living, er, example of, you know, a real life example on how-how we need to show faith and action, erm, so it was very important for us to move a lot of our content online, er, you know, the reminders, erm, you know, the Counsellors, er, ran the webinars as I've mentioned, er, so we were giving messages out to the community. Er, we launched a listening service, er, which was two days a week, erm, so that was separate to our regular counselling service which also moved online. The listening service was just, you know, you didn't have to book an appointment, you could call in at any time if you were suffering anxiety, depression or anything related to Covid, erm, you could call in and speak to, you know, a trained, er, Counsellor, erm, who can just be there to talk to you, er, just a listening service, er, so it was very important we did that and, you know, people's, people who are going through mental health issues, er, you know, we-we would always encourage them to be professionally treated, but at the same time, erm, you know, coming to the Mosque as a place of sanctuary for them was always, is always something that benefits them. Now, when the Mosques were closed, they didn't have anymore, so what we had to do was, we had to take the Mosque to them, you know, online and all of the, sort of, like, lectures and reminders that we do. 'Cause, within the lectures, a lot of them are around, you know, living through adversity and living through tough times and how we can be stronger people, how we can be better people, er, and presenting examples from the past, erm, of how, you know, the greatest example being Prophet Mohammed Peace be upon Him, of how many trials and tribulations he had to go through, er, so when the congregation are reminded of that, you know, it gives them strength again, so, that-that's, in a nutshell, what we were doing to-to try and, er, you know, help people, er, that were going through mental health issues.

INT: As you say, to bring the Mosque to the community, how did that come together? You showed me a video, you know, when I first, sort of, visited, and it was clear that there were a lot of initiatives that were already in place. So, er, and then, within the

context, I think it will be useful if you just, kind of, recap on some of the stuff that the Mosque has done historically ...

RES: Yeah.

INT: ... and then maybe, sort of, er, give a picture of how things adjusted to ...

RES: Sure.

INT: ... the pandemic.

RES: I mean, the Mosque, erm, you know, we tried to follow the Prophetic model of a Mosque, which is, er, hope for the community, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, erm, and, you know, we have many welfare activities and services. For example, women's coffee mornings. We have an Elders' Lunch that takes place. Erm, we have a Macmillan's Cancer Support service. We have, er, activities for the youth scouts and the youth club etc. Now, during the pandemic, you know, during the lockdowns, all those-those things had to stop and-and it meant, you know, the place where people would normally come to, er, you know, to socialise, to get, you know, spiritual advice, medical advice, er, you know, we have a joint pain clinic, we have, er, you know, like I said, a, kind of, a legal surgery, an immigration surgery, so all of these things had to move online. Erm, now, because we have had, fortunately, we've got experience of running, you know, events online and conferences online and utilising webinars, erm, it was quite easy for us to make that transition, erm, it was just a case of scaling up the content online and-and, you know, we refurbished an area in the Mosque as a-as a studio which we had planned to do anyway, a recording studio, er, but that, you know, the work on the studio was accelerated because now, we realised that, you know, we-we would have wanted people just looking at the same, sort of, like, screen and speaker the whole time, so we were quite creative in that we created different backdrops, you know, tried to make it look different and warm, more appealing, er, you know, for the audience watching it, because we understood people would be sitting at home and, you know, they'd be watching content online and, you know, they wouldn't want to watch the same boring, you know, content, the same backdrop, same speaker, so we had to really be creative. You know, we included a lot more infographics, erm, our graphic designers, er, really stepped up during that period, so, er, it became a lot more creative, er, the content of people watching, erm, you know, we had to become a proper, sort of, a media organisation, sort of, erm, you know, and-and that's what appealed to people and people were then able to stay in touch and in communication and although the service is where, you know, they normally come in, in person, we would do it over the phone, erm, and we utilised Zoom and-and-and Teams to phone people to be able to see the person they're talking to, so, for example, the Counsellors and, er, you know, the immigration etc. etc.

INT: Hmm, hmm. So, what, in terms of thinking about, kind of, during that period where provision was-was-was, had shifted to being online, erm, what was your sense of, what was that experience like for you, in terms of you feeling connected to the community?

RES: Yeah. Yeah, I mean, you know, once-once the community, once people were able to come out, erm, you know, to collect food parcels and-and-and, I, sort of, I used to speak to a lot of people, probably about 65% of our foodbank customers were non-Muslim, erm, so, you know, it was really good to speak, er, to the wider community to understand what they were going through, erm, because, for example, with a Muslim community, many of their friends and family, you understand what they're going through and understand how it's affecting them but with the non-Muslim community, if we didn't have those, er, welfare services for them to-to, kind of, connect into, I wouldn't have heard a lot of the stories that I heard and, you know, people going through difficult-difficult situations. Er, I think, in this area, er, specifically, a lot of the elder non-Muslims don't really have that, kind of, structure, er,

where they have, you know, kids, their grandkids living with them, like, maybe like the Muslim community do, erm, so they were struggling with isolation, erm, and it meant, you know, we had to step up in terms of supporting them as well.

INT: Yeah.

RES: Erm, because they live within the community, but they didn't have that family base which, er, you know, maybe the Muslim families had. Erm, so it was really what we spent time with them, you know, looked after them, erm, and their wellbeing, erm, so, for me, personally, I-I-I was able to maintain that contact with the community but a lot of other members of staff whose day jobs aren't related to welfare services, erm, they would be detached and they were detached. I mean, they were detached from the Mosque, you know, our, the employees who were told to stay at home and work from home, erm, you know, they were finding it difficult because they just couldn't interact with their regular colleagues, erm, and maybe the congregation members when they come in for prayers, that wasn't happening anymore, erm, and, but I think anybody in my line of work, Muslim or non-Muslim, er, I think we were fortunate in a sense that we had the ability to interact with the community, you know, we worked closely with that, did well in society with other Mosques, other churches, er, you know, providing food and there was a really strong community spirit, you know, amongst the foodbanks and amongst the, er, you know, the charitable organisations coming together in ways we haven't come together before. So, you know, we had a WhatsApp group where we were constantly interacting with each other every day, talking about the food needs etc. But then it also extended to other things where people, er, were struggling with mental health issues, so we were able to support each other.

INT: Yeah. And so, that, that's an indication of economic impact within the community and across communities as well. So, I guess, what was your perception of, kind of, a wider picture of the economic impacts of the pandemic over time for the Muslim community?

RES: Yeah, yeah, I think, you know, the food industry is very popular in the Muslim community and, you know, many restaurants had to close and take-aways had to close, people lost jobs, erm, and, you know, we have a hardship fund, er, which is, erm, er, it's called a Zakat Fund, so, as Muslims, er, you know, every year, we are obligated to pay 2.5% of our wealth, if you have savings and wealth and assets into a Zakat fund and that Zakat then gets distributed to people in need, erm, throughout the year, so we saw a massive increase in Zakat applications, hardship fund applications, erm, and, erm, you know, many people coming to us were saying we've lost our jobs and we've lost work, we were relying on X, Y and Z and, you know, on many occasions, family members who rely on other family members while working, you know, if the main breadwinner lost their-lost their jobs, then a lot of other people in the family suffered as well. Er, so we saw that and, you know, even, you know, even larger, sort of, businesses, you know, Muslim-run businesses, they had to shut, er, you know, we were fortunate enough to work with, er, a Muslim-owned business to produce free PPE for the NHS, so that was one of the big projects we, sort of, like, er, were committed to, erm, and, you know, they were very generous in that they, because their factory had closed down, they-they normally produce or manufacture garden furniture, erm, so they actually changed their whole operation and it was about producing PPE for the NHS for free, erm, so, you know, you know, whether it was a smaller business or larger businesses, everybody suffered and then, obviously, there was the cost of, er, you know, supplies increasing, so everybody was, you know, had to be with a knock-on effect of increased, er, costs, erm, so, yeah, it was, er, you know, the economic effect was a, was felt, er, not just in Birmingham, not just Small Heath, but across the country and, you know, you saw the amazing campaign from Marcus Rashford, you know, trying to highlight, you know, the-the need for foodbanks and the need for the Government to support them, erm, so it was across the country, erm, and, you know, the Muslim community across the country, er, struggled, er, as did other communities, all, you know, faith groups, ern, I think,

saw that. I think, particularly, what we saw was, you know, many Muslims, I mean, in this area, there's a high level of, er, poverty and deprivation, er, you know, a lot of people work in-in-in jobs in labour, you know, in labourer's jobs and in factories and, you know, in restaurants, in the food industry, so those industries were-were hit hard, erm, so, you know, we did see, er, a big effect on the local economy.

INT: Yeah, and I think there's something in there as well, I think, about, you talk about space and place, is there, so is there a significant, erm, representation of the local community within the Mosque? How far is the, er, kind of, local community reflected in who attends?

RES: Are we talking, in terms of, er, ethnicity or in professions?

INT: Oh no, space and place and, yeah, things, like, profession, I guess, thinking about, kind of, all of the factors that come with living in, er, more inner city areas that are struck by socioeconomic factors and so on.

RES: Yeah.

INT: So, but I'm just interested about that, because the-that will have an impact on the level of what you had to respond to.

RES: Yeah, yeah. I mean, yeah, so it was, you know, it ... the Mosque and the people who attend does reflect the community, er, you know, so we have people in all walks of life, so we have professionals, er, you know, we have doctors, lawyers, business owners, but then we also have people who are on benefits, who are unemployed, you know, a large number of people are unemployed in the community, erm, you know, people who are job seekers or people on long-term sick, people who are going through mental health and, erm, you know, they're-they're unable to work etc., so, you know, I think the Mosque is reflected on the community a-and, you know, we were so busy because, because of that, erm, you know, we had, you know, the professionals who then became volunteers who were supporting our effort. So, you know, we had GPs and-and doctors, you know, coming and delivering food parcels for us, er, and then, you know, you had, er, you know, people who perhaps were, you know, who were unemployed and who were suffering, like, we were the ones who were helping them, but then, at the same time, we had, you know, people who, er, who were unemployed who were coming forward as well in tears as well, who were saying that, look, you know, I'm not working, you know, I've lost my job, I want to give something back and, you know, maybe this is, you know, God's way of testing me to see that, you know, I've lost something but maybe I can help other people. We had many touching stories like that, where, you know, and one that come-comes to mind is, er, you know, a single mother, she was the first person to come forward and deliver food parcels and she said, look, I've got disabled children and I don't work, I look after them, I'm their full time Carer, erm, an-and she said to me, look, you know, maybe if I do this, you know, maybe, you know, God's going to help me a-and give me more strength to help my children, so I just want to help the rest of the community, erm, and she says, you know, I don't care whether it's Muslims or non-Muslims who the food goes to, I just want to help people. And we had many many stories like that throughout the pandemic which were really touching, so, erm, we helped, answered the question about being reflective...?

INT: Yeah, of course and I think, erm, there's, thinking about, kind of, I guess, religious observers, the-the-the requirement to close for periods of time, because you talk about bringing the Mosque to the community through the online, sort of, accessible forms. But, is there something about the pandemic, religious observance, and-and faith? You've already alluded to a few of these things, but I'm interested in your perspective on how the pandemic impacted on religious observance and/or faith in the community...

RES: Yeah, so, you know, the-the-the-the way of life that we live as Muslims is supposedly practical, erm, you know, we-we don't, erm, we-we don't believe people should isolate from society, erm, you know, as monks, etc., er, we believe we should play an active part in society. We should observe our religious rituals and come to the Mosque because it's highly recommended, you know, for the sake of unity and to improve community spirits, erm, you know, so-so it's-it's a practical way of life, er, where we should engage with the community on a regular basis, but there are times and there are teachings from our faith, er, that talk about when you are isolated, when you are, er, alone, er, and those-those times where you're tested, erm, you know, for example, er, you know, er, when the prophets, you know, were isolated from the communities when the Prophet Mohammed used to go and retreat and-and-and be in a state of meditation by himself, er, for example, when the Prophet, erm, Joseph, *Useph*, was in prison, then he was in isolation, erm, you know, all of these, sort of, examples from our faith that teach us that when-when-when it required, when the time comes, where you are tested with isolation, where you are alone, that is an opportunity to be closer to God, erm, you know, see it as an opportunity, rather than-than-than a loss. So, yeah, it did feel like a loss that we were unable to pray in congregation, that we were able and, you know, even the actual ritual of prayer, is designed to, you know, congregation of prayer, is designed to unite people. So, even from where we stand, the Prophet Peace be upon Him taught us to stand shoulder to shoulder with our brother feet to feet, so, you know, we're very connect-, very much connected, the hardship be connected, our bodies are connected and we're together worshipping. Now, when that's removed, you know, it feels like a big loss, it feels like, you know, my, you know, and everyone considers each other to be their brothers and their sisters regardless of their-their race or ethnicity and culture, er, the thing that unites them is the religious observance, and-and the-the love for a garden, praying together. So, now it's important to look back at examples in our faith where this has happened before, and it *has* happened before. There have been times where, you know, some of the greatest figures in our faith were tested with isolation. Er, there were times, I mean, even in the times of the Prophet Mohammed Peace be upon him, where there's a plague and he advised people not to leave their homes, not to, and not to go and enter into another, into other-other areas, not to leave their cities and go to visit other cities, so that was an example that we were able to give to the community, to say, look, this is not new, er, you know the Prophet Mohammed Peace be upon him and why is his companions during his lifetime, when a plague was, when a plague occurred, to not go into those areas, er, and to not, you know, increase the risk of the, you know, people being, er, you know, affected. So, whilst it was tough, er, you know, it was, you know, the people understood that this was a test, that people understood now that, okay, this is not just about messages coming from the Government and-and medical experts, even though it was important to-to hear those messages, this was now a spiritual battle, it was a spiritual test for us that, you know, is our faith going to remain as firm when we're alone and we're isolated, er, or, you know, do we become weaker now, or do we, you know, abandon our faith when times get tough, so it really was a-a-a good test for-for the community and a good opportunity for us to remind people about, you know, the previous examples.

INT: **And, I mean, what do you think the impact of that was, in terms of, erm, as you say, sort of, a-a test of whether people, kind of, moved towards, you know, moved closer, er, into a closer, kind of, observance of their faith, or-or move away from it, what was your perception on-on what the pandemic did, er, in terms of, you know, the observance within the community?**

RES: Hmm hmm. Well, I-I think, you know, it did, people definitely, when they look back at it now, they became closer to their faith. Maybe people who aren't, maybe people who practice the religion, er, and the way of life, er, that strictly or, you know, at all, started turning back to faith, because, obviously, many family members as I mentioned, many family members were passing away, you know, people were getting sick, they were unable to visit their mothers and fathers in hospitals, their children were getting sick, you know, people who had never been ill before, being hospitalised on, you know, on-on- with-with, oxygen and, you know, and, it really made them think, you know, it brought home the

message that-that, you know, we're not promised another day in life, and, either the belief is, all that happens, you die and then there's nothing after that, or, you go through those tests, you have patience and, in return, you're promised paradise, er, which is the-the teachings of our faith, erm, so that promise of, you know, something good to come afterwards, erm, as long as you have the patience now and as long as you-you have the forbearance and understanding that this is something that's test, as a test for us, it really brought people closer to their faith and, you know, we saw that as well, we saw many er, you know, talking about, you know, find, hav-having a newfound faith and a newfound belief in-in a creator or-or in some, sort of, or, at least praying to something or some, sort of, super, er, supreme being or-or higher power, er, to-to get rid of this pandemic. I saw a lot of messages like that on Twitter, you know, er, even from people who were well-known atheists saying, you know, you know, just talking about how, even if there, if there is a God, please, you know, get rid of this pandemic, people are just so desperate for it to end, so, er, if you can imagine, within a Muslim community, those who already have that belief in a God, already have that belief that this is a test, it just brought them closer to it.

INT: What about reverse, did you have any, did you have people from community wanting to join the faith?

RES: Yes, yeah, we-we saw an increase in the number of people, er, and it was amazing, because, erm, you know, it really accelerated. I mean, the number of people becoming Muslim in-in the pandemic, it's-it's like nothing before, erm, you know, because people had time, people had time to read, er, to read about, you know, different faiths, but, you know, in our, from our experience, they were reading about Islam. Erm, there was a lot of media attention on Muslim communities, er, and how, er, you know, there was always that feeling, almost, of communities are being blamed and, you know, and they mixed with each other, their families and relatives and we're seeing this when-when, for example, 9/11 happened, where Islam is the focus in-in the media and what happens is people are curious and people who haven't already formed an opinion start looking into it and then think, actually, you know, that's not too bad and they start reading up about it and we've got a dedicated service for new Muslims or anybody who are, who's interested in Islam or Islam-wise, erm, and there was a massive, sort of, like, increase in the number of people who are contacting Islam-wise, erm, you know, to-to get advice, to become Muslim, erm, and I think it was-it wasn't just confined to XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], I think other-other Mosques have said the same thing, er, that people ... and, you know, we-we always, as Muslims, we believe that if people give it a chance to-to look into it, to read about the tenants of Islamic faith, you know, they might not necessarily become Muslim, but they would appreciate that it's totally different to what the picture that's painted, you know, the negative picture that's painted in the media. Erm, so people were having more time, more time to read, more time to learn, er, about it, er, so we definitely saw an increase in them.

INT: And was there a way of people doing The Shahada remotely?

RES: Yeah, yeah, yeah, so it was, again, online and-and over the phone, I mean, a-a lot of people think, erm, that, to become a Muslim you have to have a ceremony in a Mosque and you have to have everything, you know, it's-it's so much more simple than that. It could literally be me and you speaking and you saying that you want to take a *Shahada* and-and, sorry, me, to testify that you want to become a Muslim and that's-that's all it is, erm, so, yeah, yeah, we-we saw that and, you know, again, it was handled online.

INT: I'm aware of time and there's a few things that I want to do, we've talked about religious observance and thinking about faith, erm, and religious observance and interventions and all of those things, erm, I'm also interested in-in perceptions within the community of the Government responses or Government guidelines, so what-what's your take on, kind of, what the feeling might have been like in the community

with regard to how the Government responded to the Muslim community and the pandemic?

RES: Yeah. Yeah, so, I mean, I've had many interviews with the media, er, where the question's been posed, you know, how different was the Muslim response compared to, or, you know, what was the Muslim response and the angle that it was taken was to compare it against, or even just focus on the Muslim response and not, sort of, like, connected with the wider response, you know, from across the country and what I always, and, you know, myself and my other colleagues always remind people is that, erm, you know, the response from the Muslim community was no different to the response from the wider community. Erm, there are many people who are sceptical about the Government messaging, many people who were, er, who were anxious about it. I mean, prior to the pandemic, there were still, a-a lot of distrust in the Government, you know, in terms of the social policies and, er, you know, austerity and everything that came before it, er, and we were very careful in when we were conducting interviews, to remind, er, you know, the media, that, look, we understand the way this might, you know, be-be turned, you know, to, or, you know, to look like, it's the Muslims who are listening to the Government and it's the Muslims who aren't, erm, you know, who aren't following guidance and etc. But then, you know, you've seen over the last couple of years, many non-Muslims coming out, pro-protest at Trafalgar Square, you know, anti-mask campaigners, er, you know, people who are fed up with the Government and the lies and, you know, all the, er, all the, sort of, like, scandals around the parties and-and all sorts of things like that, so, you know, the community was sceptical, erm, you know, and they were concerned that, er, you know, we were, you know, the Muslim community were being, erm, highlighted, or we were, sort of, like, er, being picked on, er, you know, as scapegoats to say that, oh look, you know, in places like Birmingham, the number of, you know, infections has gone sky high because people are mixing and, you know, you know, Muslims having Eid events, it's going to, it's going to increase, you know, the chances of the-the, erm, being, of, you know, the, er, of Covid spreading, erm, but then you look at other events that were allowed to take place and the community constantly were saying this to us, were saying, look, you know, why is it that the Mosque has to close where your nightclubs are open? You know, how is that, how does that make sense at all for Muslims who are coming for ten minutes a day, five times a day, to pray, socially distanced, with masks on, that's not allowed, yet people were able to mix in supermarkets and, you know, in close proximity, er, there was just, you know, the-the community were concerned about the consistencies, concerned about why is it that we are having, being demonised? So, it was very important for us, from an early, er, from the onset, to say to the community, our faith is practice, like I mentioned it before, and our judgement and our decision making is based on, er, facts, not emotions, er, based upon seeking advice from people who know. So, in the *Qur'an*, there's a verse that says, 'If you do not know, seek from the people of knowledge,' you know, 'seek from the people of knowledge,' and, so, this is part of our faith. Er, whenever something occurs, it could be a pandemic, it could be something else, refer to the people of knowledge and in this situation, in the pandemic, the people of knowledge were the medical professionals. Now, even if people didn't like the Government, if medical professionals were coming out and saying, look, this is serious, take it seriously, now, we did have GPs, er, we worked closely with the British Islamic Medical Association, so we quickly created content. We had, er, some videos made for our YouTube channel, for our congregation where doctors were coming into the Mosque and, you know, advising the community, we were able to distribute those messages, erm, BMA, the British Medical Association, they produced some myth busters around vaccination, you know, because, you know, there was all sorts of things going round that, you know, the-the vaccinations contain foetuses, foetus, you know, etc., you know, the ingredients were, they contained, er, pig, er, ingredients from a pig, etc., so, we had to bust those myths and, erm, get the message out and just remind people that, look, again, it's a test, you know, it's a test for us. Look, you're seeing people dying, you're seeing family members becoming sick, you, you know, people who were denying Covid, they were coming to us and saying that, look, you know, why are you just obeying the Government, you know, everything that they're saying, you know, you're just following what they're doing and-and we just had to reiterate, this is

not about the Government and us, this is about people losing their lives and, er, the most important, or the most, er, sort of, like, er, most of repeated verse from the *Qur'an* that we've communicated to the congregation is, 'Whoever saves one life, it's as though they've saved the whole of mankind.' Now, if we could do our bit to save one life, you know, then we feel we've done our duty, so we had to remind the congregation about that as well, that, look, you know, you might not see the bigger picture, you might not see the value in it, but, by taking these actions, taking these precautions, you could be saving the lives of your loved ones or your dear ones and to have that patience, erm, yeah.

INT: Yeah, and so I think, you know, was there a sense of people wanting more from Government response, Muslim community as stakeholders in the pandemic, I guess? Clearly there were a lot of initiatives that you've taken-taken forward, erm, so I'm interested in-in what the backdrop of things looked like in terms of the Government response to the community needs?

RES: I think, you know, one-one thing that we had to also advise the community was that, erm, you know, we have to a-, whilst, you know, there might have been, like, distrust in the-in the national Government, you know, locally, we had Public Health Birmingham working very closely with us and they were providing a lot of support and information. They appreciated that they could not do it alone, by sending out the messages themselves to the Muslim community and they worked very closely with the Mosques, you know, for the first time in ever, you know, all of the Mosques from different, sort of, like, er, backgrounds and beliefs, 'cause there are different beliefs within the Mosques, you know, they came together, we all came together because this was something that affected everybody, er, and probably ... you know, they understood what needed to happen, they needed to work us, er, not dictate things to us, but hear what's affecting us. As soon as the pandemic started, we've had, like, weekly meetings, monthly meetings etc. with Public Health Birmingham and other Mosques, we've become closer together now, erm, and, you know, we had to appreciate and communicate to the congregation that, look, at some levels, you know, we are getting support and we have to appreciate that and we have to recognise that, erm, and, you know, so-so we did get support, erm, you know, and there were many non-Muslim organisations who were providing grant funding, er, you know, for example, you know, heart of a community fund that they funded, our foodbank, they gave us a very gen, er, generous, er, you know, grant. I think it was £10,000 to run up to, to restock our foodbank supplies, so it was very important to communicate that to the community, that, look, whilst you may feel that, you know, we're being demonised, we have to also appreciate the good that's coming our way as well, and the recognition we're getting, and it was really good that, you know, we were involved in all the welfare services, like, Listening Service, food bags, etc., the PPE Campaign, because it meant that, Muslim, and this was across the country, Muslims, Mosques and Muslims were very active in supporting wider communities during the pandemic and, you know, that showed the true face of the faith, you know, not-not the-the-the image that perhaps the media, and not all media was bad, there are many, there are many people from the media who represented what we were doing very well, er, you know, and we formed very close connections with Birmingham Mail, er, we had Sky News here, we've had the BBC here and we've had people as far ... you know, we had a, erm, a-a crew from Australia come down, er, so, you know, we had a lot of positive representation in the media, er, who wanted to see what the Muslim response was, erm, in the pandemic, erm, so we appreciated that and that-that-that gave us an opportunity to show what the faith is about.

INT: So, there are other community organisation, were you in conversation with other organisations or were you aware of how other organisations also changed their practices?

RES: Yeah, yeah, so, I mean, for example, we worked very closely with schools, er, because, er, many of their families were struggling and they referred them to us, er, but then, in terms of other organisations, Muslim or non-Muslim ...

INT: I think both is interesting.

RES: ... yeah, so-so one of the first, sort of, like, organisations we really, like, you know, erm, formed a partnership with was that Did Well in Society, erm, so they were instrumental in, er, in food provisions across the city, erm, and, you know, what-what they did was, erm, essentially it was a WhatsApp Group of all the foodbanks coming together that never existed before and, er, you know, we were in communication on a daily basis, erm, understanding what the needs and requirements were supporting each other, and, it literally was everybody coming together. There were some Christian food banks in there, you know, there was, er, people of no faith had food banks in there, Muslims, Sikhs and everything, it was really nice, er, and everybody was really coming together, and, you know, a lot of, I mean, a lot of new foodbanks popped up as well, people, you know, opened new foodbanks, erm, so there was support there, that worked really well, erm, and, you know, that was probably the-the-the key partner that we worked with, er, throughout the pandemic and, you know, we tried ... because we have a lot of generous people in the community that donate money, er, we were able to, we didn't want to take, we wanted to give, erm, so, our role was, we need to help other foodbanks as well who perhaps didn't have the stock and the grants that we were getting, 'cause it, you know, I think, you-you're probably aware, you know, in order to get grants and in order to get funding, er, you know, you need to have some, sort of, reputation and-and track record of, you know, being able to deliver, erm, and, fortunately, we have had that over the years, so it was quite easy for us to, erm, to seek grants, to get donations in and what we wanted to do was then, you know, help others who couldn't do it and also give, you know, I think there was at least two or three other Muslim groups who contacted us and said, we want to set up a foodbank, how do we go about doing it, so we advised them. Erm, the NHS, er, again, we worked closely with. Er, when we ran the PPE Campaign, er, it literally was, you know, the factory purchasing all of the material from Pakistan, er, bringing it over here and then we had around 900 volunteers who were sewing from their homes, er, they had to follow all the, you know, hygiene processes and-and all of the items were, er, you know, quality checked before they went out and we were working with hospitals, we were working with, er, individual hospitals were contacting us, erm, you know, Care Homes, Funeral Directors. We went as far down to London and Manchester, even though it was only supposed to be in Birmingham, I think, erm, and-and various, er, you know, health services across the country, erm, you know, we were providing the PPE to, erm, and-and-and that was a really good relation, we had really good relationships with people, erm, so I-I think, you know, and those organisations had to adapt, you know, for example, with the NHS with the hospitals, normally they would go through their usual supply chain etc., they were telling us that, look, you know, they couldn't, they couldn't get the PPE, or they were told they weren't allowed to order PPE, er, and, you know, we had nurses, you know, I remember doing an interview with a non-Muslim nurse and she was in tears and she was saying, look, you know, as she was a black lady, she said, look, I feel more at risk because, you know, my, you know, my ethnicity and having said that, you know, people of my, ethnic background are more likely to-to get infected but, yeah, when I go to-to work, you know, I'm not protected, I don't have PPE and I'm wearing, you know, black bags and stuff and when I go home, I've got a sick mother at home and, you know, she was just so grateful we were able to provide the PPE for her, erm, you know, we worked, we supplied, er, a group of Jewish, er, Care Homes in Manchester. Erm, so, you know, every opportunity we had to-to-to form partnerships, we tried, because what we realised was, erm, this goes back to, I guess, the focus of the question was, they had to adapt and improvise because of the pandemic, because Covid had hit them and their usual processes, erm, they then had to seek out support from other organisations, you know, whether it was us or other organisations they worked with, they were hit with the same, sort of, economic challenges, er, supply chain challenges, erm, you know, members of their community who were unable to, again, visit loved ones and family members, er, you know, by providing, for example, like, PPE, it became possible to do certain things that they couldn't do otherwise. So, as I said, you know, we-we saw, erm, I mean, I'm sorry I can't remember off the top of my head, more organisations we worked

with, but, I mean, you know, Active Wellbeing Society probably covered Birmingham, erm, you know, Care Homes and-and hospitals, you know, there was Dudley Hospital, there was Hartlands Hospital, Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Er, in the Women's Unit, erm, you know, in Wolverhampton. As I said, Manchester, erm, and London.

INT: Wow, yeah. Erm, so, it's, so, thinking forward, I think, erm, oh actually, there's just one other thing I wanted to pick up on, you did talk about the, kind of, the way in which some, er, of the wider narratives you mentioned in the media that misrepresented what was going on. Was there any, sort of, experience of tensions between the Muslim community, was there that, any of that, kind of, thing happening in the context of the pandemic?

RES: I think it was more online, erm, I don't think, er, so far as I can remember, erm, I-I can't remember any specific incident where it was reported that, you know, somebody was attacked in the street or visited or abused physically, erm, but I do remember seeing a lot of online hate, erm, an increase in online hate, erm, you know, towards Muslims, especially around Eid times when we wanted to celebrate Eid and, you know, the Muslims were very upset, at one point we were very upset because, for example, I think, in Manchester, it was, like, hours before Eid, er, was due to happen, erm, they announced, like, a lockdown, a local lockdown there and-and it was, they felt it was very unjust and I think, as Muslims across the country, we felt it was unjust, you know, considering other things were allowed to take place and, y-you know, and, I think, later that year, you know, Christmas parties were allowed, etc., erm, and then when Muslims were voicing their opinion about it online, there was a lot of hate that came back, er, saying, you know, it's-it's right that, you know, you Muslims aren't to-to do X, Y and Z because, you know, you shouldn't be here in the first place, those, sort of comments and Islamophobic comments. Er, so, that-that did increase and I know working, erm, in partnership with, er, organisations, like, MEND, er, who are there to-to combat Islamophobia, erm, they reported an increase in hate crimes online, erm, as well, erm, and-and-and Islamophobia online, erm, so I don't have the stats for that, but, you know, that was something you-you can always look into. Erm, you know, and-and I think, and, again, it's, you know, it's a minority who would do that and people hiding behind screens, erm, you know, the response, the online response from non-Muslims, during the pandemic, has been positive because they've seen the work that Muslims have been doing, erm, and, you know, seeing how, you know, the work that we've done hasn't been focused on just the Muslim community. As I mentioned, our foodbank, 65/70% had been non-Muslim users, erm, and, you know, we're really happy to do that, you know, because it's-it's about caring for your community. Erm, I'm just trying to recall if there was anything else, in terms of, er, hate and Islamophobia. I mean, throughout the pandemic, and I don't think it's pandemic-specific, you know, there's been various issues around *Hijab* bans and stuff like that. So, there have been, you know, hate crimes as a result of that, which has just been similar to what was happening before the pandemic and it's continued throughout. Erm, you know, at times when the media do, er, you know, put a spin on things and do try to demonise, er, Muslim communities, then, naturally, you see an increase in-in hate crimes towards it, but, erm, yeah.

INT: Yeah. Just, I meant to ask you this earlier, did you have a testing centre or, er, vaccination centres set up here?

RES: Yes, yes, so we have, it's still currently running, erm, albeit, you know, it's-it's on a lower scale now because most people have been vaccinated, erm, and-and there's less demand now for it, erm, but, yeah, we-we set up a vaccination centre, erm, and that was, that started, er, around April 2021, erm, and we're still running now. Er, so when we started in April, er, it was, erm, full time, every day, erm, and only in the last few months, we've, sort of, like, scaled down and reduced the number of days we're open. Erm, but, I mean, even with the vaccination centre, we had to be, erm, we had to be sensitive in the messaging. What we didn't want to do is come across as being, as XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] are saying, everybody has to be vaccinated, get to the

vaccination centre, it's-it's a religious obligation upon you, erm, you have to do it, erm, because there will have been members of the community would have said, hang on, what's going on, why are we forced to, er, take the vaccination, and, you know, what happened to personal freedom, to-to choose and not to choose, erm, so, what we said was, again, we presented facts, we presented the medical experts, er, their opinions, we emphasised that, if we know that, or if we've been told we can help save lives, then it's our religious duty to-to help save lives always, erm, so, when you combine those things together, er, and then an offer is made to say, well, look, for those who want to take the vaccine, we have a vaccination centre on our doorstep, within the Mosque, you know, so any concerns now, you know, alleviated, so then, naturally, people will then take the vaccination without being forced and told, you have to do it, er, so that messaging, it was deliberate, er, so that we wouldn't come across as being, you know, dictators, but, at the same time, the message was getting across that it's important to take it, er, and people, you know, people, you know, who-who-who think clearly, er, you know, would-would take the offer and they did, you know. Erm, so, you know, we did see an increase in the number of people taking ... but, then, there were still some who didn't want to take it, and, erm, we had to appreciate that there was a valid reason why they didn't want to take it, erm, and, you know, and-and just to ... our advice was, if you're not going to take it, then you-you need to be precautions in other ways because, if you're not vaccinated and the medical experts are saying there's a higher risk of you, you know, getting infected or passing on Covid to somebody else, then, you know, you need to take all the other precautions, erm, so, yeah.

INT: So, are there examples of things that, interventions that were brought in as a result of the pandemic, that you can see continuing in-in terms of how XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], kind of, engaged in the community? And also, what do you think the needs of the community are now, in terms of looking forward, are there particular needs which remain, in terms of, erm, you know, the community and so on? So, yeah, I hope that makes sense?

RES: Er, yeah, I mean, definitely, I mean one of the things that, you know, the GPs, you know, from the community, Muslim community, advised us was that, you know, this would be the start of being able to tackle health inequalities within the Muslim community, so, for example, you know, we were able to quickly turn our community hall into a vaccination centre, and we've done it successfully, er, and many people have benefited, whereas, if it didn't exist, who knows how many people from the Muslim community, local community, er, would have been vaccinated. And, also, we've had many non-Muslims in the community who have come forward and got vaccinated at-at the Mosque because they know it's a community centre, they know it's, you know, it's a trustworthy place, er, a place that they can trust to come to, it's not a Government, you know, it's Government messaging saying to come to XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], it's XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] have advertised that there's a-that there's a vaccination centre here, so, you know, the GPs and the CCG and the NHS, you know, and they discussed it with us, they've, you know, spoken about how, you know, look, this is the start, you know, maybe we can tackle other health inequalities, you know, issues, like, cancer, like diabetes, obesity, other things that are affecting the local community, perhaps this is where faith institutes can play a part in-in tackling those inequalities and, you know, it doesn't come without support. Obviously, there's financial support available to us, in terms of utilising the space, erm, you know, the, sort of, what, in terms of, you know, er, getting the messaging across and-and resources and literature that the NHS can provide us with, erm, so, it really does create an opportunity for us now to move forward and say, you know, where-where it's possible, we can help to tackle other health issues, erm, and, not just health issues, because during the pandemic, one of the-the services that we were able to keep open was youth services, the youth clubs, erm, now, whilst, I think, most youth clubs were closed down in the pandemic, erm, we, because we, the way we proposed it to-to the Council and proposed it to, er, the local authorities, was, in an area of high deprivation of crime, gang violence, drug abuse, by closing all of our provisions for young people, er, they're only going to go on to the streets and, you know,

there'll be those who will not listen to the messaging about isolating and staying behind, er, their doors and-and everything. Now, if you leave that, you know, space, you know, if you-if you don't give them a space they propose to come into, er, it's only going to, you know, er, create more problems and, you know, fortunately, they understood that and we received funding to start a youth club during the pandemic, er, so one of, I think, one of only a few, a handful, that were running during the pandemic, so, I think, we started in October 2020 and we've been running ever since the youth club, the Friday night youth club for boys and on Sundays for girls, erm, and it really was a case of, you know, just giving them that safe space. Obviously, we had to have proper risk assessment, you know, the kids were wearing masks and, you know, we had, er, lateral flow tests and everything, but it was an opportunity to-to provide that service, erm, and that's something now we can build on up, because, now, you know, we work quite closely with, er, the Violence Reduction Unit, er, with the Police Crime Commissioner's Office, they've-they've seen the work and they've seen we've been able to deliver, er, those projects and now they're happy to support us going forward. Erm, likewise, with MacMillan and other support services, they realised that because of the pandemic, they were unable to reach many members of the Muslim community, so, again, partnering up with a Mosque who has that reach, erm, it has allowed us then to, you know, increase our, sort of, like, er, portfolio of activities, but also it helps us to help them to reach, er, you know, the Muslim community, to give them that support. Erm, so, so, yeah, so health and equalities, the youth services, erm ...

INT: And then, looking forward, do you see any ongoing needs or ongoing, kind of ...

RES: Yeah, erm, I-I think, you know, people ... I wouldn't say, I think the majority of the community are happy that life has returned to normal, somewhat returned to normal. Er, I think there was a concern that it's always going to be a case of social distancing in the Mosques or social distancing wherever you go out and we'll always have to wear masks and people were talking about, you know, having to wear masks for the rest of their lives and all sorts. Erm, so, I think, you know, people are really happy, er, that there's some, sort of, normality. There's always that fear now that, are we going to go back into a lockdown? You know, we've seen, I've just recently heard, like, there's been another lockdown in China, so we don't know when it will come back round again, if there's another variant, erm, you people, as soon as people hear about a new variant or, you know, potential variant, you know, everybody's, like, fed up again, you know, there's that fatigue, but, it's, the experience has equipped us to be able to deal with things and improvise and adapt quicker, erm, and to know that, look, we've been through it before, we can get through it again and we know how to handle it, er, and it's just about reverting back to-to-to that, you know, to that mode, erm, in, during the periods where we need to. Erm, yeah. And, I think, in terms of the Muslim community needs, erm, you know, we definitely have to have more representation, erm, you know, in the-in the media, in politics, erm, you know, some of the Muslim MPs were really well spoken, you know, came out in support of Muslim communities, you know, and, you know, Counsellors, people like, so people in the media, faith organisations, you know, playing a role in, sort of, like, leading and representing the communities better, erm, and, you know, also, for those Mosque and, you know, I don't say, you know, to-to boast, but there are many Mosques who have never done the welfare service or ran welfare services the way we have or have never ran a foodbank or have never hosted a vaccination centre and they realise now, in order to be, er, sort of, like, an integral part of society, in order to be positive contributors to society, you need to be able to do those things and-and not because it's been forced upon us, but it's part of our faith. I mean, we did it because it's what the Prophet Mohammed Peace by Upon Him, did, in his time when he lived amongst Jews and Christians. Er, it's the same thing that we're trying to emulate that the Mosque should not just be a place just to worship, it should be a place for the community, erm, so, I think, you know, Muslims' organisations have realised there's a need for them to grow as-as Mosques and as charities and not just to sit on donations and-and to see them being wasted or, you know, the money being abused, they need to actually put it into action.

INT: Well, I think that's everything, unless there's anything you want to add?

RES: I think that's it. Sorry to take up so much of your time.

INT: Not at all, not at all.

Interview 8

Date: 01/04/2022

Duration: 01:16:01

Participant characteristics: male, community member

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: Okay, in short, we're looking at the impacts of COVID in Muslim communities in Birmingham. So, if we go back to the beginning of the pandemic, what was your initial, sort of, um, what were the first kind of impacts for you, do you think, I mean, in terms of hearing the news initially? You know, what was your initial, sort of, response to hearing about the pandemic?

R: Well, it's quite weird because I have to roll back a few years – a couple of years back, but um, uh, first it was just like maybe it's false news, it's not gonna happen in the UK, because the way we behaved as a Government as well, it was a bit, like, delayed when it – like, everywhere-everywhere else in the world – well, I say 'everywhere' – most of the good nations or, uh, you know, they started behaving differently. They were putting in measures, procedures, etc, etc. Uh, UK was a bit delayed in that, so I-I thought maybe it's not here, and maybe we, you know, we missed it, or uh, it's not gonna affect us. So uh, I-I was fairly positive to start with, um, and uh, in that positivity, I booked a, uh, a holiday and I went to Pakistan.

I: Ah, okay.

R: So-so just before the COVID hit, I was in Pakistan, um, and I had – so I was in Pakistan while all of this was happening, and Pakistan obviously terrible country, given they weren't with it at all, so it was as if nothing had happened, while I was there. Um, and as I was soon to fly back, um, I started hearing stories of, like, you know, that flights had been cancelled, and people not being letting in, stuff like that. I was really scared, like, oh, I've sort of just about got in, and the day later I got into UK, uh, all the flights were cancelled, so everyone else – 'cause I had cousins who were there, and they were stuck in – *[laughing]* they were stuck in Pakistan. Um, so like, they had to tell work, like, "We have to work from here," and stuff like that, so that was big impact, I think, if you were on holiday and everything got stuck. Um, luckily I escaped that, but I know quite a lot of people had to work from abroad, and obviously the time zone affects you and stuff like that, so that was a big impact. Um, and luckily, but I-I made it back to my family, and yeah. The first initial impact wasn't as aggressive, but when I came back to the UK, it was as if, like, full-on pandemic motion. You know, I had to go through all the testing, and paid whatever to whatever, um, and it was a shock to the system.

And then I came back, and when I was here, um, you couldn't go out, you couldn't go to do your shopping, everything had to be online. Um, couldn't go to the mosque either, uh, you know, the prayers were cancelled. Um, so yeah, it was-it was-it was a – I was in – from completely not having anything, and then come back, and it was like, "Oh, wow." So yeah.

I: I think that's really interesting, and whereabouts – so whereabouts do you live, then, in um – what area was it that you were returning to in Birmingham?

R: Um, Small Heath.

I: Small Heath, so is that – okay, so Small Heath, so between Bordesley Green and

Sparkbrook or ... ?

R: Uh, no, so you're coming towards the Moseley side; you want to go towards, uh, Star City way.

I: **Right, okay. Okay. So in that – sorry, go on.**

R: By Saltley and stuff.

I: **Okay. So within that, so is it a particularly – I know that Small Heath has a good-a good representation of Muslims within the sort of local communities, so what was the feeling within the community more widely, or within between yourself, friends, networks, family members and so on? What was their perception of kind of what was happening, and how were they impacted?**

R: Um, I think it, in terms of the community itself, it was-it was a mixed bag. So you'd get some people saying, "You know, there's no such thing as freaking COVID," and blah-di-blah. Some people are, uh, you know, you know, fully vaccinated, and they're like, "No, we have to do this," so – whereas I'm slightly in the middle. Um, I think there is something as COVID. I'm not – like, obviously it's affected everyone, so there is a COVID virus out there. I think it's been heightened to a, uh, to a certain extent, but um, from a community side, I think it was a mixed bag, um, and how we handled it is slightly different as well. So um, I know the main mosques in and around the area where-where we normally go to mosque, um, had started doing the one meter and two meter gapping in, you know, Friday prayers, uh, long before it was all cancelled. So when we'd come back it was all, you know, two meters, stay apart, and blah-di-blah-blah. But some mosques, they were just like, "No, there's no such thing. We carry on as normal." And I didn't go to those mosques, but as if they were completely excluded. So we-we are all, I don't know how much you know about Islam, but it's quite different sects, so each – it's not just like, you know, one Islam and we all follow the same thing.

We-we follow the same thing in the umbrella sort of thing, but it's different sects. So they'll break into their own little, mini-worlds, and um, so I'll follow this mosque; this mosque is, like, doing it this way, so I'm going to do it this way. So it has no bearing on the common sense of things *[laughing]*, it's just like, they're doing it this way so I'm going to do it this way, so almost like I'm not thinking for myself approach. Um, and that's what happened with the COVID as well, what the mosque was doing, and if you followed that mosque, you would do it that way, whereas if your mosque were doing it differently, you would do it differently.

I: **So you say you were in the middle in terms of your perception of things, so how – could you elaborate on that a little bit more?**

R: Of course, yeah. So-so the way I understand it is, I've had a few passings in my family during the COVID period, um, not all related to COVID, but um, even so, um, the death certificate comes back and it says COVID. So that pushes the number up on the – in the news or whatever, so it can't be that-that our family or the people that I'm related to, or the people that I know, it's happening to. It's world – nationwide sort of scenario, where obviously thousands of people are dying from COVID – I'm not saying otherwise; I'm just saying that number is inflated when it comes to the news, because that is not a real representation, when you start putting heart attacks and such as, stuff like that, into COVID, because you could say then any could be – anything could be COVID because they're like, "Oh, uh, they were – their immune system was down," and blah, blah. Like, it was just very ambiguity behind it, the way they worded the, uh, the certificates and stuff like that, and that is what I didn't get. I mean, from my personal state, as a logical thinking person, I was like, that doesn't make sense to me. Like, if someone died of a heart attack, you say, "Died of a heart attack," simple as.

Uh, it has nothing to do with COVID, and once you say it's COVID, uh, died of COVID, only

seven or eight, nine people could go to the funeral. Um, and that impacts the mental health of people that actually want to go and were close to people, or you know, if – like for example, um, we live in-in a world where certain family members are closer to friends rather than families, and because you're not family, you won't be included in the nine, so you would be, for example, my auntie passed away, and she was in her late 70s, and her husband had passed 30, 40 years ago, so all she had was friends. But none of the friends could go to the funeral because she was, uh, ill – uh, incorrectly said, "COVID," and only seven people could go and visit the funeral, which was only, like, siblings, uh, and I couldn't even go because I wasn't-I wasn't-I wasn't, uh, actual family, so only actual family can go and visit funerals, so it was just absolutely bizarre. So that, I think that's the negative side. Uh, um, so yeah, that's-that's how I think I'm in the middle, where I know there's something there, obviously, but the impact, or there's, like, as I said, uh, the numbers are not correct, if that makes any sense.

I: Yeah. I think what's really interesting about that is, even within that line of thinking, let's say if we take your line, you know, so let's say we just take that line of thinking as our baseline, did you know other people who had similar sort of experiences, where they had frustrations about similar sorts of things around bereavements? Did you know other people who had similar sorts of experiences like that?

R: Quite a few. Uh, so if I was-if I was, uh, isolated in my, uh, in my situation, or you know, it was-it was just a one incident, this happened, I'm like, you know, it's fine. But because-because I know a few more instances where this happened, um, that kind of solidifies my thinking of, like, the Government is – it's not the Government doing it, but um, uh, sort of, I just believe COVID is being blamed for a lot of things that COVID is not to be blamed for, if that makes any sense, because for example, I haven't had a GP appointment for three – well, since the COVID started. I haven't been to see a GP um, and you know, uh, I'm not saying that NHS – NHS are doing a great job, but to a certain extent, they are going away from the duties that they should be doing. Um, so I think a lot of NHS staff is hiding behind the frontliners, so the frontliners are actually hand-handling the COVID and the outbreak, and doing everything that they can, is kind of giving the break to the people where they're like, "We've got it easy now. We don't have to do anything. We can just do video calls, and say we'll call people back and we won't call them back." So I think that has impacted, but it can't only be Muslims, obviously. That's just across the board, obviously. Um –

I: I think it's interesting, so now we're almost dealing with two sets of impacts. We're dealing with impacts of the actual health risks, and we're dealing with impacts in terms of how people's lives have been impacted by the response to COVID.

R: Yeah.

I: Do you think that the Muslim community was disproportionately impacted by COVID, having a disproportionate impact from COVID? What's your-what's your perspective on that?

R: I think the ethnic minorities have been impacted a bit more. Um, and that's probably to their own detriment from the thinking of, as I said before, I'm gonna follow this mosque or that mosque and not follow the guidelines that've been given to you from the Government. You know, the Government tells you to stay home, keep your distance, blah-di-blah, you kind of follow that. Uh, I'm not – and um, certain people might not have – I'm not saying – because I wasn't one of those people, and I don't – my family wasn't one of those people, but I know for a fact that that was happening, where mosques were saying, "Oh, this COVID is non-existent. This is just the Government," blah-di-blah, and you know, absolute nonsense, and they were feeding these people, and these guys are just taking it and they're going out as normal, they're going mixing. And obviously it's gonna have an impact on the community because if you're going out as normal when there's a pandemic, out, then that number will rise, um, and I think that's the issue. It's – and it's not only because of this incident; I think it's the fact that, a lot of people, it's their second language, and they don't understand the guidelines, so it's just, they're like, "Oh, we haven't got a clue what's going on. It is going to

be what it is,” and they just carry on without the guidelines because they don’t understand anything, what’s happening.

And I think in the ethnic minority, that was another case, where it wasn’t Muslims, where have elderlies that have been here for 40, 30 years, and still don’t speak English that well, um, and you have to speak very slowly for them to understand. For them to understand the Government guidelines off the news ... It’s not going to happen. It would be someone like me who understands it and tells them, “This is what you need to do,” like I have to do it for my dad, for example. My dad, um, got a letter from the Government saying, “Oh, you’re on the highly vulnerable list. Don’t leave your house,” and he’s like ... You know? Um, I won’t repeat his language, but in other terms, like ... You know what I mean? Um, I don’t leave my house, how – you can’t tell me what to do, blah, blah, blah. And so I turned up and I’m like, “Dad, calm down. They’re just looking after you, yeah? Chill out.” And you need that sort of approach from someone he knows, rather than just a paper, a piece of paper, um, and once I had that chat, calmed him down, he understood that the letter is for his own benefit. No one’s gonna get anything out of, you know, him staying at home.

Um, so it’s-it’s how you take it, uh, from my understanding, and uh, if you-if you haven’t got the level of knowledge or understanding – understanding, not knowledge, if you haven’t got that level of understanding, or if you were completely narrow-minded from what your leaders are saying from a certain mosque, then yeah, I think that is the critical part, where we as the community, has missed.

I: Do you think there’s anything generational going on with that? For example, English as a second language, then that might indicate – not always, but might indicate older generations within the community – I’m just curious as to your perspective on whether there was something to do with age, in terms of that kind of thing?

R: I mean, without research or without – I couldn’t say for concrete, but from my perspective, it would definitely be something to do with age. Uh, um, it’s-it’s not only that they don’t understand. At a certain age, people become stubborn. It’s life, a fact of life, as you get older, you get more stubborn, uh, you don’t understand things, and things aren’t as they were, um, so you, you know, your patience gets less. So from that point of thinking, for example, if my dad – if-if me and my brother weren’t there for my dad, he would-he would’ve ripped that paper up and he’d have gone out saying, “I’ve lived my life. I’m not going to stay indoors for the rest of my life. I don’t know if I’m gonna go pass out tomorrow, you know, I’ve, you know, nearly 70-something. Uh, I-I don’t know how much I’ve got longer left,” you know, that’s the thinking they have in their head, you know, how much longer have I got, and do you want me to just sit-sit in this room and pass it on forward? You know, that’s – I think that was the thing that was coming from – certainly from my dad, because that’s the sentence he kept repeating, like, “I don’t know how long I have left, and I, you know, can’t bear to not see you, or um, uh, the kids,” his grandkids and stuff like that. And even while we’re having this conversation, I’m not in the house.

So you have to understand, like, that’s an impact in itself. Like, um, so we didn’t see him for – physically see him or had any contact with him for a year and a half, or something, and that’s big for my dad. You know, this-this is the guy we have to go to every other Friday and have a proper meal with the family. He’s a proper social animal, so it was proper hard on him, whereas uh, I think I’m the black sheep in my family, where I’m fairly good by myself. Like, if you put me on an island by myself, I’d be very happy. I’d be chilling. But my-my, uh, my brother, my, uh, my dad and my sister are complete social animals, and I think I’ve took after my mum, whereas like, I like to keep up with people, but if there’s no one around, I’m completely in sync, and just calm with myself. So I think that’s the sort of thing where I know it’s impacted other people. Like, for my wife, who’s a social animal, she has to go out and meet her friends, and um, her mum and dad, and uh, you know, she has to – literally have to go out. She’s like a busybody like no one else, and whereas I, at home, I’m happy. Give me a cup of tea and a book or something, and I’m perfectly relaxed so –

- I: **Yeah, so I mean, that's – I guess some-some of that is around wellbeing, isn't it? And kind of, you know, I guess the impacts, you said something about impacts on mental health and those kinds of things. What was-what was your perception on kind of the impacts on wellbeing, mental health, maybe anxiety, those kinds of things, earlier on in the pandemic? Obviously, I mean, it sounds like you were quite, sort of, okay with being locked down, but you know, more widely, you know [laughing].**
- R: Yeah, well, to be fair, like, I'm – that's another thing, so if someone didn't say to me, "Ahmed, you have to stay at home. You have to order everything in," and I was doing that by choice, it would've been perfectly fine. But the fact that I was mandatory for me to do something, and I couldn't go out, it was just like – mate, I'm-I'm not a person that goes out, but I want to go out. Um, and that could probably be widely by – because we were exclusively at home; I was exclusively working from home, and I had kids running around and um, whereas I used to work from home before the pandemic hit, like maybe a day a week or two days a week here and there, but I think that dosage was good, whereas exclusively from home is not healthy. Um, and even now, just my offices have opened, and I make full effort to actually go out to the office. There's no condition on me to go to the office, because I can do whatever I want from home, but I think for my mental health, I've learnt that a little bit of contact from other humans is good. Um, and uh, giving it back or receiving it, just talking absolutely nonsense with your colleagues, helps a lot. Um, and sometimes not having the little devils everywhere you go is good as well, I mean my kids.
- I: **Yeah [laughing]. Well, in-in terms of impact in the home, because obviously there were periods of time, homeschooling, all of this stuff, what was your – what do you do for work?**
- R: Uh, I'm a railway project manager.
- I: **Okay. Okay. Um, so you've said you can-you can work from home comfortable in your job, in terms of facilitating work, so there was no furlough, nothing like that for you?**
- R: I did go on furlough, to be fair, and I-I-I did love it. Uh, I was furloughed for a month, um, and- and I tried to extend it, but they wanted me back. Um, uh, so I was furloughed when the HS2 was in the – because I was working on HS2 then, and uh, I got furloughed when the bill was gonna go through, and uh, it was in the – before Boris said, "No, it's full steam ahead." Um, so we had paused our project until we got given the go-ahead from the Government, and for that period I was furloughed.
- I: **Right. So that's your project that I can see out of the window of Curzon Building on Cardigan Street...**
- R: That was my project. Uh –
- I: **That was your project, okay.**
- R: That was my project. I'm not working on it anymore.
- I: **Oh, okay.**
- R: But you can blame me until, like, a few months ago [laughing].
- I: **Yeah. But um, yeah, so family dynamics, we're talking about schooling, homeschooling, so what was that like? What was the impact of having to make those changes, um, in lockdown, and when schools were closed and stuff?**
- R: Oh, that was huge. Oh, um, like it's – it was intense, to say the least, I think. Uh, and it – people don't think – I don't know how people do homeschooling. I swear to God, I don't know. I know people that have, you know, three, four kids, and they were all homeschooled,

whatever, but between me and my missus, it was very hard, um, probably because I have no patience teaching, or I'm not a good teacher, whatever, but um, I think it was difficult because firstly, we had no support from the school. So if we asked for anything, it was like, "No teacher's in," or you know – and even on video, it was difficult to get around for, like, actual teacher input for how-how do we do this, what's missing here, sort of approach. It was just like, I was just watching YouTube, on how to teach this to a toddler, or whatever. There was no support, as in, oh, there's-there's bits of this. It was just curriculum thrown our way and said, "Teach your kids this," and uh, I think that was wrong. Like, for example, I worked-I worked throughout the pandemic, and not at one point did we throw the book at someone and say, "Go build this." That support has to be there from someone. I don't care what's happening in the world, um, certain jobs have to be done, uh, to a certain level.

Um, and just because the COVID has hit, I don't think it gives anyone excuse to not do their job. Uh, I understand if your job is physical and you can't go in, but the majority of the jobs that I'm talking about, yeah, you could do it from your bedroom, just little bits of information sharing with different people helps a lot, and I think people give gratitude for it as well, when, you know, when it is shared, even though you're doing your job, it goes a long, long, long way. Um, and it helps with people's, uh, mental health, because they don't have to sit there and scratch their head, like, absolutely nonsense these people ... You know? They know what the hell to do, so they have some sort of structure.

I: Yeah. So did you have, I mean, so thinking about, did that switch up your roles in the home then, in terms of splitting –

R: Unfortunately, yeah. Uh, so yeah, like for example, um, when we had our first kid, I was involved in looking after him, but it was small. So I would-I would do the fun dad thing, if that, you know, I would play with him, uh, I would feed him here and there, but nothing, you know, extra, you know, nothing heavy, if I want to call it that. Uh, but we had a pan-pandemic baby, and then all the homeschooling stuff. So now I'm-I'm actually having to help, like, full-on, proper home dad stuff, uh, missus, like, "I've got a meeting." I'm like, "Yeah, okay, I'll make sure I don't have a meeting at the same time as you," *[laughing]* so we have to, like, match our calendars and have meetings in and around each other. So like I'm looking after the kids, and then she's looking after the kids, and um, I don't mind it now, but when it started, it was like, "Oh, my life was so much easier before." But now I enjoy it, like I've-I've gotten a lot closer to my kids, um, but to start with, it was-it was an absolute nightmare. Like, I hadn't-I hadn't cleaned a nappy ever. That-that first one got me hard *[laughing]*.

I: Oh dear. Yeah, yeah *[laughing]*. Yeah. So-so what does your wife do? What does she do for work?

R: She's a lecturer.

I: Ah, okay. Okay.

R: That's the connection to XXXXX.

I: So thinking about – did you have family members who had COVID? I don't know if I – I've not asked you that yet, have I? I mean, as in – I know you've talked about going through the bereavements and so on.

R: I had –

I: You had it? What was it like?

R: Oh, mate, it was horrible. It was like-it was like absolute shutdown. Uh, you know like you'd get – I don't know if you have ever had night sweats?

I: Uh – ah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I know what you mean, yeah.

- R: If-if you have night sweats, but throughout the day, that's what it was like. It was like sweating and cold, and you had pain everywhere. Like, all your bones, and it was horrible, um, but I only had it once. My wife-my wife had it twice. I skipped the second time. Um, probably built up some sort of immunity, but um, um, but my kids had it, but they didn't really, really have it – it was just like some sort of a flu, and they came back positive, but ...
- I: **So is it – I mean, were you worried at that time, or you know, kind of, how did you feel about it, knowing that you had COVID, or whatever? And was that earlier on, or later on?**
- R: It was fairly early. No, it was fairly early. It was when it was just starting, and people were, like, saying there's no such thing as COVID, and I was like, "Mate, I'll tell you what. There is such thing as COVID, because I've had it." Um, and you know, you don't want anyone to go through that. So um, I kind of – so that was my voice of reasoning, so – because I had had it, and I knew what COVID was, um, so I know that it was there, and it was obviously being affected – being, you know, it was, you know, affecting people and being passed on or whatever. But as I said before, I don't think it was to the level contagious of how it was made out to be, where, you know, the numbers are ...
- I: **Mm. And did you, I mean did you have anxieties about older family members, or were there people you were worried about?**
- R: Main – it was mainly my mum and dad. Um, my dad is a heart patient, uh, and he has cancer, so his immunity's, like, non-existent, and the fact that he actually didn't get COVID is-is wow. Uh, but my mom has been asthmatic for as long as I can remember, so it was like those two can't ever get – you know, just so-so we were so careful to the extent of, like, my parents. Like, we didn't see them, we didn't go, you know, physically to talk to them. We would go and sit in the driveway, like four meters away from them, and talk to them through a window, or stuff like that, and they did not like it at all. Um, and they were like, "It's fine if we get it, just come in," blah, blah, blah, but we'd be like ... Um, so I think that was the major thing for me, and well, and my brother as well, to keep, you know, just do as we were being told to do, and just keep them safe.
- I: **Yeah. [Coughs] I want to ask you about your, I guess, religious observance. So in terms of being Muslim, what does that identity mean to you, and are you religiously active? You know, and how – what does it mean for you?**
- R: Whoa, that's a very deep question. Um, so I-I am active. I do, um – I'm not as active as you may find other people, so if-if, for example, um, there was a requirement, let's say, there was an assignment, someone gave me an assignment to do, and in that assignment, there was mandatory, you must have this, this, this and this, and then it was nice if you mentioned this and this and this. I'm the person who does mandatory and forgets about the rest in Islam. So I do – you know, I-I pray five times a day, I do my charity, um, try not to be, you know, in any way or form a bad person to anyone. So there's five pillars, and I try to follow the five pillars of Islam. Um, I don't know, uh, one is believing in Qur'an, believing in angels, believing in the Prophet Mohammed (s.a.w.), that he was the last prophet, blah, blah, blah. So basically the five pillars is my understanding, and I follow that to the fullest. Um, where it, uh, where it gets hazy is, uh, my knowledge isn't the best because as I said, I only do what's absolutely mandatory. Uh, my brother's on – my brother-my brother is a lot better than me. He does a bit more. Uh, his knowledge is a lot more. Um, so me, as a Muslim, I think what's necessary is to make sure I'm doing all the mandatory things, and not do anything that I have been prescribed not to. Uh, and also not doing something extra. I think I'd rather – so I don't know how much – this is going to be slightly – a slight lesson here now, I'm sorry, but um –
- I: **That's okay.**
- R: – in Islam, there's a thing called a – where you innovate, so that is the biggest thing you can

do, one of the biggest things, for example. So for example, I've been told to drink a glass of water, a glass of water, yeah? And I'm just giving you an example – this is nothing prescribed. So I've been told, prescribed to do a glass of water, so I do that one glass of water, for example. And I'd drink it and I'd say, "You know what? I've done that glass of water, but you know what you would be better? If I do two." But it's not prescribed for me to do two. So people will say, "I'm doing more and it's better," no, you only do what is prescribed. So if you add, then you're going against the book that's been perfected for you. That's a major sin. So a lot of people do a lot more, and think, and say, "Hey, I am the best in the world because I'm doing so much more than what is prescribed," but in essence, they're sinning to a level where it's unforgivable.

I: Okay. Are there other examples of law that you could give me, because in-in my mind I guess I'm leaning towards, it's – I don't know – I understand the premise, but I'm trying to think of-of kind of what it means in real terms. Do you mean, say for example, contributing more than what is advised in terms of charity or Zakat or is it-is it different things?

R: No, no, no, different things. So it's mainly to do with praying. For example, like some – when someone passes, yeah? Uh, you're meant to do, like, just, you pray for them, you say, you know, you know, grant them ease, and go to heaven, and blah-di-blah. You pray for them, no problem. You know, you prayed, simple, no problem. But what a lot of people do is, they host parties, and parties to just sit and read stuff for the person who is deceased. So for example, they host about 40 people, and all 40 people are reading, like, Qur'anic verses or whatever verses, and nowhere in Islam says that that-that is going to have any impact on the person that's passed. So all of those people that are doing this, are innovating, because they're saying, "We're going to do something extra for this person." Uh, and this is something I'm telling you happens all the time. So as I said, that Islam is broken into different sects, and it is one sect that does this on a regular basis. Like, if someone passes, we're going to throw a party, everyone's coming, everyone brings their one book *[laughing]*, like ... Yeah, so it's that, and if you want more examples, I could probably give you legitimate examples, uh, or writing. As I said, because my knowledge is very basic, I don't want to give you something wrong.

I: No, no, no, it's not that. I get the point that you're making, though. I get the point that you're making. Um, so no, that's interesting because that clearly then, you – your faith identity is important for you, faith is important for you –

R: 100%.

I: Did-did that change in the context of the pandemic, was there – were there impacts which took you in one-one direction or another in terms of how you-how you engaged with your faith, how you expressed your faith, how you observed and so on?

R: Yeah. I think the biggest thing that impacted me was Friday prayers, not going Friday prayers. Like, that's the thing I was brought up doing, and even when we-when we got the chance to go back, it wasn't the same, um, for a long time. So missing Friday prayers was a huge thing, and it's not only that you're missing Friday prayers, the Friday prayers is a big thing because it kind of like – the-the sermon that you have on Friday prayers, it kind of like brings you back, or it, you know, it tells you, like, something that you might be doing as norm, and not thinking about it, like, "Well, crap, I've been doing this, and I need to quit," you know. Like for example playing poker on your phone and spending two or £3 on it every month or something – well, gambling is not allowed. And so you – it's, uh, it's just little – like, little anecdotes that you get while you're there, and like, "Oh, crap. Shit, sorry," you know, right, strike that, strike that, sort of approach. I-I do normally do all of the things, or I don't normally do – don't do what is not there, but there will be something, because no one's perfect, and I will be doing something, and I still do it. Like, um, so it's just good to hear it back, and you're like, "Shit, sorry, let's refrain from that, or let's..."

So missing that, and not having any, uh, secondary guidance, and just being myself, uh, was hard, uh, because I got lazy, I got loose, not-not been practicing, not doing this or that during the whole COVID, didn't – pretty much prayed just about – but I was, like, not praying on time because every day was, like, combining into, like – you know what I mean? Like, just at home, so you don't know what time it is, so *[laughing]* – so you kind of like – you're meant to pray five different times of the day, and I was, like, combining-combining different times with different times, sort of like only praying, let's say, three times a day or two times a day. But I was fulfilling the duties, but not on time, and that was a big thing. Uh, and when we went back to Friday prayers, um, the way we pray is, like, all people are equal, so you stand together feet to feet, shoulder to shoulder to represent that no one is above anyone else. We are all equal, we're all brothers. And when we went back, as I said, the Government guidance was to stay a meter or two meters, stand apart. And standing apart, it just didn't feel like I'm praying with anyone. I might-I might as well just stay at home and pray, um, because I wasn't-I wasn't feeling part of the community. You know, you go and there's no one around you.

Well, I say no one around you, but you know, we're all kind of scattered all over. And uh, you would have to get there ages before because it fills up quicker because obviously the room isn't as much, uh, because we were spacing so much. So you'd have to get there about half an hour earlier. Uh, I would have to take – like, I think I-I gave up half my pay of each Friday during the pandemic because I had to get there early, and obviously I can't have a three hour lunch or a two hour lunch or whatever. And I was like, "Fine, just pay me half the day for Friday, and then I'll go there."

I: So which mosque were you attending?

R: I-I attend, uh, two different ones. I go to XXXX XXXX [a small Mosque in Small Heath] and then XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], either one. XXXX XXXX quite small so if XXXX XXXX full, then [I'll go to] XXXX XXXX.

I: I mean, did you notice things within the community, were there other people, do you think, who were impacted? Did-did faith identity have something to do with people getting through on a community level?

R: It definitely did, to a certain level. Um, because how – it's like – the Muslim community works, it's obviously very special, but you know, we do a lot. The mosques do a lot, before COVID, anyway, they did a lot, community-wise, having food banks, and days where people that are homeless can come and eat, and stuff like that. Um, and that wasn't happening, obviously, during COVID. You know, all of that face-to-face or actual physical help that they gave to the communities wasn't happening, or couldn't happen. Um, so I think that was impacting. I think that impacted a lot on the people that provided these, supports, and they were like, "I don't know what to do with myself, because you know, I so, like, want to help people but I'm stuck in my-my house." That was a different kind of thing I heard my cousin say, like, because he goes, "Um, it's affecting my mental health, like, I've got food here but I can't give it to no one."

I: Mm, okay.

R: And, uh, that's what I – and – from him, and from the other side of the thing, where uh, the mosque, I think XXXX XXXX [a small Mosque in Small Heath] in itself is a special mosque, where the people that go there are slightly different. So for example, uh, local mosques here and there, the Pakistani mosque, the Somalian mosques, so the majority of the people – or Algerian mosque or whatever – so the majority of people there will be Pakistanis, the majority of people there will be Indian, Gujaratis, whatever. So the mosques are officially affiliated with a certain ethnic group, whereas the XXXX XXXX [a small Mosque in Small Heath] is one of the few mosques, it's not related – it's not, you know – it's so mixed, um, it's good to see the different, you know, demographic coming in, because the majority of it is a lot of...

I: Yeah, yeah, okay.

- R: Um, so you see French, you see English, you see, you know, you can – you name it, and it's so mixed, and the community is proper mixed there, uh, and you see, like, weird-looking kids, like, and you kind of like guess what their ethnicity is *[laughing]*. It's fun games, but uh – it's-it's cute, because I think my marriage is inter-inter – um, mixed, as well, but uh, it's-it's fun, I think, and it's good to see, I think, and that's the way I think communities should lead towards. So like-like I don't like the-the norm of, you know, you know – I don't know how to put it, but um, you know, Pakistanis only marry Pakistanis, or Pakistanis marry – the-the fact that we're mixing down, I'm hoping the fact that we mix so much, that down on some level, we're all just so mixed and no one can tell what *[laughing]*.
- I: **Mm, yes.**
- R: Um, and then there'll be no boundaries or no, you know, discrimination against each other because we're all so mixed, we're the same. So that's what I like about XXXX XXXX [a small Mosque in Small Heath], uh, the demographic is very mixed. So the support that you get from there is slightly different. Uh, for example, a lot of people don't have families to lean on because they're not from around here, or they've, you know, left their families to be in Islam or whatever. So they make an actual full-on effort to make sure that people that are affiliated with that mosque will come to that mosque, or if you need any help, you get it from the brothers, or whatever is around. But, that's what I like. Um, but that's only one side of what I see, um ...
- I: **Yeah. Were they doing things, because you know, were XXXX XXXX [a small Mosque in Small Heath] doing things with the community when things were locked down, and-and things like that, or as things started to open up?**
- R: To my knowledge, I don't think they did anything while the pandemic was happening. Uh, they might be happening but I'm not – I wasn't in knowledge of them. I think XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] did a bit, uh, even-even though it was a pandemic. I think XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] is a much bigger, sort of, organisation in itself, so they have a lot more money, they have a lot more resources. Um, so XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], in that terms, is better, or was better, anyway. Um, I think since the pandemic has sort of calmed itself, I think XXXX XXXX [a small Mosque in Small Heath] come back to support, um, the people in whatever they need, and uh, I think it was, like, a little help here and there, like with the food banks, and helping people, uh, with whatever stuff they needed. If they really just needed someone to talk to, they were like, "Come in and talk to us," like, to listen and stuff like that, um ...
- I: **What kind of – what do you think the main areas of need were, I guess?**
- R: I think the main support was – financial support was one because uh, I know for a few-few people, for example, if you're a contractor or you're, you know, you're a builder or whatever, your business was dead, and you know, and a lot of these people probably couldn't get, you know, furlough, or anything of the sort from the Government because they didn't have.... So that was probably the most difficult part, and when you had that, I think it was support from the elite few rich Muslim people that were there, who'd say, like, "Fine, we don't care how much it is. Like, let us know, we'll-we'll help you out," approach, which was good. Yeah, I would like to think if I had that much money, I'll probably throw it back as well, which I don't, unfortunately. But um, like, we had a fundraiser a few weeks ago, uh, for a mosque, and this is – this is a mosque affiliated with XXXX XXXX [a small Mosque in Small Heath] and XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], so it was like they come together and do this. It was a really good fundraiser, so we raised around 60K in a night, and uh, one-one or two guys went, "So whatever you lot raise," they would double it.
- I: **They would double it?**
- R: So whatever you raise, we'll double it – we will double it ourselves. So that got more incentive,

so like, people like, trying, even if they were – if they had, like, £20 or £10, they were, like, chucking it in thinking, 20 quid means 40 quid. You know?

I: **Yeah.**

R: Sorry, my cat is actually doing my nut in. One second.

I: **I think the signal's a bit up and down as well. I'm not sure if it's my side or yours, but um, yeah.**

R: So yeah, um

I: **So that, so it's interesting, were the fundraisers sort of facilitated by the mosques, and was that where they were hosted, and those kinds of things? Was this something which was, you know, members of the community could go to, say, XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], have a conversation..?**

R: I think it was a fact of, um, I think no one actually would ask, I think. It's the fact that the leaders of the mosque or the people in the mosque knew who would need it.

I: **Ah, I see, okay, okay.**

R: And it-it was-it was like, "I know you need it. Here you go," sort of approach whereas a lot of people don't ask for help when they need it, I think, and they didn't wait. I think that's the good thing, that they knew who needed it, and they were like, "Here you go, mate. Don't worry about it. When you're sorted, come back to us. It's not a problem." And I think that's the approach that helps better than you wait for someone to ask for help, because a lot of people are either too proud, or they don't know how to ask for help.

I: **Yeah. Um, were there any other things that stand out in terms of, uh, what mosques might've been doing to address things in the community? We've talked about food banks, but that's something which had been longstanding as I understand, and um, was there anything that changed at, you know?**

R: I mean, the thing I can see-see changed in the past is, um, podcasts, so you know, uh, where you'd normally have a lesson or something that you would have to go in for, uh, and get a refresher in something, or just to sit in and have a part – be part of the community, and talk to your brothers and, you know, just feel that, you know, you're there somewhere and you have some sort of human contact. But um, XXXX XXXX [a small Mosque in Small Heath] started doing podcasts, which was quite good, so uh, so you'd be in the group, you know, they'd be talking. And then, uh, and then there were a couple of times where a couple of brothers arranged, like, just meet face-to-face, like on Zoom and stuff like that, just to have a chat. Um, uh, they tried to do a quiz night which went horrible because no one knew what they hell they were talking about. Half the-half the people weren't from the UK. But uh, yeah, but I think – so we squashed that, and we-we just went, "Let's just have a chat, and we can just share stories and whatever." That-that went better. So it was like a, just, like an AA group, but we didn't do many of them, it was like just a few.

I: **Right. Um, and were there any other community organisations, other than mosques, but which might've had roles of – in the community in the pandemic?**

R: Yes. So I work in the railway, and there's a small group called XXXX XX XXXX [a Muslim group of employees], so we're-we're-we're a nationwide sort of group, some of us are in Manchester, Leeds, London, Birmingham, sort of widespread. Uh, so there's about 60 of us. Started off as a small group, but because of the pandemic, I think, it's grew arms and legs and tentacles and whatever. Um, so now it's become a full-on entity with, like, chairman, and like assigned roles, and doing this and that. It's actually really, really helpful. So through that, we would go through our companies, uh, so for example, the company I work for, uh, I would

send out an email to my, you know, people and say, "Guys, if you know anyone that needs help, come back to us. If a mosque needs help, let us know. We have, like, two community days that we can serve, volunteer days, so we can take a volunteer day from our company and go help a mosque out, help another foundation or a food bank, or just clean up something," you know, just to be part of the community. And uh, that's helped a lot, and people, um, not per se come to XXXX XX XXXX [a Muslim group of employees] for help, but it's good for other foundations to know that we're there for support if they need to lean on us.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Uh, so we're not heavily involved in everything, as you would expect because we have fulltime jobs, but we are there to support if someone needs help organising something or pushing something across, um, yeah.

I: Okay, so I think there's a couple of things, couple more things, uh, that are interesting for us to cover, I think. First would probably be, what are your perspectives overall on the Government response? Um, what worked well, what didn't work well? In terms of both your needs, and also thinking about the Muslim community a bit-a bit more widely as well?

R: Um, I – well, I think I talked about this before – I-I-I don't think we were quick enough, in the first place, as you're aware. We-we – and then when we-when we did decide something, we were-we were ineffective with the methods or, uh, you know, what procedures we've got in place. It wasn't clear, very – it was just, it was like, do this ... It's like you know when you get a letter from a – like a-like a legal letter, and they've just got ambiguity statements in there, like if you do this, this happens; if you do this, this happens, but if you don't do any of this, then the top applies, and you're like, "What the ... ? What?" Um, I think they should've kept it very simple in the, like, when the first lock – uh, when the first lockdown happened, it was very clear, it was just like, um, you know, don't go out. You know, it was straight, strict lines, weren't it? It was not black and white. It-it was black and white. There was no grey area. Um, as soon as they started sort of moving forward, it wasn't a very easy way to move forward, and I don't think they took into account of how different communities would be affected.

It was one size fits all, and one sort of message fits all, which okay, you're the Government, fine, but they need to understand that not everyone is gonna be on that level of understanding, and you need-needed better, uh, broadcasting from the Government to be able to reach the different communities in different ways, maybe, you know, get the mosques involved or the schools, or whatever they wanted to do, but I don't think it was broadcasted as it should have.

I: Do you think there was scope there to have partnerships with mosques and other organisations?

R: I don't think there is a relationship. Well, I-I-I seriously don't – I-I don't think – um, from where I sit, um, I've not seen Council or anything coming to mosque or community centre, or an office. Even if they come to a global office or a – let's say they come to a rail office, or any of the civil service offices, you know, it'd be-it'd be good to see, to say like, "Guys, we're here, um, if you need support." Because let's say for example I'm not getting support from anywhere, uh, or I'm not getting the information that I want, or I'm unclear, it's just about targeting a different demographic, isn't it? So if you, for example, you can't go to a mosque and whatever, um, but you can go to somewhere that has a person from that mosque, if that makes any sense. So you know, you kind of impact them from a different sort of, um, avenue. But I don't think that was done. It was just like, "We're going to come on the five o' clock news and we're going to just tell people, you know, stay home, stay safe, and hopefully that works."

I: So was there representatives from the community speaking with local Government representatives on local news and stuff. Was that kind of stuff happening?

R: I don't think so. Um, I think there was guidance released from the Government to the mosques, um, but I don't think there was an actual person talking or having a conversation two ways with the community. Um, maybe that's a role that's missing in the Government, uh, because having a liaison between the community and the Government would help both sides quite heavily. Uh, but I – from my understanding, and from where I sat, and where I could look, I don't think that was happening.

I: **And then what about the more direct interventions, things like, uh, testing centres, vaccination strategies? What are your perspectives on that?**

R: I mean, I-I think they were quite good, uh, in the sense that they were very readily available in the- in-in-in the communities that we were in. Even, I think, some point XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] really offered to be a testing centre as well, so they-they-they helped out, uh, and had that conversation. Um, so I think testing centres, um, weren't the problem at all, I don't think, uh, because you could [get] testing done. Uh, maybe the results side of things weren't all that great, but that's a conversation in itself. But uh, I think testing centres, I think they did their job fairly well, uh, and they were very easy to get to; there were quite a few around, um, we weren't short at all, I think. There was one in the mosque, there was a few leisure centres that became testing centres, so it was all good.

I: **And what about vaccinations?**

R: Yeah, uh, vaccinations are a mixed bag as well, um, so my dad has had all his vaccinations, um, but I haven't touched them and I wouldn't touch them with a ten-foot pole. Um, but that's only because of what has been happening since, uh, the um, vaccinations have come. So I'm not against the vaccinations, if you're gonna go for it, 100%, but from what I understand, it's the small print that affects me. So when I-when I went to take my vaccination, the small print wasn't great. It was like, we don't know if this works, uh, we don't know what side effect it has, uh, and we don't know when you would need a booster. So it was very, like, there's this thing that you're gonna put in your body but we don't have a freaking clue if it works or what it does to you. I was like, I read that and I was like, no *[laughing]*. I'm not put – if you tell me that I'm gonna take a vaccination, and if the small print says this vaccination works, we've tested it on so many people, these are the side effects, are you gonna go for it? Like, I'll go for it. If the vaccination said, we haven't got a clue if it works, then you know, if you don't know, then I'm not putting it in. Um, so that was my understanding when I went to take the vaccination. I was looking at the label, and I was like, "I, um, I'll be right back." So that was – that-that's my vaccination.

And there's lots of stories around vaccinations and that, which I don't want to get into, or the conspiracy theories, but if – that was the bottom line for me where, if the, you know, it says on the wrapper that we don't know if it works, and we don't know what the side effects are, then sorry, mate, when you know better, then I'll take it. Um, and the effect that it's having on the athletes across the world as well, it's not great to see. So you know, I don't know if you've noticed or not, but since the vaccinations have been happening across the world, fit, healthy people all over the world are having heart attacks on the pitches, or heart, you know, issues through here and there, which is not great to see. Um, and I'm not linking the both, I'm just saying it's a coincidence that I don't want to be a part of.

I: **Okay. Why don't you want to talk about the conspiracy theory stuff?**

R: 'Cause it's conspiracy theories, isn't it, really? Um, and there's no facts to back it up with, apart from, you know, this, as this happened, that happened. Just no facts so I could say something, and someone could say complete opposite, then I can hold my opinion, but I can't convince other people without facts. Um, so the fact that I wouldn't take the vaccine is because that they're not sure, and they're putting everything on the wrapper to say, "Mate, you-you're taking it on your own risk." It's like when you leave your gym bag in the-in the-in the gym, saying, you know, you-you're leaving – and there's a sign there saying, 'no belonging here is covered by insurance from the leisure centre,' and stuff, like, you'd take

your phone and your watch and everything onto the pitch, don't you? You don't leave it in the changing room because you'd think someone's gonna steal it. So it's the same principle – if someone in paper, on writing telling me, 'we've got no clue what's happening,' then I'm gonna take that paper and I'm gonna say, "When you know better, come back to me."

I: And I guess, I mean, is that a perspective that's shared? Is there, you know, is that something that is debated more widely within the community, or ... ?

R: It's debated heavy, and it's debated every single day to a point where I, as soon as this debate starts, I'm like, I switch off. It's very heavy at the moment, for example, uh, and it's not just community, it's between friends and cousins, and like, one side of the family's got it done, the other side of the family hasn't got it done, and you're like, so are you calling me stupid because I got it done, sort of approach. Um, and you're like, "No, I'm not calling you stupid, but this is my opinion." You know, this is what I say, like, "This is my opinion. I haven't got any facts to base it on," because I haven't got any facts. But this is my opinion." And you know, I go back to the wrapper, like, I just say, like, "Look at that wrapper. Like, did you read the small print before you got it?" And he goes, "No, I didn't read." "No, you should've read the small print." But it's, like, half my family is vaccinated, like – actually, more than half of my family is vaccinated, and you know, I-I'm not saying anything to them. I'm not saying, like, "It's going to be detrimental to you." No, "Good for you." My-my dad got it done, uh, and uh, he's a heart patient and cancer, whatever, so good on them. Like, if that's what you believe, then go for it. But um, me personally, uh, I-I'll wait 'til they have better vaccinations, and get it done then. Yeah?

I: So if something like this was to happen, or a similar type of challenge or crisis or whatever you might want to call it, might come along again, what do you think the things that, looking back on how the pandemic affected Muslim communities in Birmingham, or at least the Muslim community you're familiar with, what kind of things do you think could be done next time around, or what kind of areas could we see would need to be a priority, and that kind of thing?

R: Firstly, obviously, you're looking after people. So that needs to be priority, be it physical or mental health or whatever. That has to be the main thing, and no one deserves to be passing on by themselves. I think that's another thing. Um, I saw, you know, a lot of people pass, and they were by themselves, and that has to be, like, the worst ever, like not the person who was passing, because you're passed and you're dead and you're gone, but the person who wanted to be there and weren't there for their loved one, that's going to haunt them forever. You know, they weren't there when the person needed them the most. Um, so I think something has to be developed around that protocol there, if your loved one is passing, there has to be some way or form that you have some sort of a contact with them, you know, to help them pass and help you grieve, sort of approach, um, rather than completely isolated from the situation, which is not good. Um, secondly, I think, um, financial support. Um, I know our Government does a lot already, but I'm not asking, like, the Government to chip in, it's just, um, so you don't give people money, for example, but knowing the vulnerable families that are around, and just, you know, to show maybe two mosques or whatever means, um, that you know, there-there is support available for them, you know.

Like uh, like for example, they kept sending my dad, who was highly – on-on the vulnerable list, um, a food basket, you know, like bread and milk, eggs and stuff. My dad didn't need it because he had me and my brother, like, looking after him and passing him, all past years, but it – that is brilliant to see. Uh, even though my dad didn't need-need it, we dropped it off to a food bank. But that is really good to see, and it shouldn't only be done for the people that are on-on your list or highly vulnerable, because that just goes by the medical side of it. You need to see also the financial side of things as well. I don't know how they'd do it, but um, that could be a conversation between communities to say, "Look, who do we know needs support?" You know, who do we – like, so for example, people who would know, like, that family and that family, they're not doing great, you know, their businesses shut down or whatever, they would know. And it's just about anonymously dropping them a box of things

that are absolutely essential for you to live on. I'm not saying, like, Coke and crisps and that, just the bare essentials so they can eat. Um, and I think just while you're there, having a conversation with them, saying, "Hi, guys, if you need anything else, or ... you know, drop by the mosque, or drop by, you know, the cricket club, or drop by the football club," then anything, just drop by, talk, you know, have some physical activity, um, which is all beneficial to you.

I think those are the two things I would do differently. Apart from that, I think, yeah, clarity in messages, um, from Government is needed because, like, I do it all the time as a project manager when I'm doing contract – um, in contracts, you put ambiguity in there because you want the contractor to decipher it themselves and see what they come up with, and if you don't like it, you kind-kind of say, "Oh, I didn't mean this." And that's what the Government are doing, um, and because I read it and I'm like, mm, that's what – that's how I would write a contract, and it shouldn't be contractual. It should be very clear guidance. If I write a – if I wrote a guidance note, it-it would be very straight, very simple English, so you know, it can't be mistaken, um, as a contract, um, because if-if I do that in a contract then I can be held accountable, where in a guidance, you're not being held accountable. No one's going to come back to you and say, "You told me to do this. This is guidance."

I: Yeah. do you think there's any legacy of the pandemic that, you know, kind of, mosques or other organisations or even the Government could do in terms of supporting Muslim communities? Is there anything sort of ongoing that's come out of COVID?

R: Um, from the Government, I think some sort of liaison with communities would be great. I think that would be brilliant. I think that's happened with certain mosques, like XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] is quite good with that, with the community liaison and stuff, because the way they are, they're very open. Um, but I think they need to – I'm – it's difficult, because some mosques don't want to do that, um, and if they don't want to do it, you know, carry on with whatever the hell you want to do. But I think most of the people, it's a human nature, if someone wants to help you, and be part of it or understand what you're doing, or how you're doing it, you'll be open to it. It's just how you send that message across. If you're not, like, I'm here, what's going on, or else, sort of approach, it would be like, you know, we're all in it together, let's do it better, let's help each other. That's the message.

I: Mm. Mm. Alright, well, is there anything else you wanted to mention before we finish?

R: No, no, to be honest, I've talked your ear off for an hour.

Interview 9

Date: 15/04/2022

Duration: 01:36:16

Participant characteristics: male, community member, revert

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: Essentially, I think a bit of back story would be useful to start with. Um, so do you want to just kind of give an insight into where – well, I guess where-where you grew up or where you've lived in Brum, and kind of – and I guess for this interview as well, thinking about how you came to revert to Islam, essentially.

R: Okay. Um, so I grew up in an area in Birmingham, uh, Hockley, Winson Green, which is the B18 postcode of the city, um, lived with both my parents and my older brother, um, was quite a unique scenario because I was probably one of few households in the whole cul-de-sac and street that I lived, um, that had a collective set of parents that were in the house. So in a very weird way, even up until my teenager's, I was always kind of not given the same opportunity as everybody, because everybody viewed my experience as having two parents, so having, like, you know, the Government used to kind of give, like, extra finance for households that were struggling and whatever, but it was always judged based on my-my two household, but my mum and dad were still broke. Um, so I didn't get certain benefits that a lot of my friendship groups had. So in the community I lived in, um, amazing, I loved being there. Um, I'd say every summer it was exciting because the neighbours would be fighting against each other – it was like a living – the only way I can explain, it was like EastEnders, Emmerdale, Coronation Street, in one. So loved primary school. Um, I would always kind of say that I was an intelligent but misunderstood child.

Um, I come from a strong family of activists. Uh, my grandmother, um, um, my second name, Pinkney, is-is quite a significant family in Birmingham, and my grandparents, um, as well as my aunts and uncles are well-known for, I guess, their activism, um, in the '60s, and you know, when a lot of kind of Caribbean families were facing, kind of, a lot of issues as it related to racism and injustice. Um, my grandma started a project called the Nightingale Project, um, and she was one of the founders of the, um, Muhammad Ali Centre. So when Muhammad Ali came many years ago, apparently he came to my grandma's house and had some tea before they opened up the centre, so a lot of the, kind of, community activists in the community, currently now that are still alive, they would've been children and young people that were attending my grandma's house that essentially was a community centre, um, through the Nightingale Project. Um, so I've always grew up, you know, having a very clear understanding of who I was as a black man, my roots. I guess the biggest challenge was, is that I lived in an environment where everything was happening, you know, I grew up in the '90s where the Burger Bar and Johnson issues were prevalent.

Most of my next door neighbours and people that lived a street or two away from me were actively involved. But when I was growing up, it wasn't a, uh – it's very different to the times now. We didn't need to be in gangs, so the whole context of gangs and stuff like that wasn't really something that was – I remember being at secondary school and uh, my friend said, "Ah, there's this new gang forming," do I wanna join, and I thought, why *[laughing]*. But that – those were the types of conversations. So going into secondary school, I felt like I lost my way. Um, because I was, I guess, around educators and PhDs and professors that were, I guess, strong on African culture and history, I never got that from secondary school. So I-I

was kind of seen as like a problem in geography and history and maths and religious education, um, because every point that was made, I would always have either a counter question or a response. Um, I just remember, just like always, my RE teacher, me and her used to always just be at loggerheads, and we – she'd talk about, uh, different you know prophets and messengers and stuff, and I would – I'd question some of the things that she was talking about, and what I used to find with a lot of my teachers is that they were fixed in what they needed to teach for the curriculum, and I guess what I was trying to do was embrace the opportunity to, let's have a critical discussion.

So I always found myself being shut down, so I got to a place of, who cares? Who cares about school? So as I would say, I got into probably year nine and ten, going into year 11 – I just became the class clown, that became the new me. You know, making jokes, um, I was never in fighting, and so it was never that type of stuff, it was just what people would call it now, being very antisocial, antisocial behaviour. So my boy was XXXXXX XXXXX, Irish lad that lived in *the Ends* as well, and we'd just get up to all sorts, you know, and that was the reason why I got in most of the trouble, because I was rolling with XXXXX and another guy named XXXXX. And then when it got to my GCSEs, I slept, I burped, I made noises, I made people laugh, uh, the teacher warned me a number of times I'm gonna get kicked out, and that very much was my school experience. So leaving school, um, obviously coming from a strict household, mum was like, either work, college or, um, that's it, not in the house. So because my brother worked in a warehouse, I decided to work in a warehouse, but I was working in this job, and I could never, um, I got quite frustrated because I wasn't reaching my full potential.

Um, but at that time, when I was in year 11, I used to have a mentor, and he used to play basketball with me. His name was XXXXX. Um, and he had said to me that he knew of a coach in Birmingham that essentially, um, was doing basketball trials or whatever, and I kind of got into basketball as kind of, as an alternative. Now, it was interesting because this particular coach, I played for Birmingham XXXXX, that was the name of the Birmingham team at the time, he was the coach of the Birmingham XXXXX and the younger team, and there was also a team called Birmingham XXXXX. Tried out, um, and I got into the team. So what I found myself doing was working, um, but then also playing for XXXXX's basketball team. Then XXXXX got a job at College, so because he'd got into the college, he was like, "Lads, it makes sense that some of you are not in education. Come to the college and play for the college basketball team." So to me, that was a no-brainer because now I'm happy, my mum's going to be happy, I'm back in the education, um, but because I came out of school with only one GCSE which was drama, I did performing arts, but because I didn't have the requirements of the B Tech National at the time, it was kind of like a – it was like a B Tech first before you get onto the actual diploma.

So I was on a B Tech first, and I met a very good friend of mine now, um, and still is, a guy named XXXXX, and he's, you know, he does loads of stuff on *Emmerdale*, and you know, loads of stuff on the TV, and-and whatnot. But I really enjoyed being around him because other than the Irish people that I grew with growing up, I wasn't really around white people. So the only reason why XXXXX was in Birmingham was, his mum was studying law and she was trying to get her bar in Birmingham, so they moved from Liverpool to live in Birmingham. So me and him, he became like the XXXXX XXXXX of college, so me and him then just was just, like, rolling, whatever. And it was weird because I'd leave XXXXX and then go back to a community that was just black people, and then the only time I would get to see people from the outside is when I was at basketball or with XXXXX. So I had a-a real interesting upbringing, in the sense that I could slip between two worlds. I could roll with XXXXX, and his team and his boys, and could easily slip back into me just being at *Ends* around all of the people. But even at those particular ages, I always loved the idea of history and culture, because it was rooted within me.

And then I got kicked out of college, um, XXXXX, uh, continued on his acting career, um, and then XXXXX got a new job at XXXXX XXXXX College, so no-brainer again, even though I got kicked off the performing arts course, then jumped onto sports, which is the typical, um,

course that most young people choose in the community, from where I'm from anyway, that was just an easy tick-box exercise, so we did sport. And it was at that college where I kind of developed the passion and want to play basketball professionally, um, and get a scholarship hopefully in America. There was a lot of guys coming to and from America, going to Europe, and that became my dream, I guess. Um, and then doing really well in sport, um, and my dad used to always say to me, "Do you have a plan B?" And to be totally honest, I was like, "No, because this is my plan A, and my plan A is to go and play basketball," until I got to the English club finals, um, and I was playing ball, subsequently got a really, really bad injury. I ruptured my cruciate ligament in my right knee, which meant I had to have reconstruction surgery, um, so they had to take my – parts of my hamstring out, create a whole ligament in my knee, fix-fix it, um, with carbon fibre pins, and that was the end of my basketball career.

So at that point, I probably was – that was probably the first time I can actually say I went through a series of form of depression, because I'm only really going to college to play basketball; on the weekends I'm playing basketball, other than working. Didn't really wanna work in that organisation anymore. And then that's where I – my dad said to me, why don't you going and check his friend in town? Um, and that was when connections was at its height, and this was, like, through Birmingham City council Youth Service, and I met these three youth workers, um, XXXXX XXXXX from Scotland, XXXXX XXXXX from Leicester, and XXXXX, like, this tall Jamaican guy with massive dreadlocks. And they used to always say, "you've got so much about you. You'd be a brilliant youth worker." I was like, "I'm not really interested in youth work. It's not really my thing." And then they kind of told me about things that you can do in terms of youth work, and put me on a few courses. And then from those courses, I started doing some work with XXXXX, which is my basketball coach. He'd be doing, like, these activities in Easter and summer, and I kind of started to like this idea of youth work. And then it brought me to the point where it was like, you know what? I think you should go to university.

And I had the rare opportunity where they wrote my application form, mission statement, they'd done absolutely everything for me. All I needed to do was show up on the day. And I went to two universities, XXXXX University and XXXXX University, because the youth work degree wasn't in Birmingham at that time. Went to XXXXX University first, and then I lost what was called my record of achievement, these purple books that everybody used to get, [sighs] don't know how I lost it, but I lost it. So when I got to XXXXX, I was, kind of, no qualifications on paper, kind of messing about at college and whatever, and it's just me. But whatever I said to them at college really must've made them think, you know, we want to give this guy a chance. And that was it, I moved to Leicester, and I would say the first year of university for me was very confusing; I didn't understand any of the lecturers. It didn't make sense to me. Um, but I'm riding on the fact that I'm the first one out of my family here.

I: What degree were you doing?

R: So Youth and Community Development was my degree. So this is where it goes into - um, I met a man that was eloquently spoken, a black man, looked like a black Panther. So that resonated with me because I knew the beret, I knew the boots, I knew the jeans, because I'm coming from that environment. So I remember looking at him, and him looking at me, and I remember saying – he said, "Do you understand what I'm saying?" and I said no, and I think everybody giggled. I said, "I don't." I said, "Keep talking, but I'm going to catch you at some point," and what I was trying to say was, I'm not going to understand how – what the words that you're using, but I'm gonna – I'm staying with you. And that's how we kind of developed a very weird and awkward relationship, um, because he'd just sit there smiling and saying, "You don't get what I'm saying, do you?" And I'd be like, "No, but keep talking," because what I was, I guess, telling myself was, I'm not going to give up on this fact. And that kind of went from strength to strength in the sense that XXXXX, kind of, for me became a man in my life that understood where I was coming from, and he really challenged me sometimes saying that, "You know, you're a hypocrite."

And he'd say, "How are you going to be an individual that wants to be this person for the

community and black youth, but then you're rolling with your cousins on the weekend and getting up to all kinds of criminal foolishness that they were involved in at the time. And I didn't tell my parents at the time, but I was sneaking to Birmingham. So I'd sneak to Birmingham a few days – was dating this girl. So my parents-my parents' deception, even to this day, is that [I] went to university, and then one day he just said he doesn't want to stay at XXXXX [University] any more, but reality was, I was coming back to Birmingham every other week, um, and I was hanging around with my cousins, I was going out. They were getting in-involved in some situations, and it really kind of hit a point where, um, I was in a situation where a group – a family that my cousin had some problems with, and that individual pulled out a firearm and the gun jammed, um, and that for me was kind of a weird scenario because as I said, I'm at university, I'm not involved in anything, but I've got XXXXX [University tutor] here saying to me, "Your lifestyle don't make no sense." And he's like, "You have to make a choice. You're either gonna roll with your cousins and your friends, or you're gonna take this youth work thing serious."

And I kind of went onto XXXXX's [University tutor] side, and I think it was only really then from being around XXXXX, I developed a new love for Marcus Messiah Garvey and a new love for Malcolm X. These are figures that I already knew, so these weren't, for me, like some of my friends, abnormal characters. I grew up knowing about Marcus Garvey and – so that's why I said, that when I'd seen XXXXX, he reminded me of one of the Panthers. So learning about Malcolm X's story, and falling in love with that story, I then came into contact with the nation of Islam, um, and they were based – they had a couple of factions in Birmingham, and I went to an event and I just remember this black guy eloquently speaking, in a red bowtie and a suit, and I was just like, "Oh, this is – this... This is sick. Who's this guy?" And then I remember talking to him, and he was like, "Just come to the meetings on Saturday." And then I went to a couple of the meetings, and it was all very much informal, and for the first time in my life, I was like, finally, someone – people get what I'm talking about. They were talking about racism, they were talking about stop and search, they were talking about, um, inequality, they were talking about all of the subjects that I was struggling to conceptualise in an environment that I felt people didn't understand me.

And when I would talk about it, I'd always be-kind of pushed to the side, like you're just going on and on and on and on. But these individuals allowed me to speak. The only difference about them is that they were saying that they were Muslim, which was quite – not abstract, but Malcolm X was Muslim, so I'm like, I can be like kind of like these people. And then I started to kind of take it serious. I started to wear a suit, and I guess from my dad's perspective, it started to look like, "He's doing alright," type of thing. And it was only until I had external family members that were kind of challenging me on Islam, and were saying that these guys are not Muslim, and I'm – so they became very theological in their arguments that, for me, kind of wasn't my primary focus. My primary focus was that these guys get me, and they understand me. And it was only really until, um, I remember I first fasted, um, so I want to say now this is like 2008 going into 2009, I'd done my first fast, um, and I remember asking just a series of questions, really, to the guy that essentially brought me in, XXXXX, his name was, from Zimbabwe, very well-spoken, um, and I just thought he was-he was an amazing person. And one of the questions, and the series of questions I was asking him was about the beard.

I had learnt that the Prophet, peace be upon him, had said that it's obligatory for men to have their beard. We were talking about certain practices within Islam, and when I presented this to XXXXX, his response was, "We're not Arabs. We're black men." And that threw me off because I'm like, that don't make no sense, because again, I'm coming from a historical context so I'm slight – I'm slightly more clued up than probably a general person that's probably coming into – so I'm saying, "That don't make any sense," and he got very defensive. So when I started to ask more and more questions, I started to realise that XXXXX doesn't really understand the religion as much as he made out, because now the religious and theological aspects started to become my primary focus as opposed to before, it was just identity, understanding, and now it's about, okay... And it was really until then, when he started to talk about Elijah Muhammad, and he felt that what I was asking him was more for

somebody within the Nation that he believed was really good, um, at answering those questions, and uh, in America, there's a well-known, uh, member of the Nation of Islam known as Dr Wesley Muhammad, um, and he was the one that wrote the book, um, *Afrabia*, the black existence – the African existence, um, in Arabia before Islam.

And essentially, his book is very much an over a historical overview looking at, um, the African continent, and what is now known as the Arabian Peninsula, that's probably a little, tiny thing that connects Africa to Arabia. But at one point in history, that was a big land space. Um, it would've been green; it wouldn't have been desert. So the-the ancient Eastern African civilisations that's known as, which is Ethiopia, um, Somalia, Eritrea, those particular places, those were the early settlers that stayed – that moved into what is now known as the Arabian Peninsula, so those Bedouins that are found in the desert are essentially African civilisations. So before the – that's what some of the tribes that the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, used to speak about, were family. So the kind of whitewashing of Islam through what we hear today, actually the Arabs that we see today are not the Arabs of antiquity, and there's always that debate of, when people say Arabs, his argument would be presented that-that Arabs, the-the indigenous Arabs were always African civilisation, just like ancient Egyptians were African civilisations.

So again, light bulbs go in my head when I hear stuff like that because, again, that's stuff I've always been brought up on. I've always been taught that all ancient civilisations essentially were always African before they, um – because I always knew that Africans circumnavigated in the world, and you know, look at places like Mexico, before the, uh, the-the other empires that we know of, you know, you have the Olmec and the Western African civilisation that existed, so I always knew that. But one of the things that I found was that, despite the fact that this was a historical overview, what XXXXX failed to show me in those interactions back and forward was the argument I was presenting about the belief of Islam. And I think it was through those particular discussions that I, um, I stepped away from the Nation of Islam. Um, and I met a, um, guy, um, he's a teacher at a local school in Birmingham. Um, we know him as Kung Fu XXXXX, so he's a karate coach, um, dan in, um, karate, and he also knows my uncle, because one of my uncles that is, um – he's known as Mr Handsworth, um, and he's an MBE. So his statue is actually in Handsworth Park, so to commemorate the *Windrush* generation, there's a statue in Handsworth Park, and it's his image that they used for the structure. So again, family are well known to that.

But anyway, Kung Fu XXXXX, I met him at a mosque one time, because then I went through another, um, identity crisis, that I would call it now, is that I thought that Islam was Asian to an extent, in terms of the expression. So a lot of the clothing that I would wear was very much either Southern Asian, Arab culture, and when I met Kung Fu XXXXX, he said to me, "Have you ever heard of this video on YouTube called *The Strangers*?" I'm like, "What the hell's that?" and he goes, "It's about the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him." And I said, "Who-who are the companions of the Prophet?" And he just looked at me like, that's strange that you don't know who the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. I'm like, "Like disciples?" and he's like, "Yeah." Because the whole time I was at the Nation of Islam, they never once mentioned these people. They only spoke about Elijah Muhammad, and they only spoke about those types of characters. So when I went home, I-I went onto YouTube and typed – it was an individual named Khalid Yasin, so again, a black educator, very well-spoken, and I remembered his face because there was a-a DVD that was circulating in our communities called *A Purpose of Life*.

And anybody says that if you want someone to embrace Islam, show them this YouTube video or this DVD because the way that he breaks down Islam from those that might be Christians, or Hebrew or whatever they may be, that is the thing to watch. And when I watched *The Strangers*, about the-the companions of the Prophet Muhammad, that's when the light – that's when everything changed for me. Literally, everything changed for me, because the-the methodology was very simple, the book, the way of the Prophet Muhammad that was passed down to the three generations of Muslims, the people that were around him when he was getting revelations, so why not best to follow their way? And that, for me, was

the barometer of anything that I heard that may have been abnormal, strange – did the companions – did it – could they even do it, and why should do it? And that's kind of been the kind of legacy of the, kind of, the sect that I follow within Islam, follows that particular Manhaj, that particular methodology, on how to do things, you know. If it's situated in the Qur'an, the Prophet Muhammad would've explained it, he would've lived it – how did his companions behave?

And I guess the good thing about that is, with all of the things that, I guess when I kind of made my family aware that I was becoming Muslim, I went to, um, Western Africa, I went to Gambia. Um, so I wanted to started learning more about, where was the stop before we ended up in the Caribbean and Jamaica? Because I knew from time that the Caribbeans from antiquity were not – didn't look like me, they looked probably Asian, um, or what we would call now Jamaican Indian looking. Um, so I was always interested in those particular things, and I think going to, um, Gambia in 2009 and then coming back, that really, 2010, 2009-10, that's when I kind of embraced Islam. Um, and I guess, as a family that was from – I've always had an open family, because I've got family members that are into everything, and I guess the biggest worry and concern around those times is, oh, terrorism and terrorists, and all of that type of stuff. But again, because we follow a methodology that's very clear, in a very weird way, it'd-it'd be stupid to see how – and I guess this is me being ignorant in my thinking at the time, how you'd fall into the – to the hoop of those particular behaviours.

So it's interesting, I used to meet a couple of friends that – and a couple of young people I used to work with that would be in prison, and they were around – you may remember individuals like, um, Abdullah el-Faisal, um, these like, kind of, Abu Hamza's kind of group, and they were kind of, uh, exposed to a lot of individuals from South London, and that became an interest. There was a time in London, um, when there was something that was also happening in Philadelphia in America – it was called Get Down and Lay Down. So gang members, essentially, were under the kind of teachings of these individuals like the Abu Hamzas, and they were saying things like if a member in the community has drugs, burn the drugs, keep the money. Um, if they're not Muslim, their blood is *halal*, um, and these very strange things. But what we started to see was that loads of young gang members were becoming Muslim. And then a lot of people were converting to Islam out of fear of being rubbed or beat up by these Muslim gangs, so that was a very much Caribbean expression, because Abdullah el;-Faisal from Jamaica talks the talk, understands the thing.

So there was kind of an energy in the community of all of these black boys now are becoming Muslim, similar to the Rastafarian generation that preceded us, my dad's era, because my dad was Rastafarian, and his brothers, my mum kind of felt that this is this new wave now. My – your – my dad's – your dad is a Rasta, and now you're becoming Muslim, it's just a phase. But it was never a phase for me. Um, but one of the things that I did notice, that there was a big distinction in some of the Muslims, that I see them going in and out of prison, some of them that were involved, and then it was, people were saying that they were Muslim, but they wasn't really practicing Islam. So that, essentially, was my story of why I came to Islam. It wasn't no traditional, someone gave me a book and I read it, or nothing crazy happened. I think it's through the love of history, activism, having a strong family member, and I've always been, you know, um, a person that questions everything, and it's for me, with all of the kind of religions and beliefs and things that I've kind of been around – Islam for me was the only thing that made sense. A's to B and B's to C. You know, my nan used to say things sometimes, and I'm just sitting there like, "Nan that doesn't make any sense."

Even my, you know, Rastafarian community, it didn't make any sense, you know, you know, Hailie Selasse is God. What, you've got a picture of *Hailie Selasse* with a bible in his hand. So I used to say things like, "So if God wrote the – if God wrote the bible, or revealed the Bible, then why would God hold his own book? So again, similar to school, I was always told, "You just need to shut your mouth because you're being argumentative," and that was kind of always my story, and I think that's just kind of just always been, um, a thing. And I think, why, I think, my parents, I think, like the fact that maybe I'm Muslim and I'm grounded is 'cause it's always kept me away from what my mum would call the bullshit and my dad would

call the bullshit. And mum's always liked the fact that I, like, question. So when people would always worry about, "Oh, you know, this Islam thing is terrorism," as my uncles and some of the ignorant people in my family would say, my mum would say, "My son would never be a terrorist, because he asks too much freaking questions," and nobody that wants to be a part of any criminal activity – because my thing would be, if you're gonna blow yourself – or if you want me to blow up myself, I don't get why you guys ain't done it first.

I would say stuff like that, so-so you wouldn't be able to coerce me into – but I think that also enabled me to be a better youth worker, to also understand my community and to know how easy, without information, without education, without guidance, how young people just make decisions without asking any questions. And I was always different, and that's why I was never in gangs. Other than hanging around my cousins, it wasn't nothing really that I said, "Let's go and do such and such," it just so happened that my cousin just decided he wanted to steal the car in the moment, and it was, convinced me to jump in the car, and it – OK, I'm in the car but I don't want to be here. So that was always kind of me, um, as it related to my story, and being Muslim.

I: And how do you feel – how do you – so do you feel part of, in terms of being connected with other Muslims in your locale, or kind of do you have a kind of, an established network of people that you've kind of met and-and developed kind of community style bonds with as-as part of embracing your faith or –

R: So, what's interesting, with other people that I'm close with in Islam, they're people that I grew with. So it's not been any new relationship that I've met going to the Masjid, it's always been the same kind of tight-knit community. So when I was growing up, one of my olders, XXXXX, his Muslim name, he was a person that was trying to groom us when we were younger. So later on in life that – I – he went ten years in jail, I had done the whole university, youth work thing, we met each other again, when he came out of prison, and I was now working at the university, I got him onto my youth gangs and violence programme. So it's weird how I kind of met, reconnected back with my people. And then also my brother's friends, my older brother, um, is seven years older than me, so all of his friendship groups, I always was kind of around them, many of them embraced Islam. One of them had a barbershop off the Lodge Road. Everybody used to chill there. So when all of these guys are coming in and they're talking about Islam, and they're telling about this, we were just like, young people, like, "Yeah, this makes sense." But remember I was with The Nation them days, so I was just looking at it, "You guys are just mad," you know, "you're all, like, Asians," again, that perspective. "You look like Asian guys. You're all dressed like Asians, you know, and it's just not that."

And their argument was no, that there's – you know, and again, that's when I – when I'm more slightly devoted to the research and learning about Islam in Africa, when the first migrations of the companions of the Prophet was in ancient Kush to what we know it, and that's kind of how I got my Muslim name, XXXXX, um, because the Abyssinian king that welcomed the companions of the Prophet, and he was a Christian king, and then later on became Muslim before he died, and it just became synonymous with the person that I am. I always bring people in, I don't care where you're from, and I'm always – if I can help, I will. And my only need from you is, if you can help me, and we can help each other and it's reciprocated, then we're good; we'll always have a friendship and a kinship. And when, I kind of just like to move with, I guess, the um, Masjid, um, mosque that I attend, equally all of the people that were there were people that were predominantly reverts, and a lot of individuals that I would have said I would have had synergy in the community that I came from. So that man used to be a bad man back in the day. He's not no more. This individual is well-known for all this madness. How are they so calm and nice and...?

So all of that type of stuff, I felt like I still was in my community, despite the fact that we're all the same, that we're Muslim. So that was kind of how I developed my kind of friendships, so when I think in terms of my local area, no, because when I say do I even – I didn't hang around in my local area anyway, and I think the thing about Birmingham is that people will

claim an area that they don't actually live. So with all the young people that I work with, they claim that they're from Handsworth and they're-they're banging for B21, but their mums live in Winson Green and Hockley and Ladywood, and all of these other areas, and I'm scratching – it bothers me because I'm like, "So why do you claim an area that you actually don't live and come from?" But there's historical connotations to this, when we talk about resistance, we talk about struggle, Handsworth, Aston, Newtown have always been those kind of areas that people have always known for where those resistances and those families that've come from the areas of resistance, who doesn't want to show allegiance to that, so that's what it's always kind of been for me.

So when I think about my Muslim community, the one I-I travel to, because our mosque is in Small Heath – I don't live in Small Heath; I know nothing about Small Heath other than food shops, and the only time I knew about those food shops is only when I came to Islam, because it very much was always a Caribbean cuisine. So the moment I came to Islam is when I learnt about Arab culture and I learnt about West African cultures, because the mosque I go to, that's where that kind of teaching was, Islam is in every nation on the planet. And to see that was amazing, guys, white guys with tattoos top to bottom, I'm just like, "You know, this is sick." And then you'll see another guy that's from this part of the country, and someone from different parts of Africa and different parts of Indonesia and whatever, but we're all here under the same roof, saying the same thing. So that's why my frustration with the, kind of, wider society was similar to why I feel like the Nation of Islam were able to-to roll me in, because what they was demonstrating is that this is the kind of social picture of Muslims, but as you can see, this is not us.

So when people always come to me with issues around terrorism and my thoughts about it, I always thought that was an easy debate to kind of get rid of, but I guess if you're not in an environment where those conversations take place, it would just look like someone like an idiot like Anjem Choudary, speaks on behalf of all of us, and it's just like, how do you even come to those conclusions yourself? But it is what it is. Uh, and you know, it was only until my-my antennas for being around people that I would consider weird, I think it was interesting, and there-and there was a time when I was in London, and I visited a local mosque with some brothers, um, from a, uh, a group called roadside to Islam, and this was another group of reverts that were pushing Islam to young people, but showing them that you can come from a certain lifestyle and actually change your life. And I'll never forget, we were at a mosque somewhere in London, um, might've been central London, and there was four guys that came in, and they gave Salam but there was a weird energy about them, and I can't-I can't put my finger on what it was. But I remember one of the brothers saying, "We need to be mindful about them type of brothers there," and he didn't really go into detail.

But I do remember that those are the individuals that, from some of the documentaries that've come out about extremists, that those were the individuals that were on there, and it made sense then that – but even in that context, they didn't move like us. And that's what I'm saying, for those that are from the outside looking in, we all probably look the same, sound the same, talk the same thing, but it's only when you're in it you realise that these guys are not like us. And it was interesting, because the component that I noticed that was about them was very much around the similar things that I work with, the vulnerable – they all seemed quite vulnerable, they all seemed quite easily-led. And they didn't say anything, but their energy, like when I work with young people, I'm able to kind of – like, when I do work in schools, I can be like, you know, I can be having a conversation with some kids, those are the two kids I would be worried about, because it's the way that they are, you can see how easily they'll just, if someone says yes, run. Where? If someone says jump, they will say, "How high?" But the other ones ask too many questions, and it's just a sad state that, in the context of Islam, that those things also happen as well.

And I think for me, and I guess the friendship group that I'm a part of, we've never – we've always advocated for our culture to be recognised, and it's interesting because I kind of got to a weird place where a lot of the stuff that The Nation taught me, I'd actually still agree with now, and to be totally honest, I felt more comfortable amongst them than I am being in

mainstream – around mainstream Muslims. And I mean that in the context that, talking about my blackness has never necessarily been an issue amongst them because that's what we're supposed to do, is show racial pride. But I found that when I would have conversations outside of the mosque with some of the other brothers, I was always kind of told subtly that these are the type of conversations that we shouldn't be having, or some of my statements may come across nationalistic, when Islam is about servitude of the oneness, but – and it would just remind me of some of the statements that Louis Farrakhan used to make about religion in – I mean racism is Islam, and I totally understand why they – where they were coming from in that, because I thought that was quite ignorant and actually quite disrespectful that you even made the suggestion, and it was a white Muslim that said that to me. And I just thought it was –

I: **Who said – who-who was saying –**

R: So the white Muslim was saying basically, "These are the conversations that we shouldn't be having, brother," type of vibe, and that was – it kind of shut down the conversation that me and a few brothers were having about racism and race, and it was interesting that a white Muslim came in and said that, and it just kind of made me feel like how I felt outside of Islam with a white person saying, "You know what? Don't do the race card thing here, because you know, it's divisive, it's..." the stuff that you would hear in the community when people don't want to talk about race and racism. So I developed – and I probably still today, um, I'll-I can humbly admit it, that I've developed a bit of a, uh, an in and out mentality, is the only way I'll explain it, and I'll explain what I mean, is that I go to the mosque to pray, to be amongst the congregation, to get the benefits, to get the rewards, connect who I need to connect with, and go home. I'm never – and I never had been, and I've been like this since all, I've never been into cliques and circles. So that's why again, you'll never – I'll never be – I could never imagine myself as a gang member, I can never- I can never imagine myself as being a part of any group, as a collective. I chip in and I chip out, and that's kind of a relationship with the, um, Muslim community.

I've got a close relationship with the Imam, absolutely love him; he loves me because he gets me, he understands me, he understands us, him being from the Caribbean also as well, again, that historical context of coming from Handsworth, and before Burger Bar and Johnsons it was called Inchai, so him and the kind of founding members of the *Salafi* community, a lot of them would've been in that at one point in history, so there's connection and synergy in a lot of the, kind of, people that I would call my uncle, are connected to a background, a history, and I guess a lot of their nephews, for those that are not Muslim, I guess, well-known for, probably some of the worst things that've happened in the city. So that connectivity, based on race, identity, culture, has always been there, and that's why I've always been quite frustrated, I guess, with some of the congregation that portray a certain type of way, whether it's to impress the Imams and the wider congregation, but the Imams don't behave like that themselves. So that's something, the Imam doesn't behave like that, he's very open and funny, and charismatic and – but the – I call them robots, the robots that hang around 'em operate like robots, it's just like, "Yeah, no, yeah, no, yeah, no, yeah, hamdulillah, yeah, yes, sir, yeah, yeah." It's like, how are-how are you doing? Like, stop this for just two seconds. Are you good? Like, and I suppose for some individuals in that circle, so I've always thought – because I don't want to be in a robotic scenario, I always align myself with people that think, talk, and whatever, and those are probably members of the Muslim congregation that I like being around. I mean, these-these are the doctors, these are the-the community workers, the people that are connected to the world, and I always find there's a significant different, in my opinion, people can disagree with that, those that are connected to the world versus those that are just theologically robotic. And it's those types of people, sadly, are the ones that generally end up in the madness that we read about on the TV. It's never the ones that understand and have – that's just my experience that I've always found, anyway, um, so yeah.

I: **So which mosque-which mosque do you attend, then?**

R: So I go to, uh, Masjid XXXXX XXXXX in Small Heath [a small Mosque in Small Heath]. So you've got two, Salafi Masjids, essentially, XXXXX XXXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], XXXXX XXXXX [a small Mosque in Small Heath]. Um, they used to be one at one point, and now they've split. And then there was another one that they opened, um, in Aston, but it's gone in – gone through re-se – renovation.

I: **Okay, okay, so is it XXXXX XXXXX [a small Mosque in Small Heath] that you –**

R: XXXXX XXXXX [small Mosque, Small Heath], yeah, yeah, XXXXX and XXXXX are the Imams there.

I: **And when you talk about cultural representation, is it about being recognised in terms of Caribbean identity?**

R: Yes. And I'm not gonna lie to you, when I'd first seen – when I first attended the mosque and I'd seen a black guy with gold teeth, I'm listening, I'm paying attention. I-I – you don't-you don't need to sell me nothing now. I know and understand. And that's what I'm saying is the worry and danger, when I was talking about that thing that was happening in the community many years ago, you know, early 2000 and in London, where people like Abdullah el-Faisal, because I would assume, when individuals are going to prison, and people are telling them about Islam and it's a black guy that talks Patois, Jamaican tone, slang, so straight away, people are not gonna question. And I think you said this before, about teachers and parents, and how do you know somebody's not telling you the right thing in Islam? Because everyone's saying they're Muslim, and everybody's talking about Qur'an, everyone's talking about Prophet Muhammad. And people are even saying, "Oh in this part of the Qur'an, it says this, this, this, that and that," but The Nation used to say, "The Qur'an says this, this, that and that and that," but the only thing that was missing was the interpretation, and that's the part that most of those groups don't give you the interpretation, they do what it says in the black and white.

So for those that are not inquisitive and don't question and if identity is an issue for them, that becomes the priority over everything. So, again to an extent when I first met XXXXX [Imam at the small Mosque, Small Heath], it was just like, yeah, he's black, he's got gold teeth, I'm down with this guy. And I was down with him. And sadly that was the reality. It wasn't, where some people they are the tenants of the religion is my priority, whereas some people are like, yo, I'm looking for identity and I see it in you.

I: **Yeah. Yeah. Obviously you've got a very interesting perspective and a very interesting experience and I think because our project is looking at the impact of COVID in Muslim communities and it seems like community for you means something which is broad and has different incarnations and different interpretations and maybe your connection to the Muslim communities is about particular spaces in certain contexts. But thinking about the impacts of COVID, I guess initially at an individual level, what was it like for you initially?**

R: I think when I initially heard it I think it was just more about what was going to happen as it related to work. I was going through a transition at that stage for me. Number one I'd just left my comfortable job at the University, gone into the February, I lost someone who I would consider a member of my family, my friend's son, so dealing with that and then I just remember Boris saying there's a lockdown, and then during that time I had cancellations left, right and centre in terms of work. So, my initial thing was more panic at that moment, obviously more than the actual virus, because I'm like, "Now what am I supposed to do?" because I had all of these things scheduled to do tomorrow and one by one they're all saying that due to the government talk about this new virus then we have to close down. So, that was my main worry. And it was not until I got an email from Norfolk County Council Children's Services with an opportunity and I wasn't really in a position to say no despite the virus. So yes I was worried, I was nervous, mum was worried and nervous about, because what they essentially said was "All of our staff are dropping out with COVID, we need someone to

engage with these young people that are considered high risk, we heard you're the guy".

I am the guy but what does that mean? When you have someone who has to work with them, so mask, gloves, it was just a weird environment, I'm on the road doing attached youth work. So, in terms of isolation I didn't experience it because I was working, I was considered an essential worker, so the experiences that people tell me about being home and bored and I didn't experience it at all because I was out and about every day as an essential worker, and the only reason I did that is because I had to work, I wasn't in a position where I could say no because I was worrying from a comfortable salary, getting paid every single month regardless of whether I'm in the building or not, to if you do not go to work, you can't send me an invoice to get paid, so that kind of was my situation at the time.

I: Yeah, and were you worried? Was it something you were concerned about on an individual personal basis?

R: It just kind of felt like another thing, you know get to my front door, strip off butt naked at the front door, the Mrs will put it in the bag, run to the shower, it was that type of environment, that was the thing and making sure that you're cleaning your nostrils, your ears, you wash your hair and everything and that kind of was the thing, and we got COVID for quite a period of time, I got it, wasn't nothing crazy. The biggest concern more so was my auntie and my nan. Nan being old, don't really want her round, I probably made her a violent threat at some point that if any family member goes near them, because I was also noticing that young people didn't care. What I didn't want was a scenario where "I'm going to come to chill with nan" but you've been hanging around with your boys at work, and then nan contracts the virus just because you can't be arsed or not care about, or whether you believe because there was all that 4G stuff going on, 5G microchip conversations taking place at the time which I thought was hilarious, but anyway, I didn't want nobody's ignorance to impact nan and then also I had my auntie which was battling cancer and it was just not about being around them that would cause.

So my thing was making sure that if I'd done any shopping, leave it at the door in the bags, tell nan to empty the shopping but get rid of the bag, make sure you've got gloves on. So, it just felt like it was... You know when you watch them films and everything's just very surgical, that's what it felt like for me. Mum would be like, "Can you drop me stuff off for nan" I'm driving, I'm an essential worker, I was kind of calling in that sense.

I: Yeah. Do you feel like your experience was maybe... Or how was it for people around you then?

R A lot of them were struggling, it was quite evident that people were struggling with their mental health and that's why I said, if I wasn't an essential worker, I'm a people person, I like to get out and about, so going from that to just total isolation would have been difficult. It was difficult for family because family members and family friends were dying, we were told only 10 people or 12 people at the funeral, can't go to the cemetery and now bearing in mind that Caribbean communities show up for funerals, my Dad can phone me today and say "Mrs XXXXX from,' I don't know where she's from, but it's expected that I'm making an appearance, so to go from that to just being told that you can't, we had a lot of community that was breaking the rules because it was total abnormal for our communities to not be there, so I sensed that, that people were grieving in isolation and the usage of people's social media was on the increase and it was very weird and you'd see the things that people would post online and I would say "There's something not right there, I don't think their mental health is 100%, but that just don't seem right." There was a lot of those types of things that I found for me that was different with individuals. So, yeah there was definitely a kind of sense that it was impacting people in a range of different ways.

I: Yeah. What do you think were the most significant impacts? Whether it's people around you or yourself, I know you were saying economically and work that that was the forefront of your mind, but...

R: My auntie. I think she didn't make it, she passed last August on 15th but...

I: **Did she contract COVID?**

R: She didn't contract COVID but remember hospitals were doing patients, so her chemo had to be put on hold and I just kind of feel that things started to happen increasingly during COVID, I had a child in COVID, had to wait outside the hospital which was bizarre in my car. The only reason why they allowed me into the ward was because they thought that they had to do a C-section and that was why they let me in. Ended up being a natural birth anyway but this particular nurse was panicked and then everybody else panicked and that essentially had happened. So, yeah I think those I guess two key things that made me think "Okay this is a bit weird and strange, it's a pandemic thing". But most definitely I think my auntie. You know because she's like my second mum, so everything kind of revolved around her more so, more in 2021 where she started to develop seizures and we made a family decision that she had to stay at my nan's house. So, I had the opportunity because obviously I was getting tested every day and I was able to go to the house and stuff and kind of like the last eight months of 2021 we could have the opportunity to be around her.

So yeah those things for me, but in terms of like the pandemic, someone just said to me like, "The destruction of my family through what happened to my auntie, unimaginable." I've buried loads of people, but my auntie, I just want her to come home.

I: **Do you want to take a break?**

R: No, no, I'm good. It's just when you think about it's just, messed us all up because... And I've had family members that died of cancer but I've never watched it. So, to watch someone laughing joking, can't walk, can't talk and then just dying, it's hard. So, for me that was probably the only thing. In terms of my social circles nothing changed, I was still able to be out and about but knowing that my mum's only sister and my nan's daughter going through what she was going through and me trying to maintain that. My issue through the pandemic as well has been finding that job which impacted on the PhD and everything else. I guess I try to understand that in terms of, trying to get people to understand that and falling out times with my supervisors because I don't think they get it, they make jobs and stuff but I don't think nobody got it that going back from being the first one at University, probably the first one to get a proper job, there's a lot rides on my shoulders, so if I don't do things... Whereas when I was at UCB, my PhD was my priority, now it just became a thing of "When I've got time to do it", but those significant things have put me in a situation where I've had to.

My auntie's left her three daughters, even after here now I have to make my way and make sure they've got a bit of money in their pocket because they're struggling, and when you talk about acute poverty, I'm not thinking about the Muslim community I'm thinking about my immediate family because that has impacted them all. So, that's what kind of triggers me in terms of being able to do those things and those little aspects of life that's enabled me to be able to kind of do things. And so I feel like I've kind of dealt with the brunt and everything's been on essentially my shoulders to be able to maintain all of those things and try and get an academic qualification at the same time. So, that the ripple effect, what the pandemic has had. Not in terms of, like I said, my relationship but just more so the impact of loss and what it now means in terms of me being able to do the things that I'm doing.

I: **Yeah. And I mean do you know if people have been impacted in similar ways and is this something that, people in your friendship circles, who can relate with that type of situation?**

R: 100%. Loads of people were angry and then you know the scenario of if you don't get the vaccine and people feeling almost somewhat pressured, my Mrs works at the NHS and she thought she was going to lose her job because she was adamant, their whole ward, and it was interesting because the way they kept putting it on the news, and she works in a hospital,

and she was saying that there's not many COVID patients in the hospital but the news was saying that there's COVID patients and every hospital is damn near rammed. So she would tell me what the up to date data is and obviously because she works around the hospital she was like, "There's COVID patients" and we were being tested every day, if the doctors and surgeons are saying they're not getting their jab, that's always a sign of not going into it and that was always my perspective anyway and my deep perspective is knowing that vaccination schemes have been used against black and ethnic community, often times as biological warfare, is mainly part of the reason why people wouldn't, and that was my argument with my own Line Manager, Dr XXXX XXXX, that that's an idea, and her premise was that we should get the vaccine.

And I was like "Why? Once it's gone through its trial, I'm good, I'll see after the trials and I'm not actually saying I'm for or against it," but what I felt happened was that just by saying you want to wait for the trials you were almost put into this category of anti-vaxx. And it's like "I'm not actually anti-anything, I'm just saying that there's a historical context here that puts me in the position where I get an opportunity to choose," and nobody here has an opportunity to choose so my premise here was just don't fold, and low and behold people that didn't fold, we got through it and nobody loses their jobs. But a lot of people did fold and there's a lot of people now saying they wish they didn't take the vaccine because the scaremongering of you're not going to be able to travel, there'll be a two tier society, they're only going to allow people to have... So it forced a lot of people into these vaccination programmes that readily wouldn't have done it if those things are there, but I just like to... Maybe I'm one of those people that until I see the world ending then I'll act, I'm not going to be one of those people who starts stacking up on toilet paper and tin cans and, I just don't think I've ever been that type of person.

As soon as I feel the earth rumbling and a monster coming out of the ground, is mainly when I'll run to the local Asda, but I'm not going to waste £500 and that was my biggest irritant, so that I couldn't go and buy my usual shopping because people were just buying out absolutely everything at the store. But that was kind of how it led to that vantage point, scaring but amusing at most times, but definitely seeing the synergy amongst our friends, because obviously you know with our WhatsApp groups we talk about this stuff all the time, we were all in the WhatsApp group saying, "The only thing that would make us get the jab is if we're not allowed to jump on planes" because I travel a lot and that would have been... My wife says, she knows that if you can't travel then that's when you will take the jab, there's no other reason why I would want to take it, but if it had to be literally you can't fly ever again if you don't have the jab. But then I realised that there was countries who were opening their doors for people that didn't have the jab on production of a negative test, Dubai, West Africa and those were the majority of places I travelled over the last two years, the places that would let you in as long as you get a negative test,

I: Yeah. So, do you think there's a relationship between scepticism towards, because you said historically speaking that medicine has been used for, I think you used the term weaponised or warfare, one of those two. So, can you unpack that and kind of, just give us some insight into why, I'm only asking this again for the record if you know what I mean.

R: I know. I've always grown up to know that in order to control the people there's going to be certain levels of warfare, I've always been taught that. Whether it's agriculture, whether it's through pharmaceutical companies, whether it's through beliefs and ideologies or whether it's through physical warfare. So I've always known that pharmaceutical companies are going to benefit from anything that takes place and that's why there's pills for absolutely everything that you can think of. And I would say America is more a medicine culture as opposed to the UK, I've got family members who've got a pill for anything. Paracetamol, Ibuprofen is probably the most that I would have, Calpol mainly if you've got kids. It's not that deep over here but America is, so I know that history that there was loads of kind of parts in the South where communities were essentially told that to be vaccinated against particularly diseases whether it's TB or anything kind of of that nature and it came out that a lot of these different

experiments culminate in a situation where people were having abortions, people were having issues around their mental health, their breathing, some people essentially died.

So we've always known and even earlier than that, even when we talk about the concept of Thanksgiving, you should know the whole idea that the natives of America, which I always think is interesting when American people of today tell them to go back home, but anyway the whole concept of Thanksgiving was the whole notion and idea that individuals that approached the natives because they wanted to enter into their land spaces and I guess smash the ranks of order, was to infect scarves. And that's why I always thought it was bizarre that we celebrate these things, and essentially these particular gifts that was being given to these particular Heads and Chiefs resulted in those individuals ending up dying. So, we've got a whole history here where we talk about medicines, poison, injections, vaccination programmes, have only adversely impacted the lives of people of colour. So, we fast forward to 2020, some people know this information. I would say the vast majority don't. Then we've got social media, little videos and little clips of this and "Did you know this experiment?" and then you've got some scientists saying they're totally against it, so the scepticism is always going to be there.

We're in a technological era now where you drink water, they're telling you don't drink this water, that water pH, it's all confusing. But within that confusion it forces people to take a position and that position is either "You know what I've heard too much about this, don't really want to," or the ones that are saying, "I know this information and I'm rooted within that, but you eat burgers, you have food and sometimes I take drugs every now and then, what difference do this make taking this jab?" And it's literally that way anywhere between those two groups and so what I find is that all of the people that I was working with in the Council and Local Authority they were like, "Yeah, no problem taking the jab, or work from home, I'll wait for my next one" and then I remember mum and dad, and I remember having this conversation, my dad is like me, and I remember saying, "Well you're not getting the jab?" Mum was like "Yeah me and your nan," and she's talking about nan and making sure Nan's safe as she's getting old, but I realised my Dad was really quiet in the conversation and I looked at him and thought "Have you had your jab?"

And he looked at Mum, Mum's always the mouthpiece of my Dad, my Dad sits on the fence, but he would have had that scepticism but the peer pressure not from my mum but the wider society would have forced him to get that, I know he wouldn't have wanted the jab, no way.

I: So what kind of things have been circulating on social media?

R: So regarding the jab, the dis-experiment and COVID, it's all to do with 5G radiation, and I find these things funny personally, I'm into technology you see so, I would be like "Well everybody's walking around with 5G phones" so my argument would be if you've, if you are more worried about 5G I don't want to see you with the latest Samsung or latest iPhone phone, I will say things like that and it irritates a whole bunch of people online, but anyway it was just my little joke for the day. So, COVID is created through 5G, 5G radiation is linked to cancer, and this vaccination is going to accelerate the kind of genetic microcosms and stuff going on in your body, that's going to cause all of that. You had that going on, and then you've got the conversation about basically the chip, there's a microchip that software companies have been creating for a very long time and they want to be able to detect human beings and they're using this virus as an opportunity to open the door for us to say about microchips. And there was a similar conversation before about people getting lost and dogs and stuff like that as well.

These conversations always end back up, and then the conversation was essentially that these viruses that are coming, if you don't get the vaccination, you're going to basically end up dead. Then there was another one about, well if you do get the vaccination what's going to happen is they're going to put this virus out into the environment and those that have essentially got the vaccination will be protected from this virus and everybody else essentially that hasn't taken it is going to get wiped, and I thought "I think it might operate the other way

round", so those kinds of things are kind of taking place. My position was always this and it was to my friendship groups position was this, it's going through a trial, let's just see what happens, based on my scepticism of the historical nature, I'm not saying I would like totally trust the government and whatnot, and also because on YouTube we have seen scientists say no they don't think or feel based on their science that we need to get the jab, so my logic would be if a scientist, a Professor from a University, you don't become Professor overnight, so to become a Professor that would be my logic.

And I'm not saying there's not Professors that have very bizarre ideas and methodologies but you're a learned person, let's just start on that basis. You've done some sort of research to come up with some thesis and you're a person that goes through some rigor essentially to get to some of your analysis. And if these individuals are standing up in front of groups of people saying that they don't want to do it, it just puts a question mark in my head of saying, "Well there's clearly a debate between scientists about those for and those against, so I'm not in no rush until they figure it out" so I'm just going to sit in this position and there are loads of people that I know had that position, but the only thing that made them, and I think this is what the media hysteria and government hysteria was ultimately all about, was they knew that that was fixed for a lot of people, that's where they started to talk about travel, they started to talk about amenities and resources and that's why they used the two tier society and it's almost like the rich and those that are poor or working class, if you don't engage in the system, you ain't going to get the benefits, and the only people that are not going to benefit are those that are poor, working class, black.

Historically the ones that always get targeted first for these particular things. So I thought that was just like the consensus and then you look on YouTube again and you've got all the herbalists who were saying "All you need is Spirulina and green tea," and all those kind of things, and I was saying, "There's still people dying." So I've never doubted the fact that people wasn't dying, because I've been to funerals, I'm hearing. I also had COVID, and then I had a cousin that also got and he ended up in A&E and he was in a coma and stuff like that, so we knew people were getting COVID, so it wasn't ignorant to the fact it was just that "Why do I need to inject myself" was more of the conversation with a chemical that I'm not aware of. So I just found myself not talking about it to my colleagues at work because it was just almost like that was the first initial conversation, why do we need to wear a mask? And then it just goes from one extreme then to another and then you just find yourself getting tarred as an anti-vaxxer, and I never mentioned once about anti anything.

I: Do you feel like, did it have any effect, the pandemic on your faith or observance?

R: No, other than.. I don't attend the mosque frequently anyway because as I said I had to travel to and work in Norfolk, there aren't many mosques in those areas so then we're also told about social distancing and then the mosque was closed, you just pray at home, so I didn't really, the connections remained the connections through the social media and picking up the phone, but in terms of the practice it did make Ramadan a little bit harder in one respect, it was weird not having night prayers, so yeah that was I think the only difference that I essentially found.

I: Did you manage to find support and connectiveness through, so like you said it was just a matter of picking up the phone, were you able to maintain a sense of connection?

R: Yeah, I think I'm like that anyway, with or without Islam, I've always, I'm connected to a whole set of communities, not just one community, so even though I might not have had necessarily my Muslim brothers and sisters to help me, I've got family, I've got my boy, I've got – not everybody's Muslim, everybody in every environment is somehow and someone, so I've always had those support mechanisms that are essentially there and because financially I was doing okay in the pandemic, my business accelerated in COVID so that was probably one of the biggest benefits for me was that we were doing well and I was able to build a team of individuals, so I don't feel like I've see any change from a religious perspective in that

sense.

I: And it's not something that you've noticed, or is it something that you've noticed around you?

R: One of the things that I always notice and I don't think it's just the pandemic I think it's the way that the conversation earlier on and I think the biggest change is always going to revert, and I've always said that, even when we see a young revert embrace. Eid comes up, "Where are they going for Eid?" So one of the things I do for Eid sometimes is I have someone to my house for breakfast because I just have the assumption that they might be going back to their house and that's just their Eid, just the Eid prayers in the morning with the whole congregation, everyone is happy to see you, and "Have a nice Eid" and you're going back to what, your family thinking you're dressed weird and you look weird and you're this Muslim thing now, and then it's just back to our normal day. So one of the things I've done over the years is do a breakfast for a lot of the young reverts and they come to my house and we get the family to cook a breakfast and stuff, so at least you can say, "I've done something with my morning at least with a family" or something like that, so the people from a religious perspective always get left behind by the newer ones that have just come in. One of that kind of instrumental and connected to the community or the kids in the community are generally always fine.

I: So this question kind of comes from I guess a wider perception of maybe how, well I'll just throw the question out there. Did you get any sense of tensions or pre-existing tensions within or between communities in the pandemic? Was there any impact for tensions that might have already existed before or any new tensions that came up within the context of the pandemic?

R: I think every event was exacerbated in the pandemic, every single one because those tensions were heightened by the current climate and I say this wider in the work that I do, the vulnerabilities of children and young people had increased. We know not being in school for a long period of time and not connected to the education system, not having the internet, so families and communities that I guess were experiencing acute poverty, tensions would have been exacerbated and the use of things like social media would have been on the increase so individuals that would have had a voice in the space would have taken to social media and online. So what I was starting to see was a growing increase in just young people doing things that traditionally probably wouldn't have done before and that even goes to not even radicalisation as it relates to religion but also far right. So in communities as a whole, due to the social inequalities what I feel that COVID and the pandemic highlighted, we just now know its prevalent even more so than we did before.

I: And it is, and that question is with regard to things like social media, news media reports regarding hate crime and hate incidents and those kind of types of things

R: I guess to be 100%, I don't really see hate crime in the context of where I sit in terms of Islam.

I: Right.

R: To be quite frank, most of the Caribbean people that I know that probably heard anything rude, probably would punch them in the face, because we come from... And this is not knocking any other community but we're quite resilient before we came to Islam so it's kind of like, "What? What did you just say?" And it's the same "What?" as if you just looked at me a funny way anyway, so when, I'll give you a perfect example. So, one of the uncles who passed last year also as well to cancer, but it was an incident that had happened and I think it might have been a local supermarket and his wife was wearing I guess the full dress and I guess there must have been a family and one of the young people from the family must've mumbled "Terrorist" or something along them lines, and her response was "What did you just say?" and went to tell the parents and they probably had attitude with that and she said, "I'm going to tell my husband." And this big uncle with the grandkids and everybody's attitude

essentially changes, now this is an assumption here, only based on things that I've seen and things that I've experienced from conversations, if that was a little Asian lady from my local community that lives at the bottom of my road, it probably wouldn't have been that.

She maybe would have accepted that there was a disrespect and probably would have went home and was really upset and distraught at the fact that someone has really just been disrespectful. Pulling down a Caribbean's hijab off her head you might get knocked out. Tommy Robinson would be rolling on the floor, that's just what I sense from that Caribbean resilient culture of just "I'm not having it!" so being Jamaican and Muslim just know what I'm doing and it's my stuff. When you bring up hate crime to me that I essentially observe is generally external social media, somebody being disrespectful or past comments or maybe just noticing an energy that people are acting a bit weird towards you, but I've never lived in an environment where someone's blatantly said "You're black" or whatever because you kind of know that it might not go your way if you was to do something stupid and it became a one on one. Now I'm not going to say if I was in the group of pool club, snooker club for example and someone, or in a pub, different dynamic, there's way more of you that look like me, but I've no reason to be in those environments.

So, I always find that question a bit hard to answer about hate crime because my issues is black, my issues are about my blackness and not about Islam. So, it's being black then Muslim, but being black and Muslim it can have its seas of problems where we live in a predominant Pakistani community, let me phrase that again, we live in a country where predominantly a lot of Muslims are from the South Asian community, Pakistan and Bangladeshi, in the wider sphere is when people see Asians that's synonymous with Islam and Muslim. So, the question is that if you're not Asian then you're not Muslim, I don't know the answer to that, but I know that for a lot of people it's synonymous and it's the same thing, that's partly the reason why after September 11, the Sikh community were getting attacked and they were like "I'm not even Muslim" but because I was Asian and wearing a turban, people just make the assumption that Osama Bin Laden was the same thing that you are, but black people wasn't experiencing that, and as my Dad would say, "Welcome to our world".

That's what he would want to say to Muslims, "Welcome to our world" we've been going through these levels of aggression, so hate crime I think for me comes in a form of racism as opposed to that received for the same Muslim community, because the same Muslim community I've had Asian people say to me that it's hard for them to understand how I've become Muslim as it's abnormal and they think I'm inferior to them" "You didn't know the first person to call to prayer was Bilal," Bilal was the only African, but that shows their ignorance and their lack of understanding of Islam, because as I said I can go back further to all the tribes that are connected to the prophet Mohamed and they were all African tribes, but because you're in awe of that Bilal and he was a slave and so I get those undertones, you know once a slave now one of a prophet and giving calls to prayer, that's why we love black people. Really? But I only hear that from Pakistani communities. I've never met a white person that says anything as such, and if they have I haven't noticed it and none of my family have noticed it. I don't think my wife needs me in most cases, because she's a bit of a firework when she's ready, and that's my point, that's all I know.

My mum and my nan will kick off outside Asda, so if my nan who is almost 80 years old, she claims that she's got arthritis, and she can fight, then I'm not worried about... I'm more worried about my children if I'm going to be totally honest because they're just living in a world, they didn't grow up in the struggled way we grew up, £1 tokens. My kids their view is PlayStation, being online, going to the park dad, they don't know about Park Lane, Winson Green, Handsworth, he don't know any those things so for him, if someone wants to be nasty to him, he'd probably take it really bad like "I can't believe that these people are really treating me like that," instead of "F them, they don't want to talk to me, they don't care." Because that's the environment that we grew up in, so it's very different. So I always think strangely when I hear the word hate crime, I always think about Asian communities, I don't ever think about where black people sit within that context because we've been battling the system with racism, the same things that I'm probably challenging and fighting now is probably what I was

before I became Muslim.

I: So, we're kind of approaching I guess coming towards the end, but I've been asking everybody who has done an interview about kind of community organisations responses to the pandemic and in particular mosque responses, so in terms of mosques responding to the news within the community of the pandemic, what kinds of things were taken forward if any?

R: Just to be critical I feel like most religious communities are backward. Charity is always seen from the lens of poverty. I always look at charity not just through the lens of poverty but also poverty of the mind, so that we can somehow as a collective find £1.2 million to send to Syria, Iraq, Africa to help poor people, it's commendable, we love it, but if you've got a community in front of you that are involved in crime and heroin and drugs and violence and nobody diverts towards that I just kind of in a weird way don't see how, until we start to engage those issues in the community, and I'm talking about any religious community, Jesus didn't run to somewhere else to help them before he helped those he was amongst, the prophet Mohamed never ran to somewhere else before he could help the people amongst him, and I think because we've got that idea and concept of poverty being people that haven't got anything, of course there's always going to programmes and as a community I'm not actually knocking it at all, I'm just saying there's a gap that's missing and always has been.

So that's why you have organisations like mine that maybe of a religious particular persuasion that do more, same with your first class Legacies the Christians, but they don't put themselves as a Christian organisation because they're here to do... So I find that those that come from those religious institutions create entities and do more than what these religious institutions are not doing, because my argument would be that yes we talk about scripture, we talk about the waves and we talk about how we are supposed to be in society, but we don't give anybody the space to talk about the issues that impact of the wider community. We don't talk about racism, we don't really talk much about misogyny, we don't really talk much about sexual violence and harm, we don't really talk about drugs and the fact that some of the congregation's children are the biggest drug dealers in the local area. We don't talk about all of these things, but you say you're here, your trousers are not... Frig are you talking about, that's the thing about it, I can't do it, it stresses me out, because for me that there is more important than you telling me about those other things.

And it's funny you've said that because I remember in the pandemic I was doing a webinar on extremism and one of the doctor's that's living over in Qatar to deliver a talk and I got contacted by one of the brothers from the mosque online and he basically said "Oh you know brother you're using too much to do your talk, you should be mindful of these programmes," because historically you said some things about the brothers at the mosque that we all attend. I was like "What are you talking about? What are you talking about? So you need to tell you've seen me post every day on my social media about societal issues, societal problems, and now this one session about extremism and radicalisation and how do you respond? You're going to now message me about the individual because you had a historic problem with this problem? Get out of here." And that's my attitude. So I don't think I can answer that question because I don't see and that's the reason why many of us that come from those environments are proactive, and one thing that I will say though despite that the wider congregation may not get it, I do always say that one of the Imam's do get it, but it's like how do I kind of connect to that in a wider sense.

I: So what do you make of the government response then? We've touched on loads of things in terms of tests, we talked about testing...

R: My statement is this. We are given thousands and thousands of pounds to deal with billion pound problems, and all that means is of course something's happened, of course there's funding and finance and people are going to take that finance and do the best job possible, but it's not enough. It's not going to respond to the problem. If youth services have been cut £1.4 billion over the last 10 years and you're only going to give the £10,000 to an organisation,

it's kind of illogical to even go down the conversation about why that doesn't even make any sense because £3,000 keeps the lights on, £2,000 for a trip, staff need to get paid, £10,000 is done in a two week half term break, literally that's how fast it would go, but these people think that that £10,000 is supposed to stretch for 12 and 18 months. Those that are in government office that hold the finance, so it just feels like it's a knee-jerk reaction. It puts plasters over the wound for a moment and then when there's a burst of that wound we then find a new way to do it, and it's almost like two days ago a young man was killed in broad daylight in London, 4 o'clock, and the prediction is always made, next week there'll probably be another stabbing, summer holidays that's going to come there's gonna be lots of violence that takes place because there's not enough things taking place for young people.

That doesn't disregard the amazing workers, the amazing centres that are doing things with young people. Well, there's a massive population of young people in Birmingham. How do we expect every intervention is going to work, it just doesn't and there's not enough workers out there to fulfil the need. Youth workers don't even get paid no more. Organisations don't get paid anymore. That's youth work and community work, then we've gotta talk about statutory organisations, local authority – they're stretched, so everybody is dealing with a stretched foundation, that so and so doesn't know the names of the young people going through what they're going through. And what COVID has done is that it has exacerbated all of those issues. Mental health has now gone on the increase, more risky behaviours and vulnerabilities whether that's online or in the public domain. Young people are now engaging in new highs taking pills like Xanax, young people are drinking lean, erm, promethazine and codeine mixed with Sprite. Young people are taking more risk as it relates to county lines and criminal exploitation. Young people by default are joining gangs because of fear and unity. You may remember in Birmingham there were loads of tit for tat shootings and this is the stuff I'm talking about in my PhD. All of this stuff's taking place, and we for some strange reason think a little bit of funding that's gonna come is gonna sort it out, solve all of those problems. So as I say a thousand pounds worth of funding to deal with billion pounds worth of problems.

I: And what's your perspective on looking forwards then? Is Covid behind us, is it still here...

R: No, no, no, no, no, we're coming out of it, but it's the ripple effect that we're seeing right now. Tit for tat shootings, Hyde Park – a kid going around with a big sword chopping and trying to stab whoever he's trying to stab – people are having a picnic, sitting in the park thinking "what the hell is going on here?" So we're gonna start seeing more of that because nobody has addressed mental health. And the last that that the, er, the finance minister declared what's gonna be spent over the next 12 months I don't recall him thinking about young people, youth work, mental health services – so mental health is gonna be on the increase. So look outside in the summertime, and you're gonna start to see loads more people with mental health walking around the streets, cos who's gonna help them and look after them? Children's services are, nationally they're worried saying "all the young people that weren't screened at standard risk are now high risk." Youth offending are now saying "what's now taking place?" Trust up and down the country with alternative provisions because the exclusion rate has gone nuts in different cities, they're saying "how do we respond?" Well we'll just get the mentor in for a couple of sessions and see if that can work and its that ideology that's taking place. One of the things that's now happening, which you're probably aware of, is that the department of education and youth justice have merged in developing a series of taskforces in different cities. So Birmingham has just started a taskforce, they're to kind of engage with the school to prison pipeline stuff. It's based in Erdington, so they've basically got a whole team, they've got a budget of just over a million to develop a team that's gonna be working with all of these alternative provisions. So they've got therapists, youth workers, skills speech and language individuals, people that are working with families, so its kind of a holistic way to engage. Amazing model, I guess we'll know in 12 months whether it works or not. But already I've, we've helped with some of the members of staff that are working there, they're already saying that its getting crazy, its already getting crazy. We're talking, there was a case recently you probably read in the news where a group of young people killed a man in

Redditch outside of an Asda supermarket. He was in B&Q, and went to pop over to Asda for, erm, toilet. Seen some kids messing around in the trolleys, and security challenged them and whatnot and he challenged them too. And it resulted in going from anti-social behaviour to murder, just like that. So the face of youth violence now is also changing, because those kids that are now anti-social are now becoming violent. So my worry about things like gangs and stuff is not really much of an issue, my issue is more youth violence. That more and more kids are becoming that way because nobody has been helping their emotional wellbeing, mental health and wellbeing in the pandemic. It hasn't been assessed at all. Just push them all back into the schools, social anxiety has gone through the roof for both adults and children and young people. Who is responding to the fact that people have been in isolation for a long time? People have had to grieve in isolation for a long time. I don't see much responses to that other than just plasters. Plenty of people have been financially struggling, and the fact that people have took out loans, they've took out all kind of debt, and now they're in a situation now where there's, it's probably gonna take them a couple of years to get out of this two-year debt. So I it's a ripple effect we're dealing with now.

I: Is there anything else that you wanted to mention or that we haven't talked about?

R: Nah, erm, I think that's it.

Interview 10

Date: 25/04/2022

Duration: 51:56

Participant characteristics: male, director of the local public health authority

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: Okay. Thanks. Well, erm, so thanks for taking the time, I really appreciate it. I did send over a list of interview questions, but we had mainly for the project envisioned when we were thinking about people who had a, kind of, an influential role in the response within the Muslim community, we were thinking of people within the community themselves who were Muslim. So I think some of the questions we're gonna deviate a bit. Erm, I think it's really useful to start with, if you just give me an outline of your role and...and I guess, how you came to be working in partnership with the Muslim community in terms of how to respond within the pandemic.

R: Sure. So I'm Director of [Local Public Health Authority in Birmingham]. I'm responsible for protecting and improving the health of the 1.2 million citizens of Birmingham, erm, employed by the local authority and came into post in February 2019. So I'd been in post, er, well, under a year when we were first summoned to a Chatham House briefing by PHE on the new variant in December.

I: Yeah.

R: Er, and by February I was briefing politicians and starting to engage with stakeholders.

I: Right.

R: And er, in early March we had the first case reported in the city and I moved my public health team into an emergency cell structure by mid-March and we were in lockdown at the end of March. Erm, and since then we have been riding the rollercoaster of COVID.

So the engagement with the mosques, the masjids, I'd started some engagement in 2019 as part of the wider public health agenda. We'd been working to start to refresh the healthy mosque guide that had previously been produced by Birmingham. And so we'd just started to build connections and put out feelers.

Anyway, erm, in March I asked to meet the leaders of the mosques to talk about COVID and the potential restrictions and-and risks.

I: Is this as early as 2020 though?

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah? Okay.

R: Yeah, this is, this is pre lockdown.

I: Yeah, okay.

R: So two weeks. I think, two weeks before lockdown, erm, XXXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] mosque convened a meeting for me in an upper room, and there must have been a hundred people in the room. A combination of the sheikh, the chairman and the secretaries of the mosques. So Birmingham has several hundred mosques, Sunni and Shia mosques. Erm, also have a large Somali based mosque and actually the first mosque in Birmingham was founded by the Somali community in 1930s.

I: **Right.**

R: Which is quite interesting little side fact. And like any faith community there are politics. So the two main camps are those that line with XXXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near highgate] and those that line with XXXXX XXXXX {one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath}.

I: **Right.**

R: So XXXXX [Highgate] Mosque being a slightly larger group. There is also Birmingham Muslim XXXXX [Islamic organisation], which has a whole range of politics around it. And generally haven't massively engaged with us through this. We've engaged more directly through the mosque networks themselves. And there is... and I forget what it's called, an association, but it's an association of Muslim funeral directors.

I: **Okay.**

R: Who again, we've had really strong relationships with.

So er, about two weeks before lockdown, I think it was a Wednesday evening, I went to talk to the mosque. And I sat...if you imagine a very long room, me sitting at the end, they're more sitting in this giant horseshoe in like three rows deep. And the chairman of the XXXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] Mosque invited me to share what I knew.

Er, there was a consultant there who was a member of the faith community from, I think, heartlands or QE, no QE, who talked about what it was like treating some of the first patients that had come into ITU.

I: **Right.**

R: And how scared he was.

Erm, and I spoke for about half an hour and took questions, and then I left them and the ultimate ask was to close Friday prayer. Friday prayer in the city is 40,000 people plus.

I: **Yeah.**

R: It was a big ask.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Er, by the Friday before lockdown, erm, over half the mosques in the city had closed to face to face Friday prayer.

I: **Right, okay.**

R: The following night I met with, in the basement of XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] er with the predominantly, I think, it was Sunni mosque leaders, predominantly the African mosques came together, that was facilitated by XXXXX [a community leader].

I: Okay.

R: Much, much smaller group. Erm much...in many ways, much more difficult in terms of their tending to be a slightly more...erm, how to put it? More focused on Friday prayer had a much stronger sense of community for them. So there was a much, and some of this is and some of through the journey through the last two years has been understanding the financials of the mosques.

I: Right.

R: So Friday prayer is where people give offering.

I: Oh, I see. Okay. Okay.

R: So the majority of the mosque's income comes from Friday prayer.

I: Right, okay.

R: If you are in one of our small deprived communities, people don't pay by direct debit. They're tied. They give it at Friday prayer in cash. So many of our mosques had no way of receiving cash, except in cash.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Intricacies of the politics of Islam that, you know, actually was quite an important part of opening that. And I'm very grateful to XXXXX [lead at an Islamic Trust Organisation]. There are two XXXXXs [community leaders with the same name], XXXXX [Islamic Trust Organisation] and XXXXX XXXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath]. And both of whom alongside several of the sheikhs and chairman spent time educating me, getting me up to speed on various aspects. But the financials was an important one to understand, because therein lay their resistance to closing Friday prayers, and many of the mosques didn't have that facility.

So for example, XXXXX XXXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] worked with the smaller masjids that didn't to help them get access to work out how to do it. So there was a lot of inter mosque partnership on that.

Erm anyway, so then restrictions came, we locked down. We set up a weekly meeting with the faith with the mosques leaders. So I met them usually every Monday lunchtime for an hour to answer their questions, to talk about what was going on. We spent a lot of time working on co-producing funeral and burial guidance, which wasn't available nationally and developing that jointly with the enforcement environment health colleagues. Erm and again, that you know, I...they gave me videos to watch, we talked through what washing the body involved, what could and couldn't be done; what was acceptable from a scholarly perspective.

Much of the work that we did in Birmingham was taken by the er XXXX XXXX XXXX [a national Islamic governance organisation] and built on. And also we had links with BIMA and the er British Islamic Medical Association. Erm so yeah, so and that weekly meeting with the mosques continued through until really about July 2021 and then we went to fortnightly and I started to step back from doing them personally. So I was doing all of this personally with XXXXX [community engagement officer] and around July I started to bring in some other people. So I started to step back and I, kind of, now pop in every now and again and we go...we've gone to monthly and that's developing into a more broader public health conversation. Erm yeah.

And I...oh, the other thing I did, I spoke at Friday... before lockdown, I spoke at Friday prayer at one of the big mosques. Erm, and what else have I done? And I've done quite a lot of the Muslim focused radio stations, the community ones and stuff as well. So yeah, so I mean, there's been a lot of engagement with them and a lot of collaboration, which has been really good. And it's important because, you know, after Christianity this is our largest faith sector.

I: Hmm mmm, yeah. Yeah. And so in terms of going back to, kind of, those initial kind of conversations about the concerns about the pandemic and so on and so forth, I guess, what was your insight, obviously, with it both considering within the role that you are in and in terms of communicating those concerns within the community as well? What were your perceptions, sort of, very early on in terms of how this was going to play out in Birmingham generally?

R: So I think the, erm, I mean, the concern of course is that Friday prayers, people are close together. Few faiths practice communal prayer in the way that the Islamic faith does. Erm, and also in the reality that mosques do not open their windows, you know, and whereas churches will quite happily have doors and windows open. The nature of the masjids is not the same. Erm, there's a lot of common touch points so that their ability for transmission is high.

The masjids also in terms of their congregation populations, er, tend to have high risk or well, tend to be more elderly in some senses, particularly in some of the smaller masjids they have a much... that's the kind of community space. Their populations have high rates of type two diabetes particularly, smoking variable but higher perhaps than some of the other communities of faith.

And erm dietary factors pretty poor, so obesity is high, but also at the other end malnutrition quite high as well. So lots of multiple kind of risk factors to play out. So their population is at risk, their faith practices put them at risk because of transmission and they are a large wedge of the community and therefore it would be irresponsible as Director of [Local Public Health Authority] not to proactively engage with them and work with them constructively on-on finding a way forward. And that's why I put the effort in and it's why it's been so important.

Erm, I do recognise though that I am relatively unique nationally in the amount of engagement I've done with-with the mosques, the masjids through this.

And the other thing I should just say, that I forgot to mention, is of course there is also the aspect of the madrasa.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: And again, in Birmingham we have large numbers of these.

I: Yes.

R: Large flows of children. Erm, so really important point as well, lots of out of school education going on. So we've done some specific work with the masjids around the Madrasa, around educate out of school. And we've got in the person from the Council who's, kind of, expert on out of school provision. And we did some specific guidelines with them on that as well.

So the other aspect, of course, is many of them run foodbanks.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: Foodbanks that don't connect in with the wider foodbank system. So one of the things we did through this network is we got the foodbanks all talking to each other, and we managed to get the masjid led foodbanks to talk to the non-Muslim foodbanks. That in itself was quite a big step.

I: Yeah.

R: To working within their communities. And as part of the work that we did during the pandemic we had an organisation called XXXXX who managed, who supported that network of foodbanks so that we could shift food around the city. So if XXXXX XXXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] foodbank had loads of rice and there was none in XXXXX Church foodbank, this organisation would ship and they do a swap of rice for pasta or whatever,

you know. So we were basically continually shifting food stock around the city to try and ensure consistency of supply to people.

The final bit, of course, is they are amazing for soft intelligence. So you know, one of the difficult bits at the centre is often you lose sight of what's real, you just get lost behind numbers. And so you know, their erm...their frank and honest reflection on what was going well, what wasn't going well was really important. And because of all of this work we did together, that's why we ended up with things like the first mosque hosting a vaccination hub. And they worked with us, they handed out LFT kits. So we have a series of masjids that were lateral flow distribution centres.

And you know, all of that is because of the working relationship we've had.

I: Yeah. Yeah, so early on I guess with the foodbanks and stuff, is that within the context of full national lockdown then or?

R: Yeah, well had, so they had foodbanks already.

I: Yeah.

R: And most of the masjids, well, the big masjids already run foodbanks, have done, run all sorts of things. Erm, during the lockdown the food banks remained operational.

I: Yeah.

R: And we erm, we have a network, I think, now of over 65 working together that big, big foodbank. We all say pump money into the foodbank. So one of the reasons, the incentives for them to join the foodbank network was we put in about a million pounds of food into the central organising, which was then disseminated out.

I: Right okay, okay. Erm so yeah, so then to go back, was there I guess it's within the context of national lockdown or approaching the first national lockdown there's so this conversation about closing for Friday prayers. Closing the physical Masjid altogether?

R: So the closure of the masjid itself completely came with national lockdown. That was a national, not a local decision.

I: Okay.

R: Erm, prior to national lockdown, I was not focused on closing all faith settings. The reality being that daily prayer is a much smaller affair. Friday prayer is the biggie for the masjids. We have other challenge..., interestingly, the model of partnership that we had with the mosques, about a month in the black churches wanted the same. And then by the time we'd had them set up, we thought we'd better have an interfaith group for everyone else.

So by the...probably by Easter, I was doing three hours a week. So an hour with the mosque, an hour with the black led churches and an hour with the interfaith group.

I: Right. Okay.

R: Erm, and that was because of the very specific advice. So for example, and I forget what the faith term is. Between the first and second wave they wanted guidance on during Ramadan people go and sleep at the mosque. So it's a bit like a kind of mini pilgrimage, but you basically move into the mosque for three or four nights and you pray continually for three to four nights. And it's a small number of people who do it, but it's generally the most elderly.

I: Right. Okay.

R: Because it's an act of extreme devotion, so we had to do guidance on that. And they wanted views on that. We'd stuff around Ashura. So Ashura is a festival, I think, of the Sunnis, I always get them the wrong way around. And happens the end of July, I think it is. That's what drove our second wave.

I: **Okay.**

R: But it wasn't the masjids, the masjids behaved, it was an individual private... private individual who decided they were going to ignore the fact that the masjids were behaving and hold an Ashura religious ceremony in the big garden of their house. And that in Hall Green South, and that then led to a big... I mean, that was the other bit that came out of this is the masjids did do quite a bit of whistle blowing to help us understand what was going on in the community, which was quite helpful.

But yeah, I don't think... I mean, close... and through the work that we were doing, of course. I mean, the other side of this is that I then became quite an advocate for faith settings, but particularly for the masjids nationally. So in the conversations that I was having with the chief medical officer on a weekly basis with DLUHC, I was going "Hold on, you've got to think about faith settings. You've got to think about faith communities. What about this? What about that?"

And that was important because it meant I was able to come back to the masjids and say, "Well, actually I've asked the CMO and he agrees with my view" or "I've asked DLUHC and they're gonna go away and think about it."

Because it did feel like faith, non-Christianity faith was an afterthought in national policy, particularly, when it came to the timing of some of the restriction release. I mean, the concept that I forget which wave it was, but one of them we finished the day after Eid. Like, Eid was the day before restrictions finished and it's like "That's just bonkers."

And then there was another one where they finished it the day before the moon walk. So there's...and I'm not very good at remembering religious titles of things, is there's a day during Ramadan when you go out and you watch the full moon and it's like just before Eid and everyone does all their shopping. So again, dimension of faith that you might not think is about, but high risk, because along things like Lady Paul Road and Solar Road, that is where the shops make most of their money is the Islamic equivalent of Christmas. So it's a really important retail space. And the fact that in one lockdown, it wasn't open, so they weren't able to open shops. So we then had to deal with enforcement issues of people trying to sell a few samosas and saying they were a food shop. Well, actually what they were selling was £3,000 saris.

I: **Right. Okay.**

R: So there were whole dimensions of this that, you know, the faith setting is just a segment of the faith and to support one of the largest populations going through, well, largest non-white British populations in the city, it was really important from my perspective, to really getting to understanding these multiple dimensions of the faith. And it was important to understand what was going on in Saudi and Mecca. What was the position, what was the global position of the Islamic faith? And understanding that when the waves were coming across the first waves we were vulnerable because of the there is a pilgrimage to Iran.

So and we because Birmingham is so big, we are large enough to have a large enough population who that is their religious pilgrimage. And therefore we had a transmission risk in a way that virtually nowhere else in the country would have, because nowhere else has as many people that I do. And therefore it's not just understanding Islam, it's understanding the subset and the politics, and engaging with that while at the same time doing the same thing for the evangelical churches, erm, who had a different set of problems mainly around singing.

I: **Okay. Yeah. So for guidance coming through with public performances and things of that nature. So-so in terms of the guidance that you've... because you mentioned a few**

times that issued guidance on, say for example, the period of time where people might want to stay within the mosques and so on and so forth, what did that guidance look like and how was that sort of negotiated?

R: So we developed it and I use the royal we of council because it depended a bit on what it was. Erm so guidance around funerals was led by enforcement and environmental health on burials and the registered service. Erm, I had a public health member of public health specialist team that worked with them. It was a joint working group with the masjids commenting on the drafts. So we never published guidance for Muslim communities without running it through the group.

I: **Yeah. Yeah.**

R: So they very much, and some of it was they said "We need guidance on this." So for example, so in the funeral piece there's the bit around the preparation of the body. So normally what happens is someone dies and a combination of volunteers and family members wash and shroud the body. That includes washing all of the orifices, particularly the mouth. And that is normally done with your hand. Obviously, that is not COVID safe. So we developed some very specific guidance about what was acceptable. We also worked with the funeral directors to develop training for the volunteers. So they had a cadre of COVID trained volunteers with full PPE. And we went through with the scholars to get scholarly opinion on whether we could get an exemption. What is the minimum washing of the body that is in the faith acceptable, which is quite important because scholars all have different opinions, so trying to get them all to get to consensus is quite hard. And that kind of is for them to do rather than for us to do.

So there's some of that also about where we were putting, pushing back to them about "You guys need to get your own house in order, we can't do it for you."

But for example, the other things, when there were relaxations, normally in the funeral, people will walk past the coffin and touch it. This kind of viewing in state kind of behaviour and they will shake each other's hands as a way of showing condolence. So we had to do quite a lot of work with the mosque on trying to get culturally to get people away from shaking hands because it's so normal.

Even when I gave talk at Friday prayer before lockdown, I said "It's really important you don't shake hands." Walked out to the car park to wait for my cab and three of them tried to shake hands with me. I'd just told them to not shake hands.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So it is what it is. I mean, it's.

I: **Yeah. So with that, I think kind of moving forward, in terms of thinking about things like rolling out, as you said, the lateral flow testing or developing enough of a relationship to promote kind of vaccination spaces and so on and so forth, how was that navigated? I'm interested in maybe your perception of how the pandemic was being perceived within the community, what the anxieties were and the relationship between that, and I guess promoting testing or getting to a point where vaccinations are being set up...**

R: Alright. So break this down. Okay. So if we break it down a little bit. So in one sense there was basic understanding barriers. So we worked with the masjid to pump out information, what was COVID. Erm, we did presentations for them, which they then shared with the congregations, erm, those kind of things. They were very much telling us what was needed. So for example, when lateral flow testing came along, they said, well, the problem is that people, you know, the booklet's 17 pages long and it's in English. We need more, can you help us? So we worked with them on some video, for example.

We worked with them on messaging. So some felt able to speak out. So Sheikh XXXX did a series of brilliant sermons around responsibility within the context of the Quran and using scripture

to reinforce people's responsibilities to each other and not spread falsehood, which is an important principle. But and really tying that into trying to stop some of the WhatsApp group messaging that just perpetuated fake news.

I: How prevalent do you feel, what is your perception in terms of how prevalent these - you've raised the idea of misinformation being circulated, how, what's your perception on kind of how prevalent that might have been?

R: I think it's less faith specific. I think it's more ethnicity specific. So, erm, what we found was misinformation was very much being spread through WhatsApp and Facebook were the two main vectors. Very, very little on things like radio, primarily because we worked with the radio stations really well. So if they had questions, they just asked us. Erm, and similarly with the ethnic TV stations, we did a lot with Sikh TV, with Asia TV and stuff like that.

Erm, Facebook and WhatsApp, very much driven by countries of heritage. So people would talk about, there's a kind of ping that goes off in Sparkbrook and Small Heath, which is the sun rising in Pakistan because that's when everyone's WhatsApp messages start to flow from their country's heritage.

I: Okay. Okay.

R: Right, so it's a very distinct, erm, mechanism. And actually I spent pre the pandemic, I spent an afternoon with a group of 60 and 70 year old Asian women from Small Heath who absolutely described this, they-they know all the gossip from their communities of heritage in Pakistan and Kashmir and because of WhatsApp, they're massive WhatsApp and Facebook users. Erm, so we countered that by developing the COVID Champion Programme. So it was a model that...that Newham had developed around July 2020, we launched ours in August, 2020. Erm, and we have 860 odd champions on the books. And the masjids helped us recruit and many of them signed up so they get the newsletters and the briefings and everything else as well.

So we were countering this information by putting factual information out through people through their own personal associatements with professional networks and that was the best way of doing it.

How we led to things like vaccination and testing distribution we basically asked them. I mean, it was very straightforward once it became viable we kind of went for the vaccination sites went to the NHS, so the NHS said "Help us" and we said "Well, we've got this group come talk to them." So the other thing I should say is as this went on the NHS started to recognise its value and started field GPs to join me.

I: Okay.

R: So from about halfway through we had a GP join the weekly call, he was brill, to answer some of the questions people had about access to GP practices and stuff like that. So yeah, I mean, I suppose I, kind of, I'm struggling a bit to answer the question 'cause I'm kind of going well, we just asked them and then they went "Yeah, fine." Some of them didn't, some of them were more proactive than others. Erm, but for most of the masjids, erm, Islam has a very strong basis of community responsibility and probably more than any other faith acts on that.

So some of the masjids did a huge amount work on PPE, like they really organised their home sewers to sew face coverings and stuff like that. And there were some really impressive pieces of work like that, the foodbanks, etc. virtual education, the madrasa committed very quickly, the sheikhs pivoted to giving virtual sermons and where they couldn't do virtual sermons some of them were recording on old fashioned tape cassettes for the families that just had a tape recorder.

I mean, you know, fascinating ways adapting, but what we didn't face was any real barrier. I mean, I think it helped that XXXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] and XXXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] both engaged heavily and there's another one XXXX I think it is, I'm not very good at their proper names. So we had kind of three big

mosques coming out heavily working with us and being very public about it and saying "We are working with [participant's name] and the council." And not shying away from that. And I think people in the community saw that as the mosque stepping into community responsibility and legitimising and giving, and therefore they saw that as valuable and then it kind of was a virtuous circle.

I: Yeah. So thinking about the, kind of, the impacts within the community then, I think it's likely, I imagine, that you have probably the most comprehensive picture of the impacts in Birmingham in general. So what would your perception be in terms of the impact within the Muslim community and how that might compare with the impact on the city, I guess, in general of the pandemic?

R: It is not possible to answer that question because the national data set does not record faith.

I: Yeah. Okay.

R: So there is a fundamental flaw. We don't even have it on death certificates, which is badness, frankly.

I: Yeah.

R: So the, erm...that is a serious limitation. What we can talk about is when you look at the ethnicity data, erm, COVID disproportionately infected our non-white British ethnic communities, particularly our south Asian and African Caribbean communities. And where you correlate the highest cumulative number of deaths by place they also correlate with our most technically diverse and most deprived communities. It's not perfect correlation. But I think the counter is that actually when we've done impact surveys, the resilience, the mental health resilience of these communities has been better. So faith in effect has been a protected factor and that can.... So I think there's kind of two ways in looking at it, you look at it from the point of view of how much have they been affected and how much of that is about their faith, as opposed to deprivation, the baseline health inequalities they had before and actually that their faith was probably a protective factor.

And what we didn't see in the same way to cities like Bradford, for example, is we didn't have the kind of very large overcrowded housing situation. So we do have overcrowded houses, but it's not quite a specific. Interesting, I think, where we saw it more was in our Sikh communities where we had some very large houses with like very, very large extended families, but we didn't really see that until like the third or fourth wave. And what we also monitored through all of this is testing uptake. So I don't think it was due to a lack of testing, which is quite reassuring. 'Cause we were looking at testing uptake and we eventually got waste water as well.

So I think in terms of the impact on the Islamic community, I think they were disproportionately impacted in terms of infection rates. However, they are a younger in general, a younger community than some of the other ethnic communities. High rates of diabetes that put them at high risk mortality, high rates to some extent of obesity. So they had, you know, it was a mixed picture and without the faith data, very hard to draw any clear conclusions without trying to use ethnicity as a proxy, which is not a perfect proxy.

I: Yeah, yeah, exactly. So I guess just kind of moving through then what would as, I guess looking from, kind of, the initial national lockdowns and then we start to have access to testing and then vaccinations and then there are local lockdowns of which I understand Birmingham was essentially of one of the kind of cities that was almost constantly in and out of lockdown. So how was it navigating that?

R: It's one of the reasons we invested heavily in engagement with key partners because the reality is that you can't navigate that without really working with people that are seen as key informants within their communities. And so, I think had we not had that we possibly would've stood down some of the frequency of the meetings much sooner, but because we were kind of in

and out, in and out everyone wanted to know what did they mean? What do they mean for funeral sizes? That was a biggie, what's the size of funeral. Not for the masjid but for the black churches, when could they sing again was a biggie. For the Sikh temples, the giving of the sweet, so when people pray they get given a sweet by the statute. How do we serve those on a platter? So they had to all be individually wrapped. The whole process of Langar. These were for, for every faith, there were faith specific questions that needed to be answered. And often what happened is national guidance didn't come, I mean, or it came months later or people just didn't kind of conceptualize it.

So the response to Langar was read the restaurant guidance. And I was trying to explain the whole concept of Langar is it's communal eating, it's cooked by volunteers. Yes, they've got food safety and hygiene. It's a completely different concept to going to a restaurant. And actually during Ramadan, it is giving of food is an important part of looking after your neighbours. Joining each other for Iftar is an important part of the meaning of the celebrating the meaning of togetherness and community of Ramadan.

And that just didn't seem to be on national colleagues' headspace of understanding it. So we did a lot of work on that and I take it as a huge compliment that when I go now to visit the masjid many of them talk about how impressed they are about my grasp of the scripture and the faith. But that's two years working with them to understand this and understand the totality of this. And I think sometimes for Christianity faith people and policy makers struggle to really understand the totality of these Islamic faith. So people think about the Jewish faith and all of the kind of eating stuff means that people go actually, no, I do understand why we need to think about Hasidic Jews and but in Islam people don't necessarily have the same conceptualisation of the importance of ritual and how that connects with spirituality and how important that is as a resilience factor for these communities. And therefore it's an important thing to invest in.

I: Yeah, and I know this might be a political question, but what is your perception in terms of the national response and how it married itself to what might have been the needs of in the Muslim community? And then I guess, how you were positioned in the mix of that?

R: I think it was limited. There was a national faith stakeholder group led by DLUHC I don't know who went to it from public health [nationally]. I wasn't engaged with it from Birmingham. My impression from faith leaders is they felt it was limited.

I should add we also had a monthly...or was it monthly? Fortnightly? Regional faith seminar that the mayor organised that I spoke at pretty much every session as well, which was interfaced. I think national struggled. And I think some of that is because people struggled to understand the importance of faith in people's lives. And if you come from an Anglican Christian background the majority of your life is not tied into your faith. And therefore, I'm trying to understand the impact of some of these restrictions, which were there for good public health reasons, but on peoples who where it prohibits them from taking part in something which is spiritually essential with just a kind of different mind-set.

I: Yeah.

R: And I think at times there was a sense that that was lacking and, and there was just some very simple stuff, when I pointed out one of the lockdowns finished the day after Eid and they went, "Oh, is it Eid?"

I: Right.

R: It's like, well, could you not look at a diversity calendar and thing? There were just some things where you kind of went "Really, have you thought about this? Have you thought about how this feels for someone?" The fact that you protect Christmas against all else, yet you don't protect Eid does not really portray a kind of truly secular society.

And that plays into the better, the wider understanding of the community, the economics of the community, from the money that's given as tied or offering to the masjid on Friday prayer to the money that's made on the moonwalk evening, all of these things interconnect, and actually if national didn't really seem to have any dedicated thought space around that.

I: Yeah. Yeah. I've got two questions if can fit them in. So were you aware of any hostility within or between communities or any perception of, kind of, increasing tension or increasing kind of pre-existing tensions between Muslim communities and other communities within the context of the pandemic?

R: Not so much in terms of towards the Muslim communities more there were to other communities, so the Chinese community, for example, took quite a lot of hate crime. The Indian community when Delta came.

I: Right. Okay.

R: Fair bit. There was some silly bugger stuff. People using historic videos of people going to some of the very small mosques that are in residential housing areas to kind of say, well, they've broken the rules. And then actually, because the idiots didn't take the date stamp off the video it was quite obvious that this was stirring. We had a bit of that in the first wave, a bit stupid, just stupid finger pointing. But I think, and they were very good at policing each other. I mean, that was the joy of this was actually by working with them, the masjids were quite good at going "So and so is not behaving itself, but let us deal with it."

I: Right. Okay.

R: They would ring us up, and many of them would ring me directly and personally, and go "I want... this has happened. What do you think?" Or "This is the dilemma, what do you think, how do I navigate this?" And that was an important part of building the trust relationship. And the important bit for us now as the council is to continue that trust relationship and continue to build on it.

I: Yeah. And that was what I was gonna say, moving forward, I mean, kind of your perspective on whether this is in the back rear view mirror now, are we moving away from it? What are the ongoing things that should stay in place with the Muslim community from your perspective, kind of looking forward?

R: Yeah. So yeah, so the other stuff we're doing, so we commissioned during 2020, we commissioned work to develop, refresh faith setting toolkits.

I: Okay.

R: Masjids being one of them. We're now about to go to market commission engagement partners to spend a year embedding those toolkits and generating case studies in Birmingham. The masjids are quite keen to continue a relationship with [the Local Public Health Authority] but that's moving to more of a kind of monthly interface meeting rather than a masjids specific one.

And I continue to on a, kind of, personal level build relationships with them. So I've got 101 Iftar invitations this year. Unfortunately, none of which I've been able to go to. But I don't take the respect that they give me lightly, as an openly gay man, and I talk with them about my husband, who's a GP.

I: Yeah.

R: In the second Ramadan they sent me a box of dates to say thank you, addressed to 'you and your husband, thank you from the mosques of Birmingham'. Now whether they all signed up to that, I have no idea, because I know that they're not all ideologically in the same place. But there is a level of mutual respect, a mutual understanding, which we have built that I continue to

invest in and continue to value and cherish because to improve the health of a complex global city like Birmingham, you absolutely need the masjids in your corner.

I: Yes. Yes. Is there anything else that you want to mention that we haven't covered?

R: I think the only other thing I would say, which we wrestled with, and I'm not sure we've got completely right, is women.

I: Okay.

R: So all of the masjid leadership is male and in the margins we've had conversations with some of the masjids, particularly, XXXX [Islamic trust organisation] set up a kind of women's group. But I'm not sure we've navigated that well, I think that's the one that's still on the need to need to work with them more to understand how to work with sisters of the faith in a way which is acceptable to the faith leaders.

I: Yeah.

R: And I think that often gets forgotten because the, yeah, they are a particular community within the Muslim Islamic community whose voices are rarely heard and rarely engaged with and what we weren't able to do, the masjids are quite clear about the leadership being the men. And where we weren't able to build the relationships under a faith heading we did it under other headings. So we've done it under ethnicity headings, but to build the relationships with Muslim women.

And that I think is, you know, if I was looking at what would I do better or differently, I probably would work with them more around investing in the relationships with Muslim women and finding ways to do that in a respectful and culturally appropriate way than I did this time 'cause I just didn't have time.

I: Yeah. Well, thanks for taking the time, it really is appreciated.

R: Cool.

I: Thanks. See you.

Interview 11

Date: 09/05/2022

Duration: 41:49

Participant characteristics: male, community engagement officer

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: Okay, so thanks. So I think the first thing to start off with is in terms of thinking about your position and your role, can you just give me a quick overview of your role and the responsibilities that you have and the role that you, kind of, undertook in the pandemic?

R: Sure, sure. Okay. So yeah, my name's XXXXX, erm, I'm an engagement officer for the local authority. Erm, when just before, prior to the actual pandemic or prior to lockdown being kicked in, because I think when we talk about the pandemic, everybody assumes the pandemic is from when the lockdown started, which was Boris announced on the 22nd, went in lockdown on the 23rd March 2020. But obviously, the pandemic itself as a global pandemic started way back probably October, November in terms of China and Wuhan and stuff. And then obviously coming across Europe and then January, February, 2020, that's when it kind of like there was more in the mainstream media and a lot of people are probably looking into it and as public health and as health experts, people were looking at it from probably...probably well before that.

So as a director of [the Local Public Health Authority], erm, XXXXX approached me as an engagement officer to, kind of, like support with identifying organisations and groups and establishments that could kind of, like, help to amplify the messaging around...around COVID.

So we started actually engaging around March. Erm, and one of the strategies that just in, kind of, like thought of was looking at platforms where there's a massive audience. So we looked at faith. So we're looking at approaching faith establishments. So you know, Friday prayers at a mosque, you know, one of the bigger mosques, you're talking 1,000 – 2,000 people. So in terms of getting that message across, you're sharing that basic link of messaging, if you went to 2,000 people at that Friday prayers and then that will...then that will cascade. Each one of those people, even if they shared it with another one person, you're talking another 2,000 people.

So that was his kind of like vision and thinking. Likewise, you know, at Sunday service or, you know, at a good weather or at a temple or at a synagogue. So that was his kind of thinking in terms of approaching the reasons why we could initially approach the faith. And then obviously, accompanying that in terms of messaging if it came from trusted voices, trusted sources, so the imam or the bishop or the lead priest or whatever would probably have... their voice would probably be more trusted than somebody from within the local authority or somebody within the system.

And then also the other part of that is how influential place of worship were and how important place of worship were for people. So those were like the reasons why we kind of, like, approached the faith organizations and establishments. And the reason why XXXXX [director, local public health authority] approached me is in terms of my background as an engagement officer, I had the contacts and the knowledge of in terms of going to those places. So I had that contact already.

I: Yeah. Yeah. So then, I guess, thinking about as things become more serious locally, approaching what would become lockdown and all of that kind of stuff, how was that

approached in terms of thinking about what the implications might be for mosques in particular?

R: Yeah, obviously, as we were engaging with the faith intelligence like prior to lockdown, erm, we knew that there would...you know, lockdown will be imminent in terms of it wasn't public knowledge, but obviously in terms of in the background and government officials and stuff, you know, the noises were coming out that we are going into a lockdown. So there were conversations with faith establishments to say "Look you know what, there is a lockdown, there is gonna be a lockdown. What it's gonna look like we're not gonna know, but there could be a possibility that if you do go into a lockdown that your faith centre will have to close for people actually physically visiting" then that will have massive implications. You know, particularly, for those that faith plays a massive part in their life, for others where going to the mosque or going to the church or whatever is their only, kind of, social interaction with people.

I: Yeah.

R: Er, the faith establishment plays a massive role in terms of their own mental and physical wellbeing as well. And a lot of these places, other than for worship, there's other roles that they play in terms of whether it's information or advice, whether it's foodbank, whether it's running, I don't know, a bingo club or whatever. So social implications. So as well as the actual worship implications there's all sorts of other social implications and economic implications that closure would have.

So those conversations are happening. What those conversations started, a lot of the questions that we got from the faith establishments was that first and foremost, what would closure look like? Will we close and how long will we close for, and that nobody can come in, but also in terms of what they wanted was support from us in terms of with closure. So they wanted guidance from us in terms of so how would we approach their congregation? And would we approach the congregation or would a letter come from us in terms of advising the congregation and then the congregation we direct because they realize that they'll get a lot of pushback from their worshippers in terms of if they were to go out and say "Look, we're closing."

I: Yeah. Yeah. So how was that navigated then? It sounds like you mean the relationship between the mosque and the community in each instance and that had to be navigated and managed quite carefully?

R: Yeah, yeah. A 100%. So, first of all, in terms of delicate conversations needed to happen with the mosques first, first and foremost, making sure that it's not us or we're not forcing them to close, there's a whole massive pandemic or there's an issue and there's reason behind why we need to close. And also working through or navigating the benefits of closing or the purpose of closing; that the mosques and their leadership and their imams needed to be educated in terms of why we were closing and they need to understand that. And then obviously, in order for them to be able to kind of like answer the questions to the worshippers, when the worshippers were asking the same questions to them "Well, why are we closing? What would the benefits be?"

So yeah, there were lots of conversations with the mosques and the mosque leaderships, several meetings. And then obviously, the information had to be cascaded down to the worshippers as well.

I: So what kind of information was used to inform that then, in terms of was this public health information? Was it about, kind of, can you paint a picture of that for us?

R: Yeah. Yeah. So at that time it was public health information, but we just lay basic information around, well, in terms of COVID the larger the gathering, the more the higher the risk of the spread. The closer that people stand to stand to each other, where we are making contact with each other, the higher the risk of the spread. And then obviously, in terms of at that time we didn't know how detrimental or what it would be like, but it was just around controlling the spread. And the key message was that by avoiding contact, by being in large groups in small confined spaces you could control the spread. I think that that's what it was, it was more of that health message.

I: And as time went on, I think, I guess, then lockdown happened and so, yeah, how did that, was that?

R: So yeah, so the initial conversation was that, but then as we went into lockdown within a couple of weeks it was Ramadan. So that was another massive, massive piece of work that took place and lots of conversations. So for, I'd say 99.9% of the Muslim community in Birmingham, it was the first time where they'd have to observe Ramadan, but not be able to go and worship at the mosque. During Ramadan there's lots of things that happen where the mosque is quite integral. A lot of worshipping happens in the mosque and not being able to go to the mosque would have a massive, massive impact, you know. Well, in terms of the key thing is a lot of people when they go to open the fast, they'd like to go to the mosque and open the fast.

There's an increase of worshipping during Ramadan and a lot of people were, particularly, some of those people who ordinarily may not go to the mosque during Ramadan, they make a specific effort to go to the mosque. Now that opportunity isn't there. So for them it was kind of like "Well, I'm losing out and all of the good deeds or all of the good things that I would be able to do because of that." So that was affecting them spiritually, but also psychologically and mentally it was affecting them as well.

I may not be around next year so that opportunity for me to go and kind of like get extra deeds and do extra worship during Ramadan, all of that kind of that was very, very difficult to navigate as well. That's what was playing on people's minds.

But then also as well in terms of during Ramadan we have extra prayers in the night. Being closed for that, that's a massive... for some people, although those people theologically speaking it's not that important that you go, but for the lay person they think it's part of fasting and if you don't go your fast isn't complete. So all of that was really, really difficult for us, obviously, having those conversations with the mosques, but then the mosques themselves having those conversations with the worshippers.

But then is also trying to support the mosques with providing alternatives. So things like a virtual worship or virtual prayer or having some sort of sermon, whether it's via a radio link or whatever, trying to kind of like support the mosques with alternatives. And not all of the mosques had resources so it was around ensuring that resources were made available for all the mosques in order to offer some sort of service.

I: Okay. So would that be night prayers for streaming or...or virtual access for night prayers and would that be people who would be present and how? You know, I mean, I know you are, kind of, advising on how these things play through but what was your picture of that on the ground?

R: Yeah so, so for example, erm even...even hearing the call to prayers, you know, for a lot of people that's a big thing. So one of the things that how we worked, how...what we did was we kind of like put er risk assessments and things in place. So at least one or two people from within the mosque leadership could go into a mosque and actually even, you know, make the call for prayer, so at least that was going to people's homes. Even like the night prayers is virtually the recitation of the Quran. So again, it was ensuring that, you know, one or two people could go in and actually recite the Quran so, you know, it was live streamed to people's homes. So at least that; that kind of, interaction was there.

I: And those risk assessments were they...were you putting together templates that could be?

R: That's right. Yeah, yeah, yeah. These are templates that we're putting together yes. So there's lots of so conversations, obviously, between ourselves as well as the mosque leadership team. So it was a process that we collaboratively put together.

I: Yeah. And then you say making sure that resources were there for some of the mosques that might have had technological or limitations with the ability to technologically stream and so on. So how...how was that done?

R: So yeah, so this was around sourcing funding from central government.

I: Okay.

R: So we sourced funding from central government to support, not just the mosque, but all places of worship with things like zoom licenses, webcams, all sorts of other technological support that they needed. You know, you've only got probably a handful of the bigger establishments that have got that capacity, but then it was also around giving the capacity of those large establishments then to be able to support the small establishments. Because some of those were maybe an umbrella organisation for six or seven more smaller mosques within that neighbourhood.

I: Yeah. So thinking about, something that you said earlier made me think in terms of looking at the health guidance, around getting the communication out around why a lockdown, why a national lockdown was occurring. But then, alongside this being able to, you know, ongoing facilitating kind of religious observance. So that year 2020, if I understand correctly, lockdown was lifted a day or so after Eid, or the timeline around that, or maybe it was a local lockdown the following year in 2021?

R: So the timeline was obviously April, was it March or April? I can't remember. March or April 2020 we went into the lockdown.

I: Yeah.

R: And then erm June, I think it was June some restrictions were lifted, yeah. June 2020, some restrictions were lifted. Er, you could...er, places of worship were open for communal prayers but with restricted numbers. It wasn't just where everybody could go in. So then obviously that had another impact as well in terms of say, for example, the capacity of just for argument sake, take my local mosque and the capacity is about 300. With social distancing that reduced to 30 people. And so where did the other 270 go? So the implications were things like people kind of like, again, it was it defeated objects. So you had people queuing up, same example, if mid-afternoon prayers were at 1 o'clock you'd have people queuing up from 12 o'clock. And only the first 30 could come in, so it caused a lot of tension between people. It caused a lot of conflict between the mosque organizers and the worshippers, 270 people missed out and only 30 people could come and pray. There's all of those, all the implications that go with not being able to come and pray.

I: Yeah. Yeah. Which mosque do you attend, if you don't mind?

R: It's called XXXXX XXXX XXXXX it's in Aston.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah, it's a smaller branch of XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath]. So XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] is like the main hub, XXXX XXXX [branch in Aston] is smaller than...I don't know if you've heard of XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] Mosque?

I: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. So thinking about the ways that first lockdown, then I guess there would have been impacts within the community for approaching the end of Ramadan and?

R: Yeah. Yeah. So yes, in terms of if we look at overall impact, obviously, the biggest impact for those that are kind of like... what's the word I'm looking for now? For the faith community within the Muslim community. Yeah because not everybody in the community is probably, in terms of

let's use the word practicing Muslim or whatever, or faith isn't probably highest on the agenda. But for those where faith is highest on the agenda worship was the biggest impact for them at all and knock on things that come with that.

So, for example, if somebody religiously goes in five times a day into the mosque and they pray, not being able to go in psychological will affect them because they're looking at "Well, I can't go to the mosque. You know, I need to go to the mosque and if I don't go to the mosque will my prayers be accepted? Will I get the same rewards as praying at home and as well as...?" 'Cause not everybody has that, the lay person doesn't have the understanding, where the scholars and the imams came out and said "Look, your worship will be accepted, you'll get the same rewards because it's circumstantial, it's not as if you're not coming to the mosque because you don't want to it's you're not coming to the mosque because you can't. You know, there's a global pandemic." Yeah.

So but even then still there's still a lot of tension within the faith community. People were really still very, very nervous.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah. So in terms of the faith side of it, so the biggest impact was that and not being able to observe Ramadan properly. Then in terms of Eid not being able to perform the Eid prayers. So one of the biggest things of Ramadan, end of Ramadan is actual Eid and the Eid prayers itself, it's compulsory on every single Muslim if possible to go and pray the Eid prayers in congregation. And not being able to do that, again, is a massive, massive, psychological thing, impact on the community.

And for a lot of people it's the first time they've probably ever experienced that where they haven't. And even for the Eid prayers even a lay person who doesn't normally pray five times a day, or probably doesn't pray regularly at all, they'll still attend the Eid prayers. So there was that impact,

But then there was the impact of in terms of not being able to go and see your mum or not being able to go and see your dad. And that was specific, that wasn't just specific to Muslim view that's to the whole community. But then obviously in terms of the Muslim community there is a kind of like an extended household or more in terms of a class example, I'll give you, on any one given street you may have three or four brothers or sisters that live in next door to each other, they're buying houses next door to each other. But you live next door to your brother, but you can't go to your brother's house or your sister's house or your mum's house.

I: Yeah.

R: No sharing of the food, not being able to celebrate Eid where you can't even go to your mum or whatever, all of that huge impact. Funerals, in terms of the deaths within the Muslim community were quite high. And obviously, as a Muslim particularly when somebody dies and so it's the last time you're gonna see that person and to perform prayers and not being able to go. And then also not being able to afford that support when the person is mourning.

I: Yeah.

R: So all of that had a massive, massive, massive, massive impact. And then the other side of it like is the social side of it as well. For some people their only socialising is when they're going and coming from the mosque or when they're at the mosque. And you can see those people even after prayers are over they'll still sit in the mosque in their little groups of twos and threes or fours or whatever, and still there for 15, 20 minutes just having a general conversation about anything and everything.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Sorry. And then there's the economic fallout as well. In terms of a lot, a high proportion of the Muslim community are probably cash in hand workers or workers that are working for somebody where that maybe paying them £200 a week, but only showing £100 on the books. So when you get furloughed you're only gonna get £80, you're not gonna get £250 or whatever 80% of £200 is. Does that make sense? Yeah? So yeah, and a lot of the Muslim community were frontline workers as well. So whether it's a taxi driver or a bus driver, working in a restaurant, working in a chip shop, it's all frontline.

I: Yeah. Yeah. I was gonna ask about that, 'cause obviously in your role, you'll be familiar with all the kind of risk factors and all of that kind of stuff. So in terms of the impacts and sort of impacts within the Muslim community, I mean, you've highlighted frontline work and these kinds of things but what kinds of things do you think fed into the impact in Muslim community?

R: What do you mean, sorry? Say that again, sorry?

I: In terms of looking at kind of the impact in terms of COVID, as you've said, frontline work is one thing which will bring people into increased exposure. So are there any other things which kind of had something to do with..?

R: Yeah, yeah. Yes, obviously. Yeah. Yeah. So in terms of health inequalities as well, obviously, a larger proportion of the Muslim community if you're looking at some of the higher risks so people with diabetes, obesity, unhealthy eating, heart conditions and just generic access to healthcare, all of that equates to people having bad health or ill health. Which meant that for those people, that group people who got COVID their risk of them actually being hospitalised or severely falling ill or actually dying was a lot higher.

The first lockdown, it was in the mainstream media quite a lot. Well, but in Birmingham media anyway in the news and stuff like that, yeah, several bus drivers that died, nurses that died. There was a nurse from Walsall, she was only in her early thirties. The bus driver that was in his mid-fifties, there's quite a few that were kind of, and then there was the doctor, there was that Asian doctor that everybody was calling for the prime minister to go and make an apology and whatever to his family, I think the doctor was in his mid-fifties that passed away, so yeah.

So yeah, poor healthcare, living conditions. Like I said, the economic factor, all of those things played a massive role in terms of those people being in a higher kind of risk or the impact being a lot higher for them as well.

I: And you mentioned access to healthcare, so I mean, what was your picture of what was playing out on the ground in terms of being able to access healthcare where individuals might have had concerns about COVID?

R: Yeah, yeah. So for us, one of my roles as an engagement officer was to ensure that the message gets back to the community and in a way that, A, they can digest it and, B, they can understand it. And C, hopefully, they can act upon it 'cause you can have A and B but other factors may mean that they can't act upon it. Yeah.

So things like ensuring that so in terms of access one of the biggest things that was fed back to us or we found out was that communication wasn't good enough in terms of the language that was used a lot of the time, people never understood. And also the other thing as well, people always assume that just because you translate something somebody understands it. I may be from Bangladesh but it doesn't mean that I can read and write Bengali. So we're quite quick to translate something and send that document out but what we've gotta understand is that a lot of people their literacy levels are different. There are different levels, not everybody reads and write. You're able to speak a language where you're not able to read and write that language. So we had to act quick to ensure that not only was material going out translated, but also voiced as well. Animated, voiced and just keep it less jargony as possible.

And the other thing as well, the other access issue was in terms of what do you call it? The digital access, the fact that so many people from within our community are digitally excluded.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah. So not being able to. My mum couldn't do a zoom call or a team call with a doctor. So at that time my mum's somebody who's terminally ill, she needs to see the doctor or speak to the doctor once a week. So that wasn't happening, which impacted on her health.

I: Yeah. Yeah. And so when you talk about getting those messages out, I think I may have this wrong, but there was a range, I understand there were a range of materials, which you mentioned animated.

R: Yeah.

I: So some of these, can you describe those resources and kind of?

R: Yeah, yeah. So one of the things that we did was we commissioned lots of grassroots organisations and XXXXX [lead for an Islamic Trust Organisation] who you spoke to was one of the organisations that support, XXXXX XXXXX [the Islamic trust organisation] one organisation that supported us with getting materials out. So what we thought was the organisations and grassroots would know best how to communicate information and they'd know the different formats that information would need to go out in those specific communities. We have to take into consideration as well is you may have a Pakistan community in Lozells and a Pakistan community Spark Brook, but the formats that the communication goes out with would have to be totally different to every nuance for that specific community.

So we targeted organisations in specific communities, commissioned them in order to get tailor made information for those groups.

So, for example I'll give you one example. So for the first Eid in 2020, yeah. So we had a short little cartoon video, animated video, which was voiced over and it had text in English as well as whatever local community language in that area spoke. And just letting people know we want you to celebrate Eid, but obviously you need to celebrate it COVID safely, and it's not gonna be the same as you did before. You're not gonna be able to go to congregational prayers, you can do certain things and you can't do certain things. So just really impactful short, short video messaging.

The other thing that we did as well, we got local faith. We got faith leaders to do YouTube videos as well and we circulated those around Birmingham. Again, it was that clear message, end of the day we want you to celebrate Eid but obviously you have to be creative in how you do it and you can't celebrate it how you've done it previously because of COVID.

I: Yeah. Yeah. So thinking about interventions and kind of responses to need in the community in the pandemic, and thinking about your picture of what was playing out on the ground, what kinds of interventions were being carried forward? I know there's probably one kind of picture from the larger organisations, which have the resources and so on and maybe slightly different responses, but are you okay to kind of outline a picture of?

R: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, some of the interventions that, obviously, those clearly in terms of financial so in terms of people even things like filling out, ensuring people got the correct information around furlough. Making sure that their advice and information was one intervention. So what we did was ensure that some of the bigger organisations we were trained and informed about all the resources and everything that was available to people to ensure that people got the resources.

One of the things that was being played out was that sadly a lot of employers were claiming furlough but not giving the money to the employees.

I: Oh, okay.

R: Yeah. I mean, there's a massive...it's gonna be investigated and it's, I mean, it's already, I think it's already been discussed by MPs and stuff like that, where there's massive fraud. There's lots of fraud that went on during that, even things like the loan schemes and stuff like that, lots of people, genuine people who wanted money couldn't apply for the funding because of all the bureaucracy and then other people who didn't need it had the capacity and the resources. And they applied for, you know, there was lots of grants and things that were at that time that people could apply for business grants and things like that.

So again, so one intervention was around accurate information advice, ensuring that people got the correct information. People knew what resources were available. Things like food bank was another one ensuring that all, particularly, the faith spaces places of worship that were food banks ensuring that food was available, so people could actually get food.

The other key intervention was around just kind of like offering support to people, just offering support to people and ensuring that people got their correct information and people could ask those questions in terms of why, how, when are we gonna come out of this? Any information and support that they needed, it was around ensuring that some sort of package or some sort of support was available for those people.

I: Yeah. And what forms might that have taken especially in times where things were locked down...

R: Yeah. So, yeah, so when we were in a lockdown, so what was happening, so for example, someone... again, I'll use the XXXXX XXXXX [Islamic trust organisation] as an example. People that they knew that were really vulnerable within the community, I would say a lot of that was through intel and there was gaps, some people were probably missed, but they would actually go and knock on the door and from the front garden and through the window just speak to people, just ask if they're okay, do they need anything? They'd leave food parcels for them, just check, just a daily check-up on the person.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: And what was happening is other people, so XXXXX XXXXX [Islamic trust organisation] what they did was they kind of like formed a consortium with other organisations in the area and made sure that as much of that area was covered as possible.

I: Yeah, okay. So things like befriending?

R: Yeah.

I: You mentioned food parcels, foodbanks and those kinds of things. Erm, were you aware of any other? Because we've done a survey which, erm, we kind of captured a few things from, they indicated things like members of the community going, you know, kind of, doing shopping trips.

R: Yeah.

I: On behalf of older people or people who...

R: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean, I did one. I did one, I ain't gonna lie I did one shopping, yeah. So there's a vulnerable, erm, a single mother, so probably she's mid-40s to late 40s and she had a child who's autistic and she really struggled to come out the house, she couldn't come out the house. If she come out the house it'd be very difficult for her to control him and didn't wanna queue up. And that was a time when we had to queue up to go to the supermarket and stuff like that. And you didn't understand and comprehend that.

So obviously, she reached out to one of the local places of worship and I just says "Yeah, I'll volunteer." And I went to Tesco and got some shopping for her. She gave a list to the mosque and I went and got the shopping and I just I delivered it myself as well, knocked on the door, everything on the doorstep and left yeah.

I: Okay. So I think there's a couple of things that I wanna...' cause I'm just aware of the time as well. But I think...

R: Sorry, I think the key thing was one of the key things that people did was the checking up on people, that was really, really important. Just making sure that people were okay. And then it's not a long thing, it's knock on the door "Are you okay? Is everything? Could you need support?" four or five minutes, that's it maximum. I think that was really, really powerful and impactful.

I: And was that just within the community that or?

R: Yeah, that's just within the...yeah, that's just within the community. That's some of the... that feedback we got 'cause we were one of the things that we were doing during the peak of the pandemic, 'cause we were meeting once a week with the mosques. We were meeting with the mosques on a regular basis. A, supporting them, the mosques themselves. But B, also supporting them to support the community.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: And then they were, 'cause obviously we weren't directly engaging with mass numbers 'cause they were, but they were eyes and ears on ground. So they could feed back to us all the things that kind of like issues impacting the community, whatever the pandemic, whatever it was. And then it was a case of wherever we could support we would, but then also sign posting to other partner agencies as well.

I: Yeah. Yeah. So what do you think were the hardest aspects of the pandemic within the Muslim community then, the hardest impact?

R: I think the hardest impact was the deaths and not being able to kind of like go and pay your respects. Er, also the fact that in terms of, like I said, the first, you know, the first lockdown coincided with Ramadan and Eid and that, that spiritually affected people a lot. And the fact that the mosques were closed for, I think it was about three months straight, the mosques were closed for communal worship; that really affected people as well, erm, not being able to go to the mosque and pray collectively.

Erm, er, so deaths, worship, the spirituality. I think also there in terms of just the general socialising, the mental wellbeing, you know, the socialising, the lack of socialising has a massive impact not being able to go out and-and just generally talk to your neighbours and, you know, have a-have a walkabout and whatever. Not being able to do that particularly like for the elder community, the elder Muslim community, because of them being very, very vulnerable.

I: Yeah. And then thinking about kind of were there businesses that would?

R: Yeah, sorry. Yeah. Yeah. Obviously there, yeah. In terms of, although I never had much dealing with these, but for my own knowledge it did impact a lot of businesses closed, they couldn't afford to stay open. Yes, you had the furlough scheme and yes there were government grants and stuff, but the other thing is, like I said to you, a lot of these businesses on the books they weren't paying people what they were paying them. So obviously, people weren't prepared to stay for whatever it was and they were looking for to yeah, so economic... There was a massive economic impact as well.

And the other thing as well, like I say, living in like a large household where you may have grandparents, parents, and grandchildren, grandparents being locked in the room and not being

able to... because of in terms of the spread, these children are going into school, they're having to come back and grandparents not being able to hug their grandchildren that had a massive, massive impact on. And all that is, is so that they can protect, in terms of the parents want to protect the grandparents.

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I know as time's gone on, we have access to testing. There's obviously vaccinations, things. So how was that, kind of, navigated in terms of?

R: Yeah, so obviously when in terms of when the vaccination was, when we were talking about the vaccination programme and that programme was introduced, there was a bit of... I think with the elderly community there wasn't that much...people were that sceptic, but in terms of the younger community they were really sceptic, just like any other community in terms of some of the questions around how can you? How was it produced? How was it developed so quick? And conspiracy theories and all of that, all of those conversations.

But in terms of the navigation side of these, we were quite fortunate 'cause I said to you right from about March 2020, we were engaging with the mosques. So they again, the mosques and the faith leaders, they're the trusted voices. So in terms of getting, erm, the vaccine message and trying to get people to get vaccinated was a lot easier because we were doing it through the faith leaders. And you know, and also things like, you know, two mosques were vaccination... are vaccination centres, they still are vaccination centres in Birmingham. You know, one of them, one...one mosque was the first er mosque in the whole of the UK to be a vaccination centre. So that was...

I: Was it?

R: Yeah.

I: Which mosque?

R: XXXXX XXXXX. XXXXX XXXXX in Borstal Heath.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah. That's the first mosque in the UK to be a vaccination centre. And then following that XXXXX XXXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] also a vaccination centre as well.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: Yeah. So you know, when you have a mosque as a vaccination centre, it's a trusted place, you know, for those that...for those people or-or for people of faith they're looking at "Well, hold on a second, if a place of worship is a vaccine centre then it's gotta be bona fide, I'm okay to go and have a vaccine."

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah. So those conversations really helped and in terms of the faith leaders and the mosques getting the, come out for us, that really helped as well.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

R: And like I said, particularly the elderly community, the most vulnerable community that really helped. And even if you look at in terms of the percentage of people that have been vaccinated, I would say about 80 - 85% of the elderly Muslim community are vaccinated, whereas probably about under 50% of the under 50 Muslim community is vaccinated.

I: Yeah. And where do you think that scepticism comes from?

R: Erm, lack of faith and trust in government. Erm, I think the vaccine programme myself would've been, it would've been for me, it would've been a lot more productive if it was pushed by scientists and maybe even the world health organization, if it was led by them rather than by politicians. 'Cause there's a lack of trust and faith in those politicians.

Also, in terms of historical, there's lots of historical stuff in terms of, like, the vaccines and how vaccines have been tested on people of colour previously and all of that kind of historical stuff.

And then there was a question of around, well, normally it could take 5 - 10 years to develop a vaccine, how can they develop this vaccine in 10 months? We're not gonna know what the side effects are gonna be. All of those kind of things.

I: Yeah. Yeah. And then I guess moving forward, I'm just really conscious of time. Are there ongoing things that we need to be mindful of looking forward in terms of the needs of Muslim communities within the context of where we're at now?

R: I think for me, I think the key thing is lessons learnt. The lessons that have been learned if, say, for example, God forbid but there's another pandemic next year are we gonna be in a better place? We should do from the learnings that we've taken over the last two years, we should be able to react better and more quickly and more effectively.

I: Yeah. And what would those main lessons be in your view?

R: I think one of the main lessons would be is that the key one for me is that engaging with community is very, very important. How influential one of the learnings for me is how influential faith leaders are, places of worship are in terms of dealing with any issue, not just the pandemic. We haven't utilised as an authority, as a system, we don't utilise the expertise and the knowledge that some of these people have got.

I: Yeah.

R: And I think if you... I don't know whether you've spoken to XXXXX [director, local public health authority], I think XXXXX was very, very keen to continue engaging with the community, with his [Local Public Health Authority] hat on, as regards to public health, looking at just generic, why the health determinants, you realise how important and integral the faith leaders or the place of worship were in terms of dealing with the pandemic and responding to the pandemic. All the other ongoing issues, health issues, whether it's smoking, whether it's obesity, whether it's diabetes, cancer, whatever, I think faith leaders have a key role to play in kind of like responding to those issues.

I: Yeah. Is there anything else you wanna mention quickly that you haven't, we haven't touched on?

R: Erm no. No, I can't think of anything at the moment.

I: Okay. I'm gonna stop now just 'cause I know you've...

R: Sure.

I: Bear with me.

R: That's fine. Hopefully that's beneficial.

Interview 12

DATE: 22/06/2022

DURATION: 01:12:45

PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS: MALE, LEADER OF A COMMUNITY ORGANISATION

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: Okay, so, the first things, I think, to think about is I'm interested in your views going back to the beginning of the pandemic, thinking about this area. So that would be the first point that I wanna cover with regards Covid. Do you wanna give a little bit of a back story in terms of your role, how you were located in the community and... and what you do?

R: Yeah, okay, yeah that's... yeah, yeah. So, erm, I'm a... I'm a local lad born and brought up exactly where you just met me so I live right out in the front of that road. So my family have been here since 1979 and my grandad's been here since the late '40s, moved... it was literally a road which was just in the neighbouring area. So Dad came when he was about 12 year's old, so. But, erm, yeah, we just grew up on these street corners and all that until, you know, just burn around for the first few of your lives innit, and that's all you do until about, you know, I was about 21 and I... I became a youth worker. By chance. It wasn't something I wanted to do, 52 people had applied for a job, yeah, and no-one had given the application back, only me. They couldn't... they couldn't afford to readvertise, they used to charge about £1,200-1,300 at that time, this is going back early noughties and they just gave me the position. Took... took the salary down a bit, I said no it's alright, I like... I like doing it and then I just... I just trained myself on to it and then I went back into education when I was like 27 because I didn't feel... finish mainstream education.

I: Right.

R: I wasn't a bad boy but I was just... I wanted to be the class... the class clown it was one of them ones, but then yeah we just started and just... What happened was in the earlier years to 2005 the riots kind of happened and we realised there needs to be change in the system of how people work because there was other issues apart from... You know you, you get issues around crime and gun... and gangs but there're underlying issues before that, there're social determinants of why... why we turn to these kinds of things and then we realise like look, the schools didn't know what homes these children came from. At home the parents didn't know what their kids were doing after school. So we had to bring the services together, so we brought the schools together, debt, erm, management advisors, housing advice and then youth work and gelled it all together. And we just went there and we realised that we don't wanna be reactive and just do activities and youth clubs and all that, as great as it is, but you need major policies changed. You need to do things that get things changed up there and you need... plus you needed representation. So we had to train people to kind of, you know, be able to ask these questions and hold the powers to be who make the decisions for us, as I said yesterday who are in the grey suits and glass ceilings... erm, buildings in the city centre. Hold them account to all of that. Actually what are you doing? This is not what we want!

So yeah, so we just started like doing a lot of activities and a lot of campaigns like that but realised there was a massive need for working with women because everyone that was working in this neighbourhood, erm, and all the activities and the centres were male dominated. It wasn't that they wanted to be it was just the natural order how when you did something it would be done mainly by men and boys and all that and no-one kind of reached out to the women. So we kind of

designed our team around, you know, more females in the team and specific activities around targeting women because we realised in the playgrounds in the mornings and the afternoon they drop off and pick up kids and 95% of them are mums. Because of the working patterns of working restaurants, the taxis and late nights and all of that it's just how the neighbourhood is innit, so we just thought they've got a lot of free time because their partners or children don't wake up till a bit later. So they've got about three or four hours to kill in the daytime, let's start training them. You know, simple, soft skills like how to use the bus, how to use an ATM, how to be able to make a doctor's... make them more independent. We started to do that and it just flooded with people so on average we see about 300 people a week but our core work is around worker rights advice around homes, around the social determinants to help that we're trying to tackle. So we're doing... our project is around working on health inequalities that we've been doing, so for the last seven or eight years.

So before the word became fashionable because of Covid our project was a health inequalities projects, so worked on with the Trust. So we understood what other underlying issues and all of that, and yeah we've been here ever since. So the organisation had started with one of my colleagues that you've just seen there, he was one of the founders back in 2008 and so we moved from a youth work organisation to a more campaigning, err, kind of organisation and more around health inequalities and... and we are here today kind of just reactive when we have to be, but proactive mostly. You know, we wanna get policy changed, we wanna hold the powers to be to... to... to account and that's... that's about it, the work that we're doing.

I: So do you want to give a bit of context, a bit of background into talking about the 2005 riots and some of the wider context in and around the area and some of the things that you think about when you use the term social determinants.

R: Yeah.

I: In terms of the history of the area or whatever.

R: Yeah, well it's, erm, you know, I can remember growing up, it was a... a very mixed neighbourhood still at that time, you know. I grew up in the '90s, but historically like I said it was a... a very Irish neighbourhood in the '70s and across the road in New Town it was full of National Front. My brother used to tell me stories about honestly that they couldn't cross and Gerard Street they couldn't cross the road because of they used to get chased by the National Front and all that. It's shifted a little bit and I think that's down to housing because everybody lived in social housing and so if you were moved, you were moved, and then, erm, the late '70s to early '80s it became a very Caribbean neighbourhood and out of the... Everything changed after the '85 riots where I think a lot of the businesses were closed down because of the riots and they came up and the South Asian kind of community was settled and their families have come over in the late '70s-early '80s and... and they bought up the shops, bought up the houses and the demographics of it kind of changed and yeah, it's... it's been like that ever since. Then you've got a new wave of migration of the kind of the European-Italian-Bangladeshi community, you know, when we talked about resistance before, I still see a little bit of resistance that even the established South Asian community, even the established Bangladeshi community... even though these are the Bangladeshis are 'we were here first'. It's quite weird, you know, when you're kind of, erm,... when you're hearing these kinds of things.

Erm, but yeah, our organisation started kind of after the 2005 riots because we realised something needs to happen, you know, a lot of organisations were working on the community development model where if they didn't get grant funding they won't exist. So we had to kind of find a social enterprise model that we could still exist and do a lot of the work that we wanted to do, erm, and we knew housing was the biggest issue, you know, because, erm, there was no stability. You know, one of the first things that you need was... was stability and a lot of families in this neighbourhood didn't have stability, they were moved around, erm, from one neighbourhood to another neighbourhood, erm, there wasn't spaces in school. All of these different little things kind of played a part in the frustrations of 2005 and I think it wasn't as people make it out to be, a race kind of issue, it wasn't. It was the underlying issues, you know, about inequalities. You know, for

decades in this neighbourhood, I mean these are neighbourhoods that have been forgotten and you're seeing them. I... I this is my opinion, and we're seeing with the big games that are happening now and the big thing around inequalities, you know, there's something happening on our doorsteps. Where are the opportunities for the people who live in this neighbourhood?

So frustrations arise because of that, because you are thinking okay, you know, you wanna come on these great walks and... and visit our neighbourhood and you've got your Trusts and your boards and all that and it looks great at that time, but what are you gonna do about it afterwards? You know, you know housing is the biggest issue, people need to be housed and at the moment it's gone even worse. You know, like we've got families that are... the conditions they live in and they're getting... we've got families now who are living in hotels for the last three, four years in temporary accommodation. I'm talking one room, I'm talking two-star hotel, I'm talking sharing fridges with other people who have got a whole heap of different issues on... on registers, on immigration issues and all of these different things. We've got a family, as we speak now, that our... our colleagues are dealing with, they've got three children from the age of 7 to 14 who live in the same room as them in one of these serviced apartments that you used to have back in the days that looked really fancy. The elderly mum lives, er, in one room, they're on the seventh floor of one of these buildings and they've been there for over three years and it's spiralled. So now what's happening is that the guy's thinking that I can't provide for my family. So he's gone into a cycle of depression.

So you know, like we've found the link that there's 100% link between poor housing and err, and mental health, you know, because people can't... they've got no... they've not got enough space for their children to study, all of these different things. They've got no control over their lives, they feel like, 'you know what I haven't done enough, I can't provide for my family. But you know it takes some time to kind of get into the housing ladder, you have to go... I feel like our parents did that, they went through the rented market, they went to... then they were in a position to be able to buy. You can't... you can't afford to buy right now if you're on kind of low income and I'm not talking... Not everyone's on benefits but people that are on low income, the jobs that they're doing are really, really low pay, you know, and they don't seem to go up; people are getting richer, the poorer are getting poorer.

So all of these different kinds of issues play a massive part and we see it kind of every single day and don't get me wrong, people are also doing great in this neighbourhood. There're a lot of families who are doing great, they're entrepreneurial, a lot of... all the businesses that you see on Lozells Road are owned by people who live in this neighbourhood. So the money is going back into this neighbourhood, they don't wanna... they don't wanna move from this neighbourhood but I see a lot of underlying issues that people wanna brush under the carpet and never wanna talk about it because if they talk about it they'll have to do something about it, erm, yeah.

I: So let's take this into thinking about Covid then. So based on your knowledge, based on your insight into the area these underlying factors that need attention, what was the impact, initially, of Covid in the local area, the wider perception of what it might mean, what it meant for your organisation?

R: At first it was like there was... there was a thing about not knowing. So you know we've heard about massive things like Ebola, Ebola is a different kind of... we just thought it was one of these things that's gonna pass and go until it really kicked in and it took us, I... I think the best part of like two or three months to understand what reaction... the dilemma that we were in and the country's in and what's coming towards us because it just... it just went crazy where, you know erm, people can't come out of their houses, hesitancy. People were really, really scared, there was fear, you know, people... everyone went into a state of fear for what's really happening, I can't understand what's happening. And then you have all these bloody 'street professors' we call them who 5G and... and aliens are coming and you... you... you know you if you go back two... two and a half years, honestly, and you think okay what are the excuses that people were saying that this is because of 5G, because the... the poles are going up and all of this. Now you think it's ridiculous but at the time people were believing it, but the problem was the narrative that was coming from central government to local authority about what Covid is and what you've gotta do was too slow.

So the information wasn't coming to us fast enough on what you do, how you stay home and all of these things, but with social media people could just put a message out and it's wildfire, it goes crazy.

So people didn't know what to believe, should I stay home, shouldn't I stay home, toilet paper's gone up, meat prices have gone up to £14.99 a kg. So people are panicking and it was a state of panic where the shop shelves were gone, erm, err, people were charging ridiculous prices for things because they could. Erm, meat went from like £4.99 a kg to like £15.99 a kg, it was just ridiculous, you know. What we would pay for a whole... we've got a massive family, what we would pay for a whole lamb it would get probably a leg and a half with that, you know, and they were just like people were thinking how am I gonna afford this, I'm on low wages as it is, I can't afford... As it is even pre-Covid the wages that I get... get me by on the third week, on the fourth week I've gotta borrow from Peter, give to Paul and all of these different kinds of things and then I get paid again because we're living pay cheque to pay cheque, that I can get back on my feet. But Covid kicked it and it was like, I... I can't... I can't do any of this, my whole month's wages is gonna go on one week's worth of shopping for the house. You know, and then...

I: So talking about kind of the initial, the panic buying and all of that stuff, how is that connected with some of the things you've already talked about with regard to, well I'll... I'll put the ball in your court, what do you think the wider impact was of those kinds of initial anxieties?

R: I... I... I think that a lot of people are just spiralling into... into depression. You know, and we've seen it first-hand because what happened was during the initial period when we were told you have to close everything, we closed for the first month our centre, first month-six weeks and said, 'Look everybody stay at home.' But the work that we do we can't do from home, you have to be... it has to be face-to-face. Then we realised the need has become massive because all the other service provision that... in the neighbourhood that we kind of provided around housing support and all that, remember it's on the rise, people need more support now than ever before and everyone's closed from the council to the faith groups and the churches and all that, everyone's closed. So we thought, you know what, this is the time that we have to be around. So we decided, okay, what's the best and the safest way we can work so we come and do a booking system and on reflection now it's probably the best thing we did because it helped fix our system for... for what we're doing right now and able to manage the work. Before anyone could drop in at any time so it's like we started doing a lot of wellbeing calls, a lot of, erm, the work we were able to do on the... on... on... on the phones, we were able to speak to their children if they had to do anything.

But there were so many complex issues because when school closed the families that couldn't afford like a lunchtime meal and they've got lots of kids, they were having food at... at school, and now all of a sudden you've got another three, four mouths to feed. You know, so we never thought these were issues. You know, even though you work in the neighbourhood because you're working in the neighbourhood and you're not taking that objective view a lot of the time, you forget these kinds of things. You don't realise how many people don't have laptops at home, you know, then you realise okay they might have but if dad's working from home and mum's working from home the kids can't use it for school. How are three kids gonna use one laptop? The practicalities of all that, like it's impossible, how do you do it, you can't get four laptops. By the time the schools reacted in terms of giving laptops it wasn't... it wasn't quick enough. So we had to do it, we did a program of about 105 tablets and gave them to the most hard to reach families and this was through the referral system for schools and which... which are the families that haven't logged on ever in like the last three months.

I: Right, and you used that data to identify?

R: Yeah, we used that data to identify okay these guys are... they need something like that. Plus they also... their parents can use it to contact us and all of these things and we can give free kind of data, data sticks that they can use if they didn't have. So there was a whole lot of issues

that we didn't think there was a problem at that time, that you needed to be online, you needed to work from home, your kids had... and then it was like all of a sudden where you're... you're stuck in a room and you can't do nothing. A lot of the houses don't have gardens, your kids can't go out to play, you know, a lot of the houses don't have Sky, how are your kids gonna be occupied, you don't have a laptop, you don't have games at home, you don't understand the language! You know, a lot of the parents they can't speak English. So all the work that's coming from school, they don't understand what the hell it means. Fortunately my wife's a primary school teacher, even we struggled, you know, it was... it was really, really difficult so all of these kinds of things and we were just like thinking how do we deal with this? Okay, the first thing we have to do is make sure they've got enough food at home. So make sure that they are on the right benefits. So we speeded Universal... so people who got furloughed or lost their jobs, you know, we did a thing where Universal Credit do emergency claim, they got the money within five days and so they were on track. You know, so that was the kind of the first initial thing that we did, erm...

I: Okay, supporting people with their applications.

R: Yeah, supporting people with their applications and they could... that was our in and out, so we knew that straight away. So what happened is all of our... all of our staff team became benefits advisors. So, and... and the good thing was a lot of people who wasn't working and was on furlough they wanted to give something back to their neighbourhoods because as a community, as a South Asian community, we haven't witnessed anything like this because a lot of the time we just come post-war, so the rationing and all that we've never, ever seen. So this is the first time we've seen something like that, but also people thought you know what, I need to give back to my community, I'm a qualified teacher, I'm an accountant, I'm a whatever, you know, people've got skills in this neighbourhood so they were, 'Okay I need to give back.' So a lot of people were coming to us saying, 'Look I wanna volunteer, would I be able to help?' They came with their laptops, they worked out benefit applications, things like that, wellbeing calls. So every Monday morning we just spent hours wellbeing calls, 'Are you okay?' You have to also remember that the stereotype was that South Asian families, because I'm talking about Lozells it's predominantly South Asian that they all live in intergenerational... in generational households.

I: Yeah, extended families.

R: Yeah, which also wasn't the case because what was happening, a lot of kids are moving away, they had qualified, they became professionals, they moved to different cities and Mum and Dad were usually alone, or one parent was even, they had no-one to look after them because you're being told you can't even go and visit them. So how do you kind of, erm... if you're far away in another city and all of that, so all of these... everything was an issue during Covid, every little thing that I never, ever thought was an issue was an issue, from wellbeing, how do you check up on people, school dinners, going on to a laptop. So it was just about we had to prioritise on what's the most important thing and it was around... income was the most important thing first because housing was alright because they had stopped evictions and all of these different kinds of things. erm, are the bailiffs gonna come to your door, so that was quite alright. But we needed to do the benefit claims because we had families that...

So we had a guy who came to us and never claimed benefits in his life before, a professional guy saying, 'Oh, I've lost my job. If I claim Universal Credit do I have to give this money back to them?' He was like oblivious to how the system worked, and I'm thinking, 'Well if you've never had to kind of claim benefits you won't know how any of this works and if you don't know the language Universal Credit was really difficult, really, really difficult. You have to... because it's an online system you had to go online, fill in the [form], if you don't know how to type, you don't know how to read, you don't know... like it's a massive, massive issue, so.

I: Yeah, and so... so it was supporting people with their Universal Credit applications and applications for furlough presumably as well, were you supporting people with their applications for furlough or how that worked?

R: No, er, we didn't do it like that, people's accountants did that for them.

I: Oh right, okay.

R: So we worked with er, local firms and all that who... who kind of did that. So we were like the er, skill sets are, but also we're like who's got other skill sets in the neighbourhood and who's doing what? So we mapped out who's doing what. But the problem we had was that no-one else was open. None of the community centres were open, none of the churches were open, so we also realised that massive thing around food supply and also people were doing their own kind of, err, food banks and all that. So we started a food bank courier, so every Wednesday or Thursday we would give food to 100 families, but ours was referral based. So the schools would tell us who were the families, because they were still in contact with some of the families that were the families that really, really need it, you know, because in... in... in things like Covid and when these disasters happen there's a lot of people who also take advantage, you know, who've got a lot at home but are thinking I'm gonna get a little bit of extra.

You know, and that happens in everywhere, you know, there's a flood in Bangladesh at the moment and people are charging 100 Taka for candles, candlesticks because they've got no electricity at home. So that's in every country, I think, when something like this happens and the meat prices, the food prices and toilet roll prices is a perfect example of this country, you know. You know, we're... we're a 'first world' country and developed country, you know, for something like that to happen so it's just... And yeah, that was like it was... it was these kinds of issues that were like kind of just everyday kind of took up all...

I: So then, sorry, thinking about kind of your... what was your experience in the midst of all of this? Were you concerned, what were you making of everything? I'm thinking early though, in the time period that you're reflecting on now. The scene, as you've described, access to food, resources changing and people are locked down. So what was your individual...?

R: Cool, first I... I was... First and foremost I was grateful on a personal level that we got food on our... on our table. You know, we were able to, you know, everyone in our house eats, none of us lost our jobs, you know, we were still able to kind of buy... even though it was at £14.99 a kg for meat we were still able to go out there and buy it. We had the means, the transport, a good network where if we needed toilet paper we could get it from someone. You know, my family are in the... in the food business, they've got supplies and all of that. But there was also... it was really, really fearful, fear was kind of the biggest thing for me because generational households who are telling me your Mum could get it, your Dad could get it, that was the biggest thing and nobody knew what it was, what does it look like? What is this? Is it a cold? Is it a cough? Is it a flu? Is it Covid?

Then people were just, in this neighbourhood, a lot of people passed away, we were one of the hardest hit neighbourhoods in the country, you know. Erm, and there was... you would hear reports from Birmingham Mail about how Lozells is so hard hit. Scares the hell out you man, that scares the hell out of you. Like one of our family she has passed away, young lady, 41 years old, she passed away, her mum and her passed away within three days of each other. She had some... she had like learning difficulties so her mum was her carer and her mum passed away first and before she could even recover she passed away. But in a... in a way we were thinking oh my god, her mum was her carer, you know, if her mum... if... if her mum was gone and she had recovered who would have looked after her, there was no-one to look after her, you know, but she left behind a daughter who was 14 years old who's also got severe erm, erm, learning... learning, erm, difficulties. So it's like... and she was one of our star volunteers and like the team was broken but you know what we had to do the next day, wake up and carry on. Yeah, so we had like a lot of the people who come to our centre their partners were passing away and that.

So we just used to [unclear 0:23:35] the fear, so our supervisor and our manager, all these guys and I'm worried about their safety about if something goes wrong with them and then you have to... people are it off because people are... they're coming back positive. You know, one person's coming back positive and then that delays the work and all of these things. So we're constantly

also getting advice from our funders, from our network of people about what shall we do, the need is great, you know. Then we do things like those little supports that are coming out, you know, like they did a thing called 'The Household Support Fund', you know, where they give £150 for families, and £150 a family is... is a lot of money if you've got no money and we were like getting... our queue was at the end of our road and we just had to... and the problem was local authorities don't help themselves because they put systems in place that don't work. So we've booked in 50, 60, 70 people and the system crashes at 12 o'clock. Now they can't get their system up and running until the following down. So now we've got a backlog of 50 and another 70 that we booked, and guess what happened? On that same day it crashes again.

So you know a lot of the things weren't helped, you know, I think the local authority could have done a much, much better job but their messaging was really, really poor because we're getting all these fearful messages about people are gonna die, about this is happening, that's happening and none of it was coming down to us from the local authority, whoever they work with, in any different languages because we have gotta reach to every single person that lives in this neighbourhood. So, you know, it's the six degrees of separation isn't it, you pass it on to someone who'll pass someone, who'll pass it on to someone who'll pass it on to someone. So we needed... we needed... we needed information to come to us as a pdf document, whatever, that we could WhatsApp to people and flier to people or whatever. But it wasn't coming to us. So we had to do our own messages and all of that and send it out to people, but it was a state of panic, yeah.

I: Yeah, yeah and you know, obviously thinking about you've talked about the fear and people losing people and, you know, community members and so on. What other types of impacts were you seeing around that time?

R: Everything was closed, where do you go, you go Tesco, have you seen the queue! Crazy, and then you're not gonna find anything, you're limited on what you can get. Transport, not everybody drives, you know but I think the biggest issue we've had was around... around money. People don't have savings more than to last them, and I'm talking not... not even more than a balance in their bank that will last them more than a month.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: They don't, and we found that clear that a lot of people, the majority of the people that we work with don't have savings to last more than a few weeks, you know, so it's just... it's just hand to mouth and pay slip to pay slip. They're in low paid jobs as it is, imagine getting 80% of a low pay that you were getting anyway, but now you're on 80% of what the 100% would only take you to three weeks, you know. Now you have two weeks, if it was normal prices, but it wasn't it was inflated prices. So everything was around income and money and nothing at home and not being able to buy food and... and... and time management. People in each other's spaces, you know, families have never spent that much time together because there needs to be a break-up, you know, you need to go to work, you need to go to school, you need to do your own thing so you have a bit of space from each other when you need space. You know like... it was... it was like weird but it seems funny now, but it was like you know, partners were arguing with each other over stupid things, like silly things that... little habits that they'd never, ever noticed before but because they were in each other's spaces they, you know, they noticed these things now.

Yeah it was just like some of the things, some of the things we were dealing with were very trivial, yeah very, very trivial that, you know, look this is not the right time to deal with this, you know, [unclear 0:28:05] blah-blah-blah. Because people were coming to us and they'd feel comfortable enough to talk about these kinds of trivial issues and say look, leave this alone you've got bigger issues at the moment of what to do. And there was always... always a disruption, I think it flowed at that pace it would have been okay but what was happening was we went into lockdown, we came out of lockdown, we went in again, schools opened, schools closed, they open a week, close a week. That was the worst because I had seen... I've been... I've been a youth worker for over 20 years but I've really seen like the young kids at the age of 9 or 10 all suffering from mental health issues. It was on I think the second or the third lockdown that I realised this is a... a

massive issue. Kids were breaking down because there was no routine, children need routine, you know and the routine was just all of a sudden gone and they're thinking... They don't understand, they can't comprehend what's happening around the world in terms of okay this is Covid blah, blah, blah. They don't care about, they care about their routine, I wake up, I go to school, I wanna see my friends. The things that mean a lot to them, you know, and that's what was happening.

I: You mentioned before, you mentioned two things, working from home, schools, family being in each other's space a lot. But you also mentioned that part of your priority with the centre or with the organisation was also to look at some gender related issues. So do you have any insights in terms of the impact of the pandemic for women in terms of how a range of factors might have impacted for them with those sorts of changes?

R: They were getting to the stage with us, you know, that they were becoming very, very independent because it's... it's not a bad thing that people think, oh women are at home, it's just the way our community works when we've just arrived. You know, they didn't know the language, they didn't know... and their job was to raise us and we were like, not now, where a family who has two children, there were eight of us, we were one year apart. So a lot of the families were like that, you know, there's a lot of them and so that was their kind of... kind of thing. But they're... a lot of these mums are like 50 plus, we had... pre-Covid we had done a lot of work on like getting them out because diabetes is massive, cholesterol is massive, coronary heart disease is massive in our community. And so we did a lot of work around getting them out, being more conscious about what they eat, changing just the simple things like the oils in their food and things like that. All of a sudden, you know, they made a friendship group, you know, they're out, it's good for their mental health, they're speaking to people. That stopped, you know, so we've seen the biggest... biggest hit was with women because now it's like what do you do, you know, I was... I was in a place where I'm... I'm getting really comfortable, I'm getting to a place where I'm gonna become independent, I'm gonna earn my own money.

That's gone out the window now, now I've gotta just think about okay my husband's not even working, you know. How do we get money, what do we do, we need *[unclear 0:31:43]* spaces, erm, the kids are at home and so extra burden of responsibilities because women in this neighbourhood are built like... built like rocks. You know, honestly they... you can't mess with our mums when it comes to work and ethics and all of these, these types... honestly they don't make them light that no more. So it's like, but these are the type of women that were like I don't know what to do, you know, I've got... I've got a family to support back home as well because this was... remember it's all over the world, but I've got no money to look after myself. And a lot of the families that are supported back home, a lot of them are supported by women, you know. So whatever little money they have left over from their benefits or the part-time work they do in a school or whatever it is, they support their family. They don't give all of it, just to be able to... but it gives them a sense of, you know, like a... a sense of pride that, you know, I'm able to provide and keep our family going and all of these things, what little bit that I can do, you know.

So it was... I... I think we were finding it difficult to cope but what was good for us, the majority of our staff team are women, any kind of womanly issues that they had to talk about, you know, they were there, about, you know, just not able to... I think the main thing was about space and... and it was about control because what was happening is you had lost all control over the decisions that you can make on your life, you can't go out, you can't buy the things that you wanna do, you can't go to spaces that you could do. So all of a sudden all of us are stripped of our decision making powers because we're not allowed to go out, we're not allowed to do these kinds of things. That was really difficult to kind of... for everyone because everybody's fearful, should I even come out to the grocery store, can I even come out to the grocery store. You know, sometimes you just wanna come out for a walk just to clear your mind but you couldn't even do that, you know. And I think the women had fought in this neighbourhood for years about being very independent and all of a sudden had gone back into... these terraced houses are like boxes aren't they, that's what it is and you're just going back to a box and then you're over-thinking, you know, you're over-thinking. And it's like you can't unload on someone because they're going through bigger issues of the same issues.

So usually you have a shoulder to cry on but no, because everybody's going through the same issues in terms of my first fundamental is how do I provide for everyone. You know, we've got no money, you know, and my husband's not working, I'm not working or we're on furlough, we're on 80% of what we used to earn. And people just... it was... it was just a moral panic kind of in a way.

I: So how... I mean thinking about, erm, how widespread were bereavements, Covid-related bereavements or, erm, you know, in and around the community. How significant was the impact in terms of people losing family members and so on?

R: It was like... it was like a two tiered disease, there was like you're losing someone that you love, you've known all your life and you can't grieve because you can't... you don't know what's happening in the hospital, you don't know the reason of death, you can't go to visit them, you can't even go to their funeral, you can't even give them a proper burial. So like, and these are like you're loved ones, you know, like people's immediate families. It hit people hard and because... I can remember I went through a stage where we were like every morning for a few days someone had passed away and we were sat there and our friend that you met before, it was like the [unclear 0:35:20], who's gonna be next? It was like all of them and who's gonna be next? Nearly every single person that passed away we knew, can't believe it, young, old, male, female, it was all different kinds of backgrounds, you know, and it was just like... we... Honestly, that was the scariest part of it was like who's gonna be next guys. It was just person after person and we can remember every... every other day it was like [unclear 0:35:47] that's all we were saying, that's all we were saying and our... our lives were then two days were taken over.

So it was... it was a constant state of fear and a constant state of people were just passing away and it was just suddenly, I'm talking about Lozells but also, you know, Aston and Handsworth, you know, people we know. You know, we... they might be different neighbourhoods but we're so well connected because everyone in these neighbourhoods at one time lived together, they've lived, they've loved, they've bathed together when they only had a communal bath in Litchfield Road. So all the families were... so families were like interlinked. The children might not know each other but our dads do, you know, so he's an uncle or whatever. And then obviously it filters down a bit after generations to generation, people start losing touch but I can remember speaking to my dad and like a lot of his friends passed away in different areas but they can't even go and say goodbye, can't even go and see the family and it was just... it was... it was just the way it was.

I: What was the situation in terms of, erm, did you have any insight or any kind of insight into the relationships between what might be happening with care in hospitals, the relationships between hospitals and mosques and then preparations in and around funerals? Do you have any insight into the relationship between those things?

R: Erm, we're fortunate because we know some of the funeral providers so XXXX XXXX Mosque [large Mosque in Lozells] is one of the biggest.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah, so it was just... we just kept basic communication with them in terms of okay what would happen. The mood... everybody was actually on standby so if a relative had gone in they were on standby for the worst possible news. That's what it was, and like what do we do next, who are the 15 that can go? So it's... it's sad, but people when they... when they were on that kind of standby it was like... it was like this is inevitable, this is what's gonna happen. If they go into hospital, because the pattern was if they went into hospital they never came back. There was no communication with us from the hospitals, they didn't wanna know, they didn't wanna talk to us, we can't go, they don't pick up the phone or anything like that. So the minimal communications that we had was after someone had passed away, so it wasn't whilst they were alive because you couldn't see them while they were alive. After they passed, and our priority after they passed away we need to bury straight away. So give us the cause of death whatever it is, and people were arguing like it's not Covid, it's something else, he had all these other issues, he was perfectly fine,

she was perfectly fine before they went in. So people are constantly having [unclear 0:38:12] as well, but there's no-one to answer them questions, because on a normal day forget about hospitals, on a normal day you can't get an appointment with your GP for three weeks. Having Covid you can see the... our GP surgery hasn't still opened up face-to-face, you know.

So it was like who do you speak to and that was a massive frustration that 'I just want some information on... on what my mum is doing, my dad is doing, my brother is doing, but there were no communications at all. People were, you know, erm, first time fathers, first time, not being able to be there, not being able to be at the scan, not being able to say the last goodbyes to their parents or anything like that. It... it was... it was really difficult, communication was so poor.

I: Yeah, and so I'll ask one more think about impacts and then I'll move on to thinking about some of the responses and interventions that might have supported the community. The last thing I want to ask about impacts is about religious observance, so what was your perception of the impact of the pandemic on people's religious observance basically.

R: That first Ramadan during the pandemic was the best Ramadan anyone's ever had in terms of reconnecting with their faith, their spirituality, every single person you speak to, like, have got the most out of that time because a lot of people found religion. A lot of us are born a Muslim but we just... just... just moved away from it. A lot of people re-found their faith, a lot of people [unclear 0:39:53] the smaller things about their faith, I'm talking predominantly about the Muslims, but it's like everyone was the first time that... you know, because you can't go anywhere, there's no [unclear 0:40:05] parties, there's no gatherings or anything like that, like guys we're a family and we're gonna do this now. So a lot of people were cooking, a lot of people were helping out for the first ever time, having conversations, really in-depth conversations with family members that they'd never been able to have, everyone's so busy. But everyone you speak to they'll say, you know what I wish we had that Ramadan. So everyone you speak to is like, 'I so reconnected with my faith, I found out so much more, I got into reading a bit more, I got into... you know, some more of these vigils and just... yeah, so it was a massive reconnection and a massive surge of energy towards faith, you know.

What happened when you're in a state of fear you look to God, and that's what was happening, they were all looking to God for answers and they were just reconnected like, you know, in such a beautiful way that it was like really, really nice to see. You know, like we couldn't go to the mosques and late-night prayers and all that, so we prayed at home at home as families together. We never do that! We just seem... I don't think we're that busy but we just make out like we're so busy that we don't have time for each other and it was the first time that you've got no excuse for it, you've got not excuses, you know. And... and it was like, it was such an amazing time, honestly and that was one of the best things that came out.

I: How about Eid itself for that year?

R: Eid, again because I can remember the first time just as I remember the first time, the one that we did just at home, yeah it was... it was... it was online shopping, I can just remember it. It was like, you know, online shopping. We still did all of our formalities that we had to do, a lot of people, you know, did morning prayers in their garden with their... a lot of us are fortunate we're from big families, you know and there's a lot of us. So we got two houses together, all of us lived together, so we did the... the kind of prayers in the morning together and then we carried on doing what we were doing, you know. A shame we couldn't go to each other's houses but we were connected through WhatsApp, we made a lot of calls, we still had the same food, we still dressed up, all of these different things I think we did. Because we needed some happiness in our life, we'd gone through so much... so much like obstacles and barriers and nonsense and all of this, you know, that it was just like everybody saying, you know what let's [unclear 0:42:16]. Because the kids... the kids need to be happy, they need to know that it's still Eid and all of this. So we carried on, you know, whatever we had to do, the tradition, we just carried on doing all that.

It's still like... it's still a bummer that you can't go see your family and you can't do the usual stuff and blah-blah-blah, but in a peaceful way it was... I think it... it was a time of reflection really, a

massive time of reflection from that Ramadan to that Eid, it was a massive, massive time of reflection. So I think a lot of people were just... I found a lot of people just content with who they are, so a lot of people who had big dreams, I want a six-bedroom house and a farm or something like that, that's not realistic, that's not what makes you happy. So people actually reconnected, okay what is it that makes me happy? How much money do I really need to get by? So like people are really content with what they are doing now so people when I speak to them they say if it wasn't for Covid I would still be chasing that... that dream that was unrealistic, that wouldn't have made me happy, that would have disconnected me from my family. But now I know that maybe I need only £25,000 a year is what I've gotta earn to get me by, it's my happiness limit. Anything after that is a bonus. So I think people just realised that they are, and that the time we have isn't really much, you know, in a kind of a religious or philosophical way that let's make the most of it, let's reconnect with people that we haven't spoken to, let's make time for each other.

I: So thinking about interventions then, initially I mean a big part of our project has been looking at, er, mosques and their responses to community needs during the pandemic. So what was your experience in and around the roles that mosques might have had in, erm, responding to communities' experience of the pandemic?

R: I think the big mosques, you know, like the XXXX XXXX Mosque [large Mosque in Lozells], the main XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate], Mosque XXXX [large Mosque in Handsworth], they done more than anyone can do, you know, in terms of reaching out to families, in terms of food banks. Some of them are still running food banks, erm, the wellbeing calls, the thing around... and giving families a bit of peace and that when someone is deceased, you know. Going above and beyond in terms of whatever they... whatever pace they can do and get a body back and... and do the burials and take that burden away from families. I think that was where they were applauded the most, it's like they took a massive burden off people's shoulders, you know, and they went out their way, did an extracurricular that they usually didn't. Mosques don't do foodbanks, and they realise now it's a massive need in our community and you know what, we need to carry on doing it. So it's altered the way people are, you know, the style of living. There's a lot of mosques that are closed doors in and around, they're some great ones out there but there's still some ones that are just, you know, are a place people go and pray, come back and they don't do anything extracurricular or anything extra with the children or whatever. But you know historically if you look at mosques they were community centres, you know, people will... will [unclear 0:45:21] in the mosque, they would come for advice and all the things that we do would have been in the mosque; they were youth clubs, all of these different things.

I think that's what the bigger mosques have done because they've got the space for it, like XXXX XXXX Mosque [large Mosque in Lozells] is a youth club, it has 300-400 kids on the summer program, things like that, erm, and they're able to do it but it's just sometimes you need reassurance from a higher power and the mosque is that sometimes. So that reassurance that everything's gonna be okay, don't worry about, we've got it covered and it... I think they've played a massive role.

I: So thinking specifically about XXXX XXXX Mosque [large Mosque in Lozells] then, so what kinds of specific things did they provide? So what kind of specific things were they putting in place?

R: They would like, erm, doing a lot of, erm, kind of providing food for the families, cooking for the families, you know operating kitchens, erm, wellbeing, erm...

I: Would they deliver the food or...?

R: Yeah they would deliver... they... they had like... these guys have got so many volunteers it was unbelievable. Erm, and... and connecting with other... other faith institutions as well, like just... not just Muslim but also like other faith groups and... and doing the collective effort that this is a community issue, it's not a Muslim issue but we have to help everyone in our neighbourhood, and that's what they did. Like I said we ran a community kitchen for over a year and we cooked

and provided food for like families from... from all different backgrounds and... and I tell you what, they... they did that on such a grand level. Same as like the other mosques across the city...

I: So some of the things that have come up are things like, I think you mentioned actually, the check-in calls that you were doing. So were you aware if the mosque was doing those things as well?

R: A lot, so we do a lot of partnership work with a lot of... it's called the Partner Citizenship UK who you met before, erm, there's about 25, erm, different faith institutions, schools, unions and all of that. So we've got a great partnership between different people, erm, and that's what we're just doing, a collective, er, effort, who needs this, who needs that, where can we have, where's the gap, I need this and just calling upon our networks to kind of do these kinds of things.

I: So what... what do you think were the main needs, erm, I know you've talked about some of these already, but in terms of what were the main areas of need and how far do you think they were met by kind of community-led initiatives or support from mosques and so on?

R: Food, erm, money, probably 'cause housing wasn't an issue at that time because all of us..., but it was the food and income and I think they were met in the best way possible by the community centres and by the mosques because they had the food banks where we were just giving ingredients to people that needed to cook. There was cooked food going out to them and there was a lot of advice from church groups, the mosques, from our community centres, people were just following up people like, 'Are you okay, do you need anything else?' Resource checks, you know, erm, and just befriending someone or just having a conversation, it's not just about that you need something because just having a conversation are you okay and catching up, or doing a back story and catching up about something. So everyone... I think there were... they were the biggest things that people realised these are the things that we need to do in order to get to the next phase, whatever the next phase is gonna be. People are starting to come out slowly, you know, go for a walk and you reassure people that it's okay to come out now 'cause they were still about, 'Am I okay or not okay to come out?'

You still see some people still wearing masks now, you know, not... not sure of what's happening, whether it's gonna come back and all of these different kinds of things. So yeah.

I: Now thinking as things moved on as well, I guess as times change we have things like testing come through, vaccination programs, can you talk about those a little bit?

R: Yeah, so testing was difficult because you know like who would imagine navigating a system online, really difficult, especially with a system that's brand new and doesn't work. Anything the government does is not gonna work for the first six months, yeah, there's gonna be some sort... People were like, you know, what's a PCR test, what's a lateral flow test? You know it's... it's quite confusing, you know. It took us like the best part of three months to understand what Covid was and we... we... and I'm talking three months of eye of the storm, you know. But again, erm, it's how do I get tested, do I get tested, what does it mean, so does that mean if I've come into contact with you you stay at home for seven days. But how the mechanism works was really, really difficult to, you know, the latter stages of when... and... and that distracted the flow because that means the rest of the house can't go to work or something like that, so everybody's off now, you know. But when vaccination came in it was... it was the most difficult time because the rumours that were going around was unbelievable, honestly. It was like...

I: Take me through some of them.

R: So it's like, you know, erm, some of the ridiculous ones that, erm, yeah a guy from over there his arm fell off, yeah. Just these are the rumours that people were saying, erm, he rotted away, he had a vaccination and rotted away. He was perfectly fine, three days later they passed away, erm, they started shaking and then passed away. And... and just kept... kept having these nonsense excuses left, right and centre and all you would hear is don't take the vaccine, it's bad for

you, it's not halal, you know, and then the mosques and... and those [unclear 0:51:43] had to come out and say, look we've seen it, it is... you're allowed to take it, if you're... if you're unsure about it here's a statement, blah blah blah. But when it was rolled out what was happening is these neighbourhoods weren't... weren't forthcoming, so... because the messaging was crap! You know, you're not telling people do you have to take it, is it... are you allowed to travel with it or without out. So it was like a mix of messaging, mix of emotions and all that so people weren't taking it up. Then when you realised that bloody hell we've set this back, we took us... we spent billions of dollars on this vaccine, now no-one wants to take it up, there're so many versions of it, there's Astra Zeneca there's blah blah, I can't even remember some of the names there were just so many versions of it.

So when the stats came out that we were in... under the 50% mark, that BAME communities, South Asian, the black Caribbean communities weren't taking it, that's when they realised okay we need to work with these guys now but we've been saying... we've been doing your work for you for years. So they had approached us saying, ah can you send people to us and blah blah. I said, look I don't think it's gonna work like that, sometime with these kinds of things you have to be where the people are. So we kind of put a collected effort in and said, look a lot of our friends own, erm, wedding venues and they've been closed gathering dust. I said, look maybe, you know and we've had conversations between... we've got a lot of, you know, erm, medical professionals, nurses, doctors as well, I spoke to them and said look give us some insight, speak to our committee, what's the vaccine about? So we would have a lot of workshops so people with whatever questions and answers they had they'd ask them, just for reassurance that you're gonna be okay and they were like, look I've taken it, you know, my mum and dad have taken it, and all of that. But the funny thing was even the people who were hesitant about the vaccine wanted their parents to take it.

That was the funniest thing I found, like okay so you are proper anti vaccine to... you're the one who created these Facebook posts but you want your parents to take it. It doesn't make sense does it, but it just, you know, so... I... Love is a weird thing sometimes, I don't know how it works, yeah! So we just started working with... and you know these, erm, GPs and sometimes their head's up their own backside sometimes in terms of their relationship skills are really, really bad so when... when I was approached, erm, by one of the GPs she was a young GP, XXXX her name is, she got it, she fully understood and she got... she got what we were trying to do and she was saying, look we're gonna, erm, we're gonna collectively do it, we're gonna, erm... you just tell us how we wanna do it and we're there. But I would have thought ultimately this is... it became competitive because a different, erm, primary care network, you know, er, like the more people I vaccinate the more money I get. It's a business, end of the day because these... these primary care networks are several GP surgeries under one PCM.

So throughout the whole process you understand the mechanism, how these things work. So you've got individual GPs... remember they're all businesses, they're all independent businesses. So they're all limited companies, they're profit making and then they're only in a certain neighbourhood, you have to fall in that certain primary care network which is an umbrella. So they would be your supplier, so they supply you blah blah blah, all of that, so you're under them and the same with the pharmacies, you know, they fall under all of that so you have a... a group of people, a collective. So luckily she kind of got interested and we wanna do exactly what you wanna do. I said yeah, it means good money for you guys doesn't it, blah blah all of that. But, you know what, I also wanna do the right thing so any concerns, whatever you have look, I'm down. But she got... she got like you know what, in terms of like... a lot of them didn't wanna set up or anything like, she didn't care, she came, set up, moved things around blah blah and said look, I really wanna do it, I really wanna give something back, I haven't been able to but...

So we set up, erm, in the Bangladeshi [unclear 0:55:42] XXXX Centre we set up a makeshift surgery, erm, and I think within an hour we had registered, just on that surgery, 'cause we want... they wanted to test it first, they wanted 100, it took us 45 minutes to fill the 100, till our phones didn't stop ringing and ringing and ringing and we had done the 100, it took us about half a day. So our staff had come, we had a really good system, they would come and we booked them like five minute slots, they would come, register, we'd send them off, they'd get their vaccine and they're

gone, make a nice video about how you feel blah blah blah. Then we were booking them for the next one, erm, and a lot of them were like, 'I wanna go Bangladesh, I need a vaccine now, a lot of people are like, 'I need to travel, I can't travel without this.' They were like the 'needle massive' because by the time we had finished that we had a waiting list of another about 230. So within the following few days we did another surgery and we booked another 230 people in, erm, South Asian... these were predominantly South Asian people and the same process that we used. Then we started... when we... when... the narrative kind of shifted towards a little bit in terms of, ah, you know, it's not bad, people are actually not going, look over 300 people have taken it through us and not a single one of them has had an issue. So the worst anyone said, 'I had a sore arm for a little bit' and then everybody was perfectly fine.

So when we were able to show our... share our own stories and our own statistics like look, 300 people have taken it last week and none of them have come back and said they've died or... they're not gonna come back and tell us they died if they're dead, but... and people were getting it because they... they realised that okay my brother's got it, my dad's got it, my mum. So we then were getting calls from all over, all over Birmingham. People were calling from Coventry, people were calling from Warwickshire, people called from all these different places and said, look we heard you guys are doing the vaccination program, and we'd go okay maybe we could shift it a little bit now so what we can do is people are a bit more comfortable, we could just book it into their surgeries. So they've got a massive surgery up the road and we started booking into the surgeries. Then all the other kind of networks had seen what we had done, so they had come and visited us and blah blah blah, and thought bloody hell we need to jump on this, and they were like 'can you help us do it'. We're like, no we're not paid to do this 'cause we've got a massive workload as it is, but I can tell you what to do, I can tell you exactly how we do this, we're more than happy to do all of that.

But then we sat down and realised, okay we need to get to the Caribbean communities, so we reached out to the church, the... the, erm, a massive church, erm, and they do a food, erm, a food bank there, they've been doing that for years, they're one of the biggest food banks in the West Midlands, erm, and the best organised one as well. Erm, and we just said look, let's... let's work one out here and then, erm, I think we... we did about... we did two surgeries there and got about 100 people. But that's massive because the Caribbean community was much more hesitant to the vaccine than the... than the South Asian community and it just flowed from there and I think within a week we must have done over... over 500 people. Yeah, over 500 people, you know, our surgeries and then we booked people in into their own centres and I think by the time we got to about 1,000 the statistics had gone from about 48%, er, in the South Asian community in this neighbourhood to about 57-58%. So we had taken it like a... a 10% mark-up, you know, because a lot of people we had vaccinated were from the B19 neighbourhood.

I: And you were watching those numbers because of the...

R: Yeah, yeah because we've got our... we've got a massive database, I'm talking a fair few thousand. So we send out one WhatsApp message or... or one text or one email and we fill a room with people, you know. So we had that network where GPs if they send a survey out probably out of 10,000 people 5 people fill it in. But because we've got... we told them, we've got relationships with these people, you know, we've got really, really good relationships, they come to us. They feel like they owe us a favour because of how we sorted their benefits out, their housing out, their schooling out, all of these things that they... It's not like we call them and say you owe me a favour, you have to come to it, but with the professionals we try and tell them, 'Look this is what the vaccine is, this is what it contains, this is why it was made so... processed so fast.' All of these different kinds of issues, 'Here's some information in Bengali, here's some information in Urdu, now make your own decision up and then let us know what you think. Speak to your children, you know, speak to them, you know.' Erm, because what was happening is a lot of parents would say no, no, no, elderly parents want to take it but a lot of the kids were saying no, no you can't take that, I won't allow you to take it. You've never taken an interest in your parents' lives and all of a sudden you don't want them to take it because you... you heard something on Instagram or Facebook or some stuff like that.

So we just had to fight the narrative that... and you fight it with facts and so you've got the professionals who [unclear 1:00:35] that this is what it is, this is what's in the vaccine and... and all the people that we've vaccinated none of them had an issue, not a single one of them had an issue. So...

I: This might seem a bit left field but at any point during the pandemic were you aware of any tensions, community based tensions, not within but in terms of hostility either towards South Asian and Muslim communities and/or black communities or was there anything, any additional stresses on maybe pre-existing tensions or racial tensions?

R: No I think people didn't have the time for any of that. They just... they were just so occupied in terms of, erm, err, what they do, how they look after their families or their lives. The biggest thing with people, even the people who are on the road all the time, it was like how do I get back on the road? The thing is like I'm gonna be the only car out there, if I'm selling drugs or whatever I'm doing, it's gonna be so easy to get spotted but no-one's gonna buy off me because there's no-one... no-one's coming out their house. So all the guys on the road that was it, it was how the hell do I get out and no-one wanted to buy. Then it became to a... this is the first lockdown, I think after a bit people started getting joy, for the first time in their life there was no pressures of, 'oh the bailiffs are gonna knock on my door, I'm gonna get eviction notice, have to pay a bill on time' or anything like that 'cause none of them... all of... all of them were lifted. So the first time people had lived carefree. You know, and they got to a stage of okay we haven't been affected, we're... we're not coming across anybody who's got the... who... who... who's infected or anything like that. People just enjoyed and... and after a bit like just took the time to kind of reflect and chill out and enjoy the whole thing.

I: So you've obviously had an active role, oh and I was thinking about hate incidents, hate crimes or things... there were some of the ways that the media news reported, especially around the delta variant, shall we say. Did you observe anything in regard to that?

R: No, because... I know at first we... we used to see things around err, the Chinese people getting attacked and all of that. Erm, a little bit when the Indian variant came out, you know, a little bit when the Indian variant came out but we... we didn't see anything heavy handed to be fair, we didn't see anything heavy. It might have been online but... 'cause people weren't out and about so, you know, there was nothing heavy handed, you know. And by that time you had every single variant in the world, from South African to Indian to Chinese, and like how many people are you gonna start fights and hate, yeah!

I: So I think we're coming to kind of wrapping up but I just want to kind of check in with you about you run a community focused organisation, so in your judgment what did the government response look like and what would be your ideal government response in a situation like the pandemic in terms of meeting the needs of the Muslim community, but more your local community should I say.

R: To be fair, as much as I don't like the government, I think they were very slow in terms of reacting because we were the slowest in terms of going into lockdown and all of these different kinds of things. If you speak to the business people they done the best they can for businesses, they did a lot around furlough, but if they had only reacted only. You know, if we had gone into like closure, lockdown earlier it would have been... you know maybe it would have saved a bit more... a few more lives. But I think the bigger thing was about messaging because the messages were so mixed and that was where the confusion was coming from and that's where the anti... Covid anti-vaxers and all that took advantage of the situation and I think that's what it was because if you can't convince them you confuse them and that's what was happening. People were getting really, really confused and we were getting... like every time, err, Boris made an announcement on a Monday we would get inundated on the Tuesday, 'what does it mean' 'what does this mean', 'what does this lockdown mean', 'what are we allowed to do', 'what aren't we allowed to do'. Our thing is that you know this briefing is happening, you know what you're gonna say, yeah, why don't you pass that message on already beforehand to local authorities. Our local authorities are slow as

jack anyway, yeah, get prepared.

So like something would be announced this Monday and our local authority would react honestly two weeks later. I'm thinking give us a... throw us a bone for God's sake, you know we're trying to get... we haven't got a marketing team who could quickly design a flier blah blah blah, plus we haven't got the time because we're seeing so... Remember we went from seeing like 50 people in the day to 100 people in the day, 150 people a day, while managing a food bank, while cooking, all of these different kinds of things. So we were like, you know, we were four or five times busier than normal and we were like... and we kept saying give us the right information because that's the right information to pass on, you know.

I: Do you think it can be done from a government-led perspective, because you have a very particular role and everything that you've talked to us about - is it your view that it has to be community-led in terms of having an effective response about this? Or do I have that wrong?

R: No, I... I... I know... I know what you're saying. I think the grassroots ground work in the neighbourhood inevitably has to be done by us because people have [unclear 1:06:11] them it hasn't really worked because they don't have relationships in... when it comes to the minor, minute kind of the micro level it has to be community organisation because if you've got to parachute people in people don't respond to them and people won't turn up. So if you did a session now if we didn't do that vaccination session and they did it themselves no-one would turn up. No-one would turn up because you have to, you have to have a conversation with people and yeah you could put a great... and you could do a great flier but what we did and why people turned up is every single person we had a conversation with, yeah, and said look we're gonna be there, don't worry, we've got the languages covered. And they're gonna have a face that they recognise there, so safety, you know, people are... when you're... when you're in fear you need a safety net and we were the safety net for a lot of the people and that's what it was. So people were like okay there's a familiar face, they've never given me wrong information, and that's what it was. So I think one of the things that it showed that there wasn't... as much as we say this there's a collective network and we do a lot of things, between community organisations yeah, but there's not that much of a great relationship within local authorities and community organisations because people think often they can give you the money and that's it but it's not that, you have to constantly be engaged and know. What local authority often do is they go to the same organisations that have been going for the last 20 years and expect different results whereas they're not as connected. We... we don't market ourselves really well as an organisation but you can't mess with us in terms of engagement and every organisation we work with [unclear 1:07:48] we do a lot of partnership work, they know that because when they come here they've seen... they've seen the room full of people.

When they've done... we worked... we did a thing with Generation Rent last week, we were trying to do some things around the housing market and all of that, 50 people... they were seeing 50 people in like seven different sessions and we filled it. XXXX XXXX was the international artist, we went to his show yesterday, every time he did a show people dropped out, we took over 50 people yesterday. So we could fill a room, we're doing something with the council on the 14th around the housing market and there's a few things that we wanna change. Easy [unclear 1:08:22] these are case studies of people who...who... who could tell you real-life stories about what's happening in their household and blah blah blah, how it's affecting them and all that. That's what it is. There's a proper disconnect, there's an absolute disconnect.

I: Yeah, so what do you think are the needs looking forward then, with endemic Covid as they call it, they're calling it now rather than pandemic. What do you think are the needs of the community looking forwards and is Covid something that's still in the public consciousness or in the consciousness locally around here?

R: No, I think it's... it's post now, people have started to forget about it, people have moved on with their lives, people don't wanna think about it. They hear... they hear the occasional story here and there. I think you're gonna catch all that noise from the back innit!

I: Yeah, but if I have to I'll transcribe this one myself so I'll be alright.

R: Okay, yeah, yeah I think people are just... they're moving away from it, they don't... they don't wanna think about it. It's taken too much of their time up, too much of their life and the thing was, you know, what changed the perception was around partygate, what the government did and now they realise, you know what, you've been chatting shit to us like all the time. It's not as bad as it was, you know what, that's two fingers at you, I'm gonna carry on with... I don't care now because it couldn't have been that bad if you guys did all of that. And that, you know, the trust went out the window, absolutely went out the window.

I: Is there anything that you wanted to talk about that I haven't asked you about, with regards to Covid, the impact maybe in this community or other contextual things about the community that I wouldn't know about being an outsider?

R: I just think people... people looked... people looked for a saviour, you know, that's what it was. People looked at okay I... I need... because often we get people who just wanna ask us questions, reassurance. A lot of our queries are reassurances, 'I've got this what does it mean?' That's all it is, and people need reassurance and we needed reassurance in Covid but we never got it. We never got it from local authority, we got it from our funders in terms of... because mental health went on a massive rise. Every single one of our staff members suffered mentally, till this day. I [unclear 1:10:41], yeah honestly and like you know you would... because it's a macho thing isn't it, you're thinking nah, nothing like that would ever, ever happen to me. That guy who came in twice before, he was like us, really normal, all of a sudden broke down, no-one knows why. You know, so more and more people that we meet are fighting it alone, they don't even know that they're suffering and that's... that's due to Covid because they've been locked in a room for too long, they've been over-thinking, they think there's no-one there, they've lost loved ones that were their only support structure ever who only believed in them and things like that. Now they feel like they're so alone and... and really finding it difficult to get back in to some kind of rhythm or some kind of mood of being able to just carry on with their lives.

I think post-Covid that's been the biggest thing although housing and food and all that, while in the eye of the storm Covid was the biggest issue. Post-Covid it's... it's around mental health and it's around if we don't tackle these, erm, underlying issues, the social determinants of... of health around erm, housing, around income, around, you know, services, you know. Why is that people in Lozells are living eight years less than people in Sutton Coldfield, it's only a few miles up the road. Why is it that they can phone the same GP service which is under the same NHS and get an appointment on the day where we can't get one for three weeks. Something is fundamentally wrong with services in our neighbourhood. Either people are taking advantage of us or think that these people don't care, these people are gonna live less, or whatever it is but ultimately they're making the most money on us, these neighbourhoods. And that's what it is, that unless we deal with... and I think this is a collective effort because we need to ask questions about GP services, we need to ask questions about pharmacies, about chemists who provide this service, you know, because people who go... who go to the GP service often are not ill. Often they don't realise it's a debt management issue and because of that they've gone into a zone and they need to see a... a GP, but maybe they don't need to see the GP because someone in the chemist is qualified enough to speak to you.

But if you come to a centre like ours we'll tell you, you know what you need to speak to other women who have similar issues and let's collectively let's have... you know, simple things, let's go away from here, let's have a little walk, you need to start doing activities, you need to start being physically active, you need to start gardening, you need to start... take your mind off that, that's what it is. Not... you don't... everything shouldn't be prescribed, it... it's not medicinal, you know, and that's what it is but we're in... we've put ourselves into a system where that I'll only feel better if I've got a prescription and I've taken something. You know, even if it's two Smarties, you know, it's the placebo kind of effect that I have to take something in order to feel better. But it's not, it's, erm, you have to change your surroundings, you have to be around other people, you have to speak about it. So we... we try constantly to get people to talk about some of their issues, start on a one-to-one basis, if they're comfortable then move to a group setting and... and things like that.

I: Okay, well I'm gonna finish there if you're happy with that.

R: Yeah, man.

I: Thanks for your time.

INTERVIEW 13

Date: 28/06/2022

Duration: 34:47

Participant characteristics: male, Imam, community leader

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

- I:** Okay so erm yes so thank you for taking the time, er do appreciate it. I'll just give a quick overview of what we're looking at for the project and then erm I'll start kind of moving through the questions if that's okay. Essentially we're looking at the impacts of the pandemic within the Muslim community or the various Muslim communities in Birmingham and we know that mosques have had er, you know, a particular erm connections within communities. So our project is focused on that and it's focused on the relationship, I guess, between the community and the mosque and erm support within the community or the things which were impacting most in the community. Erm so I think starting there erm can you give me a brief erm description of of your role here and also the community around?
- R:** Er okay thank you very much, okay I think er I believe that the research that you are working on which is very er beneficial okay for the community. So er my role over here in the Masjid is that I am the head Imam.
- I:** **Mmm.**
- R:** So er being the head Imam my direct involvement with the community is during the congregation.
- I:** **Mmm okay.**
- R:** So er a five time congregational prayers and also the Friday er prayers and many other prayers so that's one. Second is er sermons, so there are many sermons given, so that is my role and also counselling. I mean different issues come up again then we do counsel people.
- I:** **Mmm.**
- R:** So and then for any religious questions that we give answer okay and so this is whole range of involvement with the community. So that's er er involvement okay of the community and the community over here is very diverse, it's not only one er community. So this Masjid established by people from Bangladeshi background, but the users are from everywhere erm I mean every Muslim order can use this okay. So these are Arab communities, Somali community all Muslims they come. So it's a mixed environment, men, women so that the role, that's the community that we are dealing with.
- I:** **Mmm and from your point of view and your experience what were the biggest, what were the hardest things, what were the main impacts when the pandemic erm started to affect the community? I mean thinking all the way back to I guess it's March 2020 or in the early stages where it was starting to become something to be concerned about. What was your erm view on how the community was impacted by that?**

R: Okay so there were many er erm areas of that. The first thing is because er within the parameters of Islam every day people need to gather five times.

I: **Mmm.**

R: So although it is for a religious purpose but it has a very big social impact. What is the social impact? The er erm setting that we are living in, so we have got set works okay and we go to do our work, but when we come to Masjid it is kind of a hub where I meet and I release my emotion okay and my sorrow. I share with it er with other people. So it is kind of giving everybody a er erm a point where they get recharged okay with positivity.

I: **Mmm.**

R: So that was a first hit okay because when Covid came we said no mosque.

I: **Mmm.**

R: Okay, so now people got shocked and that impacted them so they couldn't go out okay nowhere and they remained at home, that created a lot of say domestic problems because er husband, wife and everybody is staying er in the house all the time and they can't go out okay. That created a lot of domestic matters as well. So domestic violences, arguments and things, whereas people are not able to come to here and also the other impact was that what is the erm religious er ruling for that.

I: **Mmm.**

R: Are we allowed to close down? Are we allowed to not okay? So that's another area that the scholars okay have to go and revisit the Islamic er text to give them the er erm right information and kind of it's not only the right information but to convince them.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Because er if you do not have this kind of pandemic over centuries, so people do not know, they only know that this is the right thing.

I: **Mmm.**

R: But they don't know that there is areas okay when you can take er erm any type of emergencies okay there are many other areas okay. So this was the impact okay that er they, they, I mean this was a really okay shocking for them. So that er erm er may okay they didn't want to follow that, they want to come. So that one of the things. The other thing is that the health issues also have got big effort. So the effort is that because you need to when you stay at home er you're okay, but when you come to the mosque okay you come freely, you do whatever you want. But when the pandemic started and the difficult that we, we faced is that to make people go and abide by the er restrictions set in place. So that was a shocker because they don't want to use hand sanitiser, sanitisers okay erm many of them have got alcohol.

I: **Yes I know.**

R: That's a very impact okay.

I: **How did this, how did this work? Because that's a big question. I know there are some which er which don't have alcohol in them but how, how did it work?**

R: Exactly, okay. So we dealt with it okay in er erm sophisticated way. One thing is that first we said that if you are coming to the Masjid you've got to use the hand sanitiser okay. Now if you are not using it okay then you are causing harm for other people to die. So even if it

is not lawful in normal circumstances in emergency circumstances er erm Sharia allows you to do that.

I: Yeah okay.

R: So some people they were convinced, some people they said no I'm not going to go to the Masjid okay. Then we looked for halal options, so once we got the halal options so we gave them.

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

R: Okay, so that's how we dealt with it okay. So people in the beginning they were shocked but later on they got used to it, this is okay yeah fine. So that's how we, OK? Some of them they did use gloves okay so they came over here and they were wearing gloves okay and then they took their gloves off and get the new one. So this way okay they were, I mean kind of coping with it okay. Other impact was that the er the funeral was a big, big, bigger area. So normally someone dies and what do we do? It's a big er erm er incident okay when someone dies in a family. So family okay because in the British society the mosque is the venue okay where you, you accommodate everybody at the time of grief and sorrow. So they come together, they offer the final prayer okay on the deceased and then they er collectively see of that person okay and then they final processions and this and that and none of them taking place.

I: Yeah.

R: So this is a huge impact okay, it's, it's a psychological impact. So I mean it was really, really er shocking okay for people. So er erm then we had to restrict the number, we had social distancing and this and that. So then people okay coped with it but it was difficult. That had a huge impact okay so and then then it comes to the er erm impact that obviously they were government support okay for families and for people er eventually but still some people they got affected of that. Their businesses got affected [unclear 00:09:46]. So I think this is what we can see in one of the areas.

I: Yeah. Going back to the funerals and bereavements were you able to do the er erm you know thinking about the appropriate er practises in and around burial and how was that approached?

R: Okay er what we did okay we followed the er government guideline for these areas okay 100 per cent.

I: Yeah.

R: So what I mean happened okay normally when a body comes okay we do er erm er arrange washing and everything okay and with this okay, when the pandemic started obviously you have got er people died with Covid, people died without Covid. So we actually er followed the government guideline, so with the distancing measure, with the PPE, er with the with the limiting the numbers okay and then also the burial, the number of people can go, only five people went, six people went okay, an Imam went with full PPE and that obviously that was very difficult for people to accept. But because of the er mosque had a very big er erm role in convincing people.

I: Yeah.

R: So er I mean er we had to avoid the – normally we do the funeral prayer in the big congregations but for that we had to arrange outside of the Masjid with proper distancing, with a limiting the number. All that we followed exactly, but it had a huge impact on the people psychologically.

- I: **Yes I can imagine and I think and as well you talked about the economic impacts, were there, were there impacting around, in and around in the community with small businesses, people with er you know. What was the impact with er because there's a lot of small businesses in and around it? So what was that impact like?**
- R: Yeah I mean er I may not be able to talk about okay the individual ones.
- I: **Yeah, yeah sure yeah.**
- R: Generally, generally obviously some people they er I mean for example for a long time their shop was not er open. So er our government support worker was there say for a limited er option that's one thing. Second the other is er some people they there's a process to er go and get it. Okay so some people er may not er I mean er I, I realise and then when I talk to people they said okay they don't know how to do it and some people they did it okay, they got it. But compared to their normal business and support worker was actually matching.
- I: **Yeah, yeah.**
- R: So, so this, this was the impact that okay they had loss okay in their businesses okay. So you can say er that was not I mean huge er impact because of the government support okay, it was at a low, but there was er erm impact okay of that.
- I: **Yeah and in terms of health impacts as well I mean what, what's, what was, what was the impact in in terms of the actual physical impact of Covid within the community? How many people were getting ill, how many people were becoming seriously ill, how many people were being hospitalised? Erm what was that, what was the impact?**
- R: I mean, er in terms of that the effort of Covid okay, I believe that in general across okay the community and every household got affected okay. Okay and I, I, I mean I personally we got affected okay, in our Masjid, loads of okay our admin people okay and, and the workers okay, they got affected with that. We had to, er one Covid we were allowed to even keep the Masjid open for some time. We had to close it down for three weeks because of this.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: When you were allowed, when government said you are allowed to keep it open but it's still okay and every household has got a Covid case, Covid situation okay and some of them were, but not everybody were hospitalised.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: So I won't be able to give you exact er number, but generally our er regular congregation can stay between 250 to 300 okay or sometimes 400 okay and obviously we did the distancing measure, it was only 18 people okay and Friday congregation is 1,000 plus people.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: With the er Covid er measure okay, only 220 people something like that okay.
- I: **Yeah, yeah.**
- R: So that was the thing, but generally everybody had the you know the health impact okay of the er the er Covid okay situation and er from the mosque arranged vaccination and er for the vaccination I think erm about er 60 or 70 people okay er in the first one and then the second one probably er about 40 people okay we vaccinated, vaccination van. Because people they go to a GP because ...

I: **Yeah, yeah.**

R: So because there were various options so not everybody came over here. Our one was actually and those were 55 plus or something like that okay, so for them. That's what I'm saying and the issue is that er whether you take the vaccination or not.

I: **Yeah.**

R: That's another issue obviously where you will have discussion!

I: **Many times.**

R: But from the Masjid okay er erm being the head Imam, you know religious guide for them okay, I, we, our stance was that okay. You allowed okay to take this vaccination okay and you should go and do it, take it. Why? Because I mean if the erm medical erm I mean studies say that this is safe to take it, then there is nothing erm and obviously er there are many controversial issues okay around it okay and there is many controversial messages okay and videos okay that made people scared. Okay so that's when okay they had views okay then erm I mean they decided not to go ahead. But from us okay erm we you are allowed to take it and what are the reasons okay. So, so people got convinced and they, they did take it. Majority, the majority people take it but still there, people who say no I don't want it.

I: **Yeah. Erm and thinking about religious observance as well erm and I think er the timeline with the first lockdown made Ramadan and Eid or there were issues around er obviously you know Ramadan and lockdown, what was that like for the community?**

R: Okay, again a very good er point you mention erm erm I mean this is a big, this was a very big shock for the community er erm because erm like, for example, in my lifetime, I haven't seen that okay. In Ramadan I wouldn't be able to come to the Masjid.

I: **Yeah.**

R: In Ramadan okay I wouldn't in during Eid okay I won't be able to get out there to congregate.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So that was a very big okay shock for the community and er there were erm I mean not ready to accept this. So some of them okay, they had er a retaliation okay. They are, they're er I mean er speaking okay er roughly okay, phoning the office, coming to the Masjid. But we had to er erm counsel people er using our scanners, using all our media to make them understand okay quoting okay from the er emergency measures that has been taken in the past in the, by our predecessors okay, then they understood okay what to do. When they got the evidence in there okay and then they come down okay. And then also er in this sort of pandemic okay rather than er being the cause to spread it okay. What is the benefit okay and what is our religious obligation to keep it okay under control and to help it.

I: **Mmm.**

R: So although it was very difficult.

I: **Yeah.**

- R: Er erm for everybody, but er to to er I mean kind of help the greater society and to be with the greater erm I mean understanding okay. They I mean that was okay difficult, this is very difficult for me.
- I: **Yeah I can imagine. I can imagine. And also thinking er did you have a perception did you feel that there was a change in, or that the pandemic had an effect on how people approached their faith?**
- R: Yeah. That's how, yeah definitely. Why? Because er the Orthodox and conservative view is that don't er erm go and take all these er emergency measures. When you go and take that, take that dismiss, you don't have reliance on God.
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: And one of the faith aspect is that is that er you fully trust and rely on God and you don't go for all these, okay. So if you learn God okay why do you need to er erm distancing? This means okay, if you erm standing next to one another okay, you think they're okay, the er virus will come to you. So where is your reliance on God?
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: Okay, so that was a very big controversial, controversy okay among the Muslim community. So, so this means that you are approaching your faith in a different way now.
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: Yeah so some of them okay erm I mean the Imams for the religious leaders those who say that, no we must distance, we must er erm avoid okay shaking hands, must use this, this, this, this. So they were pointed saying that okay you do not have trust in God.
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: Which is a big allegation. So now if you take a special measure at the time of er erm erm pandemic or in a similar situation does it mean that actually you do not rely on God?
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: It's not. Because prophet himself he taught er erm that you go for the mains first, then rely on God.
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: So for example, one companion came and then he said okay I left my er camel outside the Mosque okay and I rely on God. So prophet asked him okay have you tied the camel and he said no. He said why? He said I rely on God. He said no, tie your camel first, then rely on God.
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: So our bit is, is to er erm do whatever necessary and then rely on God and that is true reliance.
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: Okay, but you do not do your bit and then you say you are relying on God, okay that's not a true reliance. So er erm to make people understand this whole point.
- I: **Yeah.**

- R: It was was a big mission. Okay it was a big mission okay because er and obviously er I mean it takes time.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: For people to get used to it. So that's the, that's the er approach and er erm I mean that's I mean does it matter that needs to be convinced okay and people need to be convinced as well.
- I: **Yeah, yeah, yeah.**
- R: This is how you come and approach Islam and approach religion okay in a different way.
- I: **Yeah and did you notice people becoming more observant and becoming more engaged with their faith within the pandemic? Were there people coming into the faith in the pandemic?**
- R: Yeah.
- I: **Sorry, sorry.**
- R: The, the, the erm I mean views of conversion okay meaning Shahada or this sort of thing okay. In our community over here we haven't er erm seen okay that. But we've seen people where er first you get to come and to congregate okay and do a kind of be erm with the, with the religion. Okay but er the other issue was that for some times due to the pandemic okay people felt a big detachment.
- I: **Yes, yes.**
- R: With their faith.
- I: **Okay.**
- R: A detachment. What, what, what it is for example say okay you aren't able to congregate. Now many people they come to the mosque and they congregate okay and then they socialise. The other thing is that they do go for personal study. So they read Koran, they read, they do a lot of things. Now that really was stopped.
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: When the mosque was closed obviously both were closed er erm but when we opened for them to come and stand okay with distancing okay and offer their prayer. But the text okay was not allowed to touch.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: Because you okay saying why. So that made a bigger impact that people over a long time okay they have become detached ok from religion.
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: So that, that, that was er I am and to my understanding of it there was a bigger okay impact. That's one. The other is it affected the er education of the children.
- I: **Right yes.**

- R: I think it's not only the religious education, it's the secular education and the er you know er secondary school and all the education of it, was, was affected. Because we all went online and online education of it has got no control. You are just delivering, but the receiving end, okay how they are receiving you do not know.
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: So that had a big impact as well.
- I: **Yeah, yeah.**
- R: Okay.
- I: **Were you able to erm were you able to provide the majority of education online or?**
- R: Yes we were able to provide it under supervision because we did er use okay Zoom platform okay, Skype platform okay and obviously all our users okay they were given the ID okay for that. So we were able to give and for our erm er mosque you know er servers okay and the guidance of it obviously we've got mosque radio scanner. So that was, and also the Facebook so we used that and that was helpful.
- I: **And were they the platforms that you were using to put the information out when you were talking about the other examples, you were kind of trying to present...**
- R: Any explanation okay for any, any, any issues okay that needs to be er erm given okay I mean explanation for that okay. So we used that okay for those purposes.
- I: **Yes so radio scanners and social media.**
- R: Yeah and also it was a er means for us to get them connected with the Masjid.
- I: **Yes, yeah.**
- R: The social media and platform and the radio scanners okay that was very helpful during the time of the pandemic okay.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: Because I remember that people are coming over to us afterwards so they're saying that we heard your voice okay, we heard your voice, we heard er that er topic okay. Ah that was good, okay, I mean helping us okay, okay that we are not isolated okay and we are not, in other words...
- I: **Yeah. So if you had to, because I know we only have a few minutes now I guess. But with erm I'm thinking if you had to describe, I know you've talked about a lot of things, but what do you think the main role was that the mosque itself played for the community in the, in the worst times of the pandemic?**
- R: Okay er the mosque did er a lot of things. Number one the erm people needed to understand what's going to happen.
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: And er at which direction we are going.
- I: **Yeah.**

- R: So people okay they were relying on the er on our er you know media outlet or maybe all the information that we gave. So that's a big help. The second is mosque helped okay people to er erm buy er erm their food and shopping and anything because er there were many elderly people who were not able to go outside. So mosque volunteered okay and and announced okay that anybody need any help.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: And we gave them our numbers and then social media okay we shared with them. We received a call, we bought things and then they paid later. So that was a service okay that being offered to everybody. So that was a big help okay to the public and their needs. The other is for the funeral. Er the mosque erm er staff and volunteer they had to risk their life okay er for example to go and involve in burial okay in washing okay because no-one wants to put himself in trouble, in risk yeah. But with the PPE and everything, but the danger I suppose was great okay. Took a contribution okay. So and these, these, these are the things we did during the pandemic okay and indeed it helped the people.
- I: **But do you think the communities or what do you think that the, the feelings in the community might be about government's responses to the community's needs in the pandemic?**
- R: Er government responses okay people are not unhappy about because *[phone ringing]* can I take?
- I: **Of course yeah, it's okay I've paused. Alright that's recording now, yeah sorry erm. So I was asking about erm the erm thinking about erm the feeling about government responses in the community and whether erm what the community's perspective was on the government response to their needs within the pandemic?**
- R: Okay. Er the main frustration okay of the people okay was for the government okay is that the medical services ...
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: Have become very, very, very disturbing.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: And er in terms of dealing with Covid and response in the financial issues I believe that the people er are not unhappy okay with the government response.
- I: **Right.**
- R: Er that is er my understanding okay.
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: Because also help us there.
- I: **Mmm.**
- R: But the main issue was medical help.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R: And this was a very big thing okay and and okay er I mean er post-Covid okay is the same thing is happening.

- I: Mmm.**
- R:** So for any appointment, for any sort of investigation and diagnoses okay you are looking at six months, one year and it is a big suffering.
- I: Yeah.**
- R:** So in the post er, erm er I mean pandemic okay I would say that er the government need to look at this er seriously.
- I: Yeah.**
- R:** Okay, because er the NHS service okay is at the moment, okay, is really, really okay frustrating.
- I: Mmm.**
- R:** Okay and also the er among the people the fear of er a pandemic is not there. I, I, I, I believe but among the government institutions the fear of er Covid is still there.
- I: Yeah.**
- R:** And they are er I mean maintaining that and as a result people are suffering.
- I: Mmm.**
- R:** So still okay the people, patients are being seen over telephone.
- I: Yeah.**
- R:** Okay which is okay obviously I mean er nowhere near when you see face to face.
- I: Yeah.**
- R:** This is we suffer okay to get any hospital appointment okay, erm is, is er really, really hard. For myself erm I mean I think everybody for one eye appointment okay two months. Okay optician in two months okay for any appointment okay. In, in many cases I know people they were dying, they were serious issues, six months, eight months now, so that is one of the area that we need to look at how to improve.
- I: Yeah.**
- R:** In terms of other responses okay it's, it's not er erm er I mean people will always have okay erm mixed views whether we go for vaccination or not okay. Some people are saying okay no, no, it is, it is too er erm target okay the minorities okay or something like that. These are not actually er you know er logical approach you see, this is an emotional kind of statement vs logical statement. So I don't think that there is a problem in that. But this is one other thing, the other is er mosques and er businesses okay those who had er no income for example okay or they come and support okay. Because they were struggling okay for these er so may not be erm qualified to get the government help okay. That might be er erm an issue. So government may give help to get to those who okay are not qualifying for that okay but considering their situation. So that situation okay overcome now but after er the pandemic okay we need to er look er at this strategy okay that in future if in any of this situation how we will tackle that.
- I: Yeah.**

R: Okay so.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Er is there any special measure okay erm need to be taken in place. So that is to be researched and looked at. But the pandemic okay er also have positives, so for example okay the learning opportunity had widened. Because before the learning opportunity was only face to face, now the standard learning has become the norm now.

I: **Yeah, yeah.**

R: So also it has many other okay like the big big companies okay and obviously it's okay, they're now selling many okay er but people can do work from okay. So there is positives as well okay positives things okay. Er and when the GPs are treating people okay over telephone that is also a positive okay as well. Because they didn't think of it before. They might be able to categorise er patients who can be, can be treated over telephone just a phone call again and give the solution for those who need okay and not limiting them on the phone okay. So there are strategical er erm changes that need to be taken.

I: **Yeah sure. Is there anything that you wanted to mention or talk about erm that we haven't covered?**

R: No it's fine okay.

I: **Okay. Well thank you so much.**

INTERVIEW 14

Date: 13/07/2022

Duration: 01:09:11

Participant characteristics: male, community leader

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: Well thank you for taking the time obviously, it's greatly appreciated and erm but I think it would be really useful if you could give an insight into the role that you have erm with [an Islamic Burial Organisation], and also to erm to, to just give a brief insight into that role I guess. But could you describe your, your role?

R: Okay erm first of all thank you for giving me the opportunity erm erm er because I feel that it's a key part of the, you know, learning process moving forward.

I: Mmm yeah.

R: Erm definitely erm yeah. I'm the chairman of the Birmingham [Islamic Burial Organisation] and I'm also the vice chairman of the National [Islamic Burial Organisation].

I: Okay.

R: So we were in as a National [Islamic Burial Organisation] and Birmingham [Islamic Burial Organisation] we were initially involved at a government level early on in er sort of end of January/February when things were kicking off in Italy.

I: Mmm.

R: So we were called to attend Downing Street. So basically they approached er the erm you know the Muslim Council of Great Britain to say that you know because Muslims and Jewish people need quick burials and, you know, the government said, "We don't know how you people conduct your funerals and things like that so we need somebody on the board". The Cobra group, you know, when there is a disaster anywhere they have a Cobra meeting and then they, you know, decide what to do and how to plan it and everything. So they invited erm the chairman of National [Islamic Burial Organisation] on to that meeting initially. And then erm er what happened is that er erm he nominated, you know, the five different entities across the UK, so myself was one of them.

I: Mmm.

R: In the Midlands, so my area sort of I was assigned an area from Northampton all the way to Stoke-on-Trent, the bigger chunk of the country was my responsibility to coordinate, you know, and to get the information out to Muslim communities regarding Covid.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: So based on the figures that the government got from Italy and the situation in Italy. Because, you know, they had it before us.

I: Mmm.

R: Yeah, you know, a lot of er quotes and figures were, you know, banded out to say look we can either be expecting, you know, almost eight times the number of casualties just in Birmingham. West Midlands just compared to the annual, you know, we have about eight, 800 Muslim burials in Birmingham and they were caught in like something like 2,400 within a few months.

I: **Right okay. So over what time period, sorry, sorry to, to interrupt, but erm. So over what time period would it normally look like 800 erm burials and so over what time period was that looking ...**

R: Yeah the figures that was er for the like a year before we did about eight, just over 800 burials.

I: **Yeah okay.**

R: In Birmingham. These are the Birmingham City Council Cemeteries I'm talking about yeah.

I: **Yeah, yeah.**

R: Erm so there was only three main sites in Birmingham that did erm, you know, burials er for Muslims which was Kings Norton, Handsworth only the one who pre-booked because of the two cemeteries are full now. So those who had pre-purchased graves could do the burials. But at that time when Covid started there were still provision for, for burials at Handsworth at that time anyway.

I: **Mmm.**

R: Er and then there was also Sutton New Hall, the new Birmingham City Council cemetery assigned for Muslims as well. So those are the three cemeteries. But then what happened is [the Islamic Burial Organisation] call immediately, we called a meeting on a Wednesday night or I can't remember whether it was a Wednesday night or a Friday. I think it was a Wednesday night, we called a meeting at er private girls, Muslim girls school. We invited all the people because we'd been doing this for over 15 years now with the burial council. So we already had context in Peterborough and Coventry, Nuneaton, people who are doing involved in burials and some of them funeral directors, some of them just mosques operated. So we invited all of them to the meeting and then we had some doctors who gave us how the PPE - unfortunately the biggest stumbling block was getting all the misinformation from Public Health England.

I: **Okay.**

R: And nobody knew, nobody knew exactly how to deal with Covid initially.

I: **Yeah.**

R: You know everybody was sort of er hospitals and some doctors and people weren't sure, because they themselves were unsure of er what they were dealing with, you know.

I: **Mmm.**

R: So initially there was a lot of er erm uneasiness and anxiety and fear er in the communities as well. There was some part of the community who were also, you know, saying that oh this is all false and this is just frightening people and, you know it's about 5G and the masts and all of this. There were so many things, you know, rumours going on. But anyway we continued as part of the government's strategy and all that, we continued our work anyway. So we called a meeting and we showed them what PPE was required. What PPE looked like, because many of them didn't even know what PPE was. Erm and we told them that the vulnerable category would be, you know, anybody over 60 years shouldn't be involved in our washing and showering and all that. So at that meeting we realised that most of the meetings right across the UK, most of the mosques

and burial, you know, burial rituals in the Muslim community were done by people over 50 years old.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: Yeah, so that was our initial problem. So then the, what you call it came on, you know, the shutdown came on, lockdown came on, the first lockdown.

I: Mmm. Can I just ask you quickly

R: Yeah.

I: Just ask you with that meeting where you were, you were kind of briefing and conveying, you know, the information about erm PPE and, and so on. Could you give me an idea of, of how many representatives from mosques or funeral services or funeral directors, sorry, might've been present? How many people were you informing in that, in that context?

R: It was over 40, it was over 40 representatives from different Mosques, towns, cities and towns. Yeah. We only invited, you know, like the funeral directors and people who are involved in bereavement rather than invite mosques.

I: Yeah.

R: Because Birmingham alone got over 200 mosques.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: So over the years we've been dealing with like this for 22 Muslim funeral directors, of which about 12 are very active and they do many funerals.

I: Sure, yeah.

R: Yeah, some funeral directors within the city who only do like 10/12 funerals a year. So we don't really engage with them. I mean we informed them of what's happening with the rules, regulations and things like that. But they're not proactive sort of thing.

I: Yeah.

R: But the main ones are the ones who, you know, we deal with. So those key people attended from Coventry, Leicester, Birmingham, Muslim Council of Leicester, Muslim Council, Burial Council, Coventry, all over. We had Peterborough, Northampton people, we had people from Stafford. So we informed them of what PPE they needed. We also invited the Birmingham City Council er erm interim manager.

I: Mmm, mmm.

R: To, to the meeting and we informed him that this is what is expected and this is er predicted that these are the number of deaths we are talking about and what is the City Council going to do about it? Because we were just about coping with what we were doing daily on a normal day, five/six funerals a day and now we're going to have three times more. Erm.

I: Yeah.

R: So how are Birmingham City Council going to accommodate? So he was involved initially as well and then above me a coroner was involved, because er then I, I was also sitting on the excess death committee with Birmingham coroner, the military, the police, the hospitals, the city council, you know, executives around the, around the West Midlands. You know, Coventry and

Warwickshire, Birmingham, Solihull, Walsall, Wolverhampton, Sandwell, all the council representatives were on there. So there was a large group, it was called Excess Death Group. So it was chaired by Louise Hunt, the Birmingham senior coroner, and that's where the Nightingale Hospital erm and all that was organised through that group of people.

I: Uh hu, okay. So erm so with erm you were going to move on to talk about lockdown erm. So I think these are quite early stages, so you were being consulted you say towards the end of January, February of 2020 when the concern was about what had happened in Italy.

R: Yes.

I: Erm and then I guess it's early March, it's, it's ...

R: Yes.

I: It's March where we, we get to lockdown. So erm how, what was the picture looking like going into lockdown in terms of had, had you already seen an increase in the frequency of, of deaths? Was it ...

R: Yes.

I: Yeah okay.

R: There was quite a lot of, at first, you know, some of the Muslim Community basically didn't er erm take on board what the government was saying, some part of the community, not all. Erm they were still saying, "Oh this is all false, just frightening people", and, you know. Erm things like that. But we, what we did nationally is we, we organised er a committee er of scholars, professional Muslim doctors who work in hospitals and deal with PPE and theatres and things like that and then we had the Shaira council, people from the Sharia council as well. So every single night we were having meetings every day right, trying to sort out how we're going to deal with this, what are the provisions. And then the other stumbling block was, you know, er there were rumours saying that er people Muslims are going to be cremated.

I: Okay.

R: Because they were, there wasn't enough provision in the City Council. There was not enough storage in the hospitals, erm, you know, erm the certification side of it. So everything with – we work with the government er erm and the, the local authority to facilitate it as much as possible, make the pathway for registration and, you know. So everything was done er electronically.

I: Mmm.

R: Then we found out that most of the mosque also had, you know, washing facilities within the wudu or washing area, the communal washing area, so then we couldn't use those facilities either. Because if we, if we wash, you know, one body we have to decontaminate the whole area.

I: Mmm, yes.

R: Plus all the people who are involved before, prior to Covid, were all over 60 years old.

I: Yes.

R: So then we had to organise er one PPE, how to don and doth PPE, then we had to er also organise a training course for young people to help to wash and shroud, you know, carry out. So then we went to police to get permission to, to have those training sessions erm, but we organised that through internet and then we, we sent them in all the information pre the course and then physically they attended a course in Perry Barr or in Aston at the Muslim girl's school. Er we got

permission from the police to help that training course erm. So we staggered the appointments so we give everybody like a half an hour slot. So they came in er they were given a er a time to come in at certain times erm. Everybody was checked if they had any symptoms to the Covid and all this, that and the other. Everybody was wearing masks. We had doctors who give professional – doctors and er erm consultants who work in hospitals who deal with PPE, give training of how to don and doth PPE. The, our one step course was, one step was finished and they moved on to how to shroud and wash and shower.

So all the young people came forward and we had over, you know, over 400 people trained erm within the Midlands area basically. Similar things happened up north and down south, so we divided the country in five, five sections erm, you know. There was a north east section, a north west, Scotland, Midlands and the south. So there was five representatives who were coordinating all of these things across the UK.

I: Yeah.

R: And then erm initially the problems were that, you know, er we were being told by Public Health England and some hospitals that it was given bodies in a sealed bag, saying, “Do not open”.

I: Mmm.

R: So this was a big, big issue for everyone, erm and then er, erm what happened in Birmingham one of the Imams of a mosque passed away and his son is also an Imam and said, you know, there’s no way I’m going to bury my father without washing his body and showering him.

I: Mmm.

R: I don’t care if I have to die, I don’t care if I have to sign a piece of paper to say, “I’m taking this on my own, you know, responsibility, but there’s no way I’m going to put my father in the grave without washing him and showering him. Because he’s been an Imam, he’s been giving the prayers for 35 years, for me to bury him without showering and washing him I’d never be able to live for the rest of my life.

I: Yeah.

R: We consulted, you know, he passed away at XXXXX Hospital.

I: Okay.

R: We got in touch with XXXXX bereavement team erm a lady called XXXX XXXX who I’ve been working with over 12/14 years now. Erm I contacted her and said, “Look this is the situation can we use your facility to do the washing because at the moment we don’t know whether we can use any of the mosque facilities,” and what have you.

I: Mmm.

R: This was the first incident that we had in Birmingham at that time and a lot of Muslim funeral directors also unfortunately were, they were scared themselves, they didn’t know what they were dealing with.

I: Yeah.

R: And so they were reluctant, you know, to handle bodies as well.

I: Mmm, mmm.

R: Because then [the Islamic Burial Organisation] as a group er we made a decision that we want, you know, once it was approved by Public Health England and the doctors gave us advice that, "Look we are dealing with Covid patients who are, are alive," and you know alive and the PPE we've got is far erm, it's not adequate. This is what some of the doctors told us that you've got better PPE.

I: **Yeah, yeah.**

R: So you can wash and shower as long as you cover the face and the nose as soon as you open the bag. Just cover the nose and the face so that there are no gases coming out of the deceased.

I: **Mmm yeah.**

R: And just minimise the movement of the deceased so that they're – and then just was, you know, or just rinse over and then at least you've done something rather than doing nothing at all.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And we consulted, we consulted some of the er scholars across with all different faiths as well.

I: **I was going to, sorry I was going to ask you the person at XXXXX Hospital I think the signal dropped a little bit, who was working there or was that an inter-faith connection when you were asking about using the facilities?**

R: She allowed us to do the washing in the mortuary at XXXXX Hospital that's the first Covid patient that was washed and shrouded in Birmingham.

I: **I see, okay, okay and so how ...**

R: We, we realised that this is now an issue so then erm what happened [Birmingham Islamic Burial Organisation] bought a container.

I: **Mmm.**

R: Er you know one of these er trail foot containers, we kitted it out with the washing facilities er and then we had another tent next to it, you know, a marquee where, you know, ladies if it was a lady's funeral they would don and doth in the marquee because you couldn't use any other mosque premises, premises because mosques were also closed at the time. Plus with Covid situation we didn't want to contaminate the areas and then having to decontaminate everything after every funeral or every washing and showering. So then we had a marquee and we had loads of volunteers who were willing to, you know, come on board.

I: **Mmm.**

R: So we used the marquee to don and doth and then they would go into the container do the washing and the shrouding in there and then er and there was very, very limited only the immediate family were allowed to come and visit the deceased.

I: **Mmm, mmm.**

R: Is how we did er and then we made a video erm what happened is we were getting calls left, right and centre from all, all over the country saying that, you know, what do we do, what do we do? So we, we actually one of the young doctors he said, "Look why don't we just make a video of how we're doing everything". So we made a video, put it on You Tube and it went viral all around the world and we were getting calls from Canada, America, South Africa, Barbados, Spain, France, all over the place, you know, asking us. You know, "We've seen your video", we are now

confident to carry out this ritual, you know washing and showering erm the last rights for the Muslim people and just explain how you've gone about it or maybe need some more advice or whatever and we were getting enquiries from all over the world.

I: Wow and so where was the, where was, you mentioned the storage container and the marquee, was that in Birmingham or where was that located?

R: Yeah what happened we, we installed that at XXXXX mosque [a large Mosque in Sparkbrook] in Sparkbrook, it's the centre.

I: So XXXX [large Mosque in Sparkbrook] is that XXXX XXXX [another large Mosque in Sparkbrook] or is that different?

R: No, it's a different one, it's on, it's opposite, it's diagonally opposite on the other side, you know, just opposite.

I: Okay.

R: XXXX Road, is it XXXX Road? Yeah XXXX, it's on the corner of XXXX Road. So they have a big car park and one of the funeral directors who was operating from that mosque was very proactive and he was already very er, erm basically working with [a Birmingham Islamic Burial Organisation]. XXXX XXXX and all of them they were not willing to touch any, because they, their funeral directors weren't sure what to do, XXXXX mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] also wasn't sure.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah plus all their premises are within the mosques.

I: Yeah.

R: So they couldn't use the premises.

I: Yeah. I know erm I think well I, this is something that's come through with the research. I think we've, there was another erm I think XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] had the additional storage, some additional storage, a small amount of additional storage as well.

R: Yeah so what happened is that once, once the numbers started going up and the hours, the hours in meetings every single day with the coroners, hospitals, looking at, you know, storage spaces in hospitals, mortuaries all around, funeral directors, all Muslim and Muslim funeral directors. Every single day we were having meetings erm the excess death meetings, every single day we were having meetings nationally with the National [Islamic Burial Organisation]. We were having meetings with the hospitals, regular, you know, it was like a full-time job. You know, I work for XXXXX [a camera company] and I should really give credit to my boss and XXXXX [employer] for allowing me to do all of that during that time and I was still working as a full-time engineer. I wasn't, I wasn't furloughed at all, but I was managing all this coordinating with some of the colleagues around me as well.

I: Wow and so, so moving into, I guess, we're in lockdown and the, the things are gaining momentum. I wanted to ask you about access to testing because it could be the case erm earlier when we were talking about whether you'd noticed an increase in deaths within the community? Was there a point where testing became available and you could confirm that these were Covid related deaths?

R: Okay it was a lot of, there was a lot of er erm I, I would say lack of knowledge and also lack of er process within hospitals. Some hospitals were giving us bodies in body bags.

I: Mmm.

R: Some hospitals were just in a shroud or a bedsheet, yeah with no nothing on them. Er the paperwork didn't say it was Covid. But when we went to collect the body the mortuary staff would say, "Hang on this is a Covid, you know, Covid patient". So er because there, there was obviously as you probably know there was Covid wards assigned in hospitals and things like that. So when the mortuary staff went to collect the body they would put a note on there to say it's a Covid. Some, some mortuaries did that, some mortuaries didn't. So there was a lot of er, you know, there was no set procedure in hospitals. Public Health England didn't know where to turn. One minute they were saying something and the next minute they would change.

I: Mmm.

R: And what they said and what hospitals said was completely sometimes opposite.

I: Right.

R: Yeah, so it was a total shambles to be quite honest. So then Muslims our, the Muslim community, National [Islamic Burial Organisation], you know the Birmingham [Islamic Burial Organisation]l. We then got involved with the Sharia people, we got involved, invited the consultants who work in hospital, Muslim consultants and senior throughout the UK to deal with the advice. What was the best practice and how we could move forward with this. Then er we called a meeting in Blackburn and in London of all the Sharia different faith groups to get a fatwa to say that. Because, you know, initially some people said that this is like a war situation. So according to Islam you don't have to wash the body.

I: Yes, okay, okay.

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

R: So they said, you know, you can, you can just bury them without washing them because it's like a war, you know, it's a pandemic or a war situation. So during the time of war erm Islam er permits people to be buried without washing and showering and all that. So anyway, so there was a lot of conflict, you know, some people are doing it and some people doing it, but then we came to a conclusion er after consulting different doctors and you know what was safe and what wasn't safe. Because what was allowed, what wasn't allowed or what was, you know, SIP, best practice and everything and then we can go from there, and that we could wash the bodies. Then we consulted the Jewish community on this as well and different faith groups, Sikhs and, you know, all different faith groups were involved as well, er erm, everybody had their own opinions obviously erm. But then we made a decision that we could wash the bodies provided we had adequate PPE and we were, had people who were qualified to wear the PPE and, you know, certified with PPE, you know, or no-one knew how to don and doth properly.

I: Yeah.

R: Plus they should be young enough er with no, no, no or any medical issues that would affect the family and we made them sign, you know, a disclaimer form as well, just in case if something happened, you know. So we covered ourselves that way.

I: Yeah. Do you think that will have a legacy, the training and the shift towards younger, younger people taking on those skills and that, and that understanding and their responsibility. Is that something that's continued do you know?

R: Yes, yes, yes, has very much continued, that's one of the good things that came out of Covid is young people became proactive who were not involved and, you know, when we first put out for on our [Birmingham Islamic Burial Organisation] website that we were going to run this

training. We got thousands of phone calls and thousands of e-mails to say, "I would like to volunteer". Some of them had qualified as scholars, you know, and they're young, in their 30s and 40s, but they said, "We've never been given this opportunity to actually physically do one". Because in every community it was the elder generation doing the washing and the showering.

I: Yeah, yeah and so ...

R: Very, very much. It's, it's, it's been a positive change.

I: Yeah, yeah. As things gained momentum how would you describe where things were at their peak in terms of the impact for Muslims? And also I'm interested in your perspective on whether the impact or how far the impacts of Covid erm were specific for Muslim communities, whether Muslim communities were harder hit and, and so on?

R: Okay I've made some notes, if I can read some of the stuff in here yeah.

I: Yeah sure.

R: Okay, social breakdown. Covid worked to Covid, you know, the initial questions they sent me, yeah.

I: Yes, yeah, yeah.

R: Again at the beginning of the pandemic what has been the main impacts on the Muslim community?

I: Yeah.

R: Social breakdown. What's happened? Because the pandemic, even now, there is the social, you know, breakdown of communities now. You know, before Covid people used to walk into, you know, the Asian culture was you don't give prior notice coming to visit them or whatever. You know, a lot of families or siblings you just walk into their house or, you know, ring the bell and say, "I've come to visit," your mum or your dad or whatever, you know what I mean. Erm but now people are reluctant to go into each other's houses. Erm it also made people wary of, you know, going to sibling's houses or, you know, visiting the sick and everything. Erm the other thing is, you know, the Muslim culture and the Muslims is we embrace each other when we meet. Yeah, so that's all stopped now, people are reluctant, even now, some people are reluctant to, you know, even shake their hands. Erm, initially there was a, a large contingent of Muslims who didn't believe in Covid.

I: Mmm.

R: So those people continued and you won't believe it, in those communities that didn't actually, you know, take precaution, there were so many deaths. I, I personally experienced collecting bodies from those houses.

I: Okay.

R: We attend one, one house in Sparkhill erm and that community basically a lot, their Imamsab or the leader of the mosque was basically saying, you know, "Everything comes from God this is just a test, this is just, its not as bad as things are made out. You know, there were people saying things like this, you know what I mean and erm the community didn't take any precaution. Erm some of them they weren't even wearing masks. When they went to collect a body and the height of the pandemic there was over 80 people in the house.

I: Right.

R: When you weren't meant to collect those deceased bodies. We said, told them, "If you don't get that we're not going to come and collect the body". They were literally outside myself, and two other brothers who had to collect the body. We had to tell the whole house, "Everybody, get out of the house, disperse yourself before we can go and even collect the body," and we were wearing full, you know, full PPE kit, the masks, the big erm what do you call it? The gloves, everything, the suit, you know, the HazMat suits and everything.

I: **Mmm.**

R: And there some of them were laughing at us and saying, "What are you doing, this is not necessary," and all this crap. But we had to, because we didn't know what we were dealing with.

I: **Mmm.**

R: So some of the things, right so I put social breakdown. Secondly, no more social interactions so people are not like embracing and greeting each other now. You know, some people are still reluctant.

I: **Yeah.**

R: The worst part, the worst part of everything was not being able to, to visit their loved ones in the hospital.

I: **Mmm.**

R: That was the worst part, because, you know what, once the ambulance took them you didn't know what was happening to them. A lot of the elderly patients didn't even speak English.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So the families had no information of what was going on in the hospital and, you know, when they ring up the hospital number it was constantly busy. Er even if somebody answered the phone getting the information of the loved one. So the hospitals were not prepared at all and that was the worst part and then people getting phone calls from families saying, "Please, please can you find out what, you know, what the state of my mother is, what is the state of my grandad is or you know. People getting, been trying for three days trying to get in touch with the hospital, we can't go to them. We tried to go to the hospital, the police are there, they're stopping everybody to into the hospital. Er so what do we do now? And then some, some patients actually er I lost a few, a few close, very close friends of mine erm and you know some patients who got through to the right ward and everything, they were being told, "Oh they're doing well," and then the next day within hours they get a phone call can you come quickly, you know er, he's in the last breath. And then within two hours they're gone. You told us two hours they were doing well, they were making progress.

I: **Yeah.**

R: You know what I mean. But there was a lot of er, we were getting, you know, calls from families who were really anxiety, breaks, breakdown, people crying on the phone, erm, things like that. Even, even health workers, you know, people who work in hospitals were phoning us for help, asking us, you now, "We are seeing death every day, there's no respite".

I: **Yeah.**

R: And we don't know where to start. Then we organised, you know, because families wouldn't attend their loved ones, the nurses were telling us that, you know, we haven't got time to attend for every, every, you know, er end of life patients. We've got so many, you know, our priority was like, you know, looking after and treating. We were running from pillar to post. So we can only do what we can do within the resources we've got available. So and we organised a

Qur'an cube, you know, you get like a er erm CD player to put next to, you know, on the table and it plays, plays the Qur'an. So, you know, er so at least if there is somebody there. One evening I remember categorically at around after half 11 er our er from XXXXX hospital, she's the chaplain, she rang me at half past 11 crying on the phone, she's saying to me, "I can't take it anymore, because from morning to evening I'm going from one room to another room, to another room, all I'm doing is holding the hands of a person who is, you know, is about to die".

I: Yeah.

R: She said, "I can't take it anymore, it's, it's just too much".

I: Yeah.

R: This is what was happened. So this was the biggest stumbling block and you know, er after that the second issue we had the biggest issue was people couldn't attend the funerals of their loved ones, because according to Islam we had to bury them as quickly as possible.

I: Yeah.

R: So the loved ones were – if they were Covid patients you couldn't attend the funeral, they couldn't even see the body. So that was very, very difficult and you know what the legacy of that is still continuing because people didn't get closure.

I: Yeah.

R: And that is mentally affecting people.

I: Yeah.

R: But this was quite, quite, you know, it was for, for me personally, you know, initially I was doing the washing and the shrouding and everything, but what happened is that erm I took a back stage once we had all these young people trained, I was just coordinating er erm with the, the volunteers that we had. We had a team of volunteers who knew how to process the paperwork. We had volunteers who knew how to do the washing and the showering. We created WhatsApp groups so if, you know, er you know, people would volunteer for two hours, three hours, whatever, depending on you know their availability and everything and we made rotas and, you know. My son was involved, there's quite a lot of young people in the community were involved. So we had a group in the Aston area, we had a group er we were using XXXX XXXX mosque [a large Mosque in Aston] which is it's got a facility outside the mosque. So we built a er marquee, er we had a marquee outside so where we could bring the ambulance in, offload the deceased and then take it inside and then washing, showering and then bring it out and the view would be. Once we er we, you know, the next of kin we will invite like the immediate sons and daughters only.

I: Yeah.

R: With the masks and everything on them come and view in a sealed er erm er box, coffin with a glass window on it so they could just see the face. So this was very, very difficult for the family, you know, they couldn't physically, you know, get involved or be part of the, you know, the washing, showering and, you know, part of the, the whole end of life er process.

I: Yeah.

R: So this er erm and then there was also the anxiety about the clinician situation, there was a lot of rumours and videos going around saying that Muslims are going to be cremated. But er, you know, er we managed to get everything resolved at a government level through some MPs and, and, erm I mean that would have never happened anyway so. But there were people sort of, you know, putting videos out without er proper information.

I: Yeah and I mean er ah this feels like a bit of a, er, erm, well I mean it's a question about the impacts, your reflections on where you've described in terms of how that is, you know, the legacy of that you've already mentioned people's well-being is, you know, affected in, in the long term? I mean, you know, what's your view of the impact of all of this, you know, all of these things that have, the community have been going through?

R: Firstly I think there was a lack of communication from the government for a start.

I: Yeah.

R: Okay. They, they were coming out with mixed messages.

I: Yeah.

R: One day they're saying you can go in, next minute they say you can't go in then every hospital had their own rules and regulation.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah, so you didn't know where you stood with hospitals. GPs were reluctant to come out and help families.

I: Mmm.

R: Yeah because nobody knew what they were dealing with er lack of information, lack of you know government direction or Public Health England erm even coordination between Public Health England and, and erm er the local hospitals. You know, I contacted er erm what's his name, er erm our local Birmingham [Local Public Health Authority], what's his name?

I: XXXXX.

R: XXXXX XXXX, yeah. I contacted him several times, one you couldn't get hold of him, two his secretary wasn't, didn't know the answers, you know. When I asked her questions about whether we should be allowing, you know, next of kin getting involved or whether we even with PPE erm we collected money on er, you know. There was no initial help from the council or, you know. It was very, very frustrating on the part of the Muslim community. I think er now since then there's quite a lot of groups now. I, I have meetings regularly on a monthly basis. There's a faith group er where the police coordinates all these issues regarding bereavement and any issues in the community. There's also the excess death committee still continues even now as I speak. You know we have meetings, regular meetings even now er. Now because there is a lot of links between the, all the city councils and the health authorities and everybody, [the] senior coroner Birmingham said we should continue with this group so we can have meetings every like month or every couple of months.

I: Mmm.

R: Because obviously Covid hasn't gone away. Secondly it's, you know, it has brought a lot of good coordination between all the authorities and all the hospitals, erm all the bereavement stakeholders basically, the cemeteries, everybody continue with this. It has brought quite a lot of er things through, you know, expertise around the table as well.

I: Mmm.

R: So we're continuing with that. Initially people were reluctant to accept until deaths started happening in their respective communities. Erm mentally, it's mentally affected people on a long term. I get er, you know, I deal with a lot of doctors, so many of them come back, even now you know when I talk to them they say they're getting more and more people coming into surgeries with mental problems, not getting closure. Plus the social breakdown of communities as well, you

know, before people could visit each other and things like that. Erm now people are reluctant to go into one another's houses and, you know, meet up and things like that. So er mental health has been a big issue.

I: Yeah.

R: Erm there were like two Muslim groups, some people accepted the pandemic, some people didn't.

I: Mmm.

R: And those who did not accept, you know, pandemic and they were saying, "Oh it's just false". You know, they were sending out figures from, we know for a fact that within the, within in the, you know you can just go. People the baseless facts they were sending, you know, Birmingham has only done so many funerals and last year if you compare the figures from last, it's the same, you know, all these figures. But you only need to go to a cemetery to realise, you know, in every cemetery if you go to Leicester for example.

I: Yeah.

R: Leicester cemetery yeah it wasn't as full as within the last few months or er within the last year, couple of years, it's the excess area is all full as well.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah, even in Birmingham, you know, Handsworth cemetery in November of last year er yeah in 2022, 2021, November I think that's when it was the allocation was exhausted so we moved to Sutton New Hall. Now if you go to Sutton New Hall is more than 500 graves already.

I: Mmm, mmm.

R: You know what I mean.

I: And you're saying you, you'd only ordinarily have 800 in a year.

R: Yeah in a year in Birmingham, yeah.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: So there has been an impact definitely.

I: Yeah.

R: Because I see it first hand, you know, and you know there, there were people, vulnerable people who, you know, some of them, I lost a friend who was healthy. He was actually helping me set up after the initial er erm shutdown. He was at XXXXX mosque [large Mosque in Aston] in Aston in XXXX Road. You know we refurnished the whole place up, you know, the washing and the shrouding place to fit new extra freezers and things like that. On a Wednesday afternoon I went to see him, er he phoned me while I was at work in Telford. He said, "Can you pop in on the way home because we need to fit some lights, so I need to know where you". This was on a Wednesday and come Tuesday he passed away.

I: Oh, yeah.

R: Within five days er, but he was one of the guys who, who refused to take the vaccine.

I: Right, right.

R: You know. These are the things, you know, erm over reaction, confusion, no certain or definite processes, all information from Public Health England, hospitals, GPs, government, local authority, there was no one body that we could turn to. There was conflicting information.

I: **Mmm.**

R: We as an organisation were prepared as [Birmingham Islamic Burial Organisation] was involved with National [Islamic Burial Organisation] and excess death Cobra committee meetings. So people were even phoning me and saying, "Why, why are you frightening people?" I used to get abuse phone calls as well and saying that you are part of the conspiracy and all this, that and the other, but I took no notice to be fair, I just carried on what needed to be done. Because I used to see death every day, every single day.

I: **Yeah. Mmm. Yeah, I mean, and I mean, what's, what do you think the feeling is now? Is, is the sentiment that Covid is, is in the past, is there, are there ongoing, I mean, how are things compared with when things were, were at the peak?**

R: Definitely, there have been a steady decline slowly, slowly. Erm the other er, I mean people have accepted it and with the vaccination programme, I think people have now come to terms because, you know. If you meet people in, in your, in your mosque everyone has got a story to tell. Somebody they know passed away through Covid.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So they now realise that it wasn't just a hoax, it wasn't just, you know, somebody, everybody, you know, they know somebody either within their own family or within their extended family or even within friends, families, somebody passed away through Covid. So now it's slowly, you know, the, the message has sunk in and now people have got themselves vaccinated. There are still a, a very minor, small minority who still haven't got themselves vaccinated, but the majority have. The other thing is it's forced those people who were reluctant to have the vaccination, to have vaccinations, because they want to go abroad for holidays.

I: **Right yeah.**

R: You know what I mean.

I: **Yeah, yeah.**

R: So that's also been, er you know, er the, but the majority of the people I mean sensible people they all, they all had vaccinations. They all have the boost, a lot of them have had boosters and everything. But yeah, so overall I think, I think, pandemic hasn't gone, gone away in my opinion, there are still cases arising at the moment, because I get cases, I get figures from hospitals and bereavement services. So it hasn't gone away. The only difference is now hospitals, doctors are better informed of how to deal with it.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And er how to best cope even families are now better informed and, you know, know what to do with it. I, I, myself had Covid twice. The first time I had Covid was October/November 2020.

I: **Right okay.**

R: And it was er no 2021, last year, sorry, erm it was really bad, very bad and my oxygen level was down but I didn't go to hospital. Erm I have, one of the local doctor's friends and he said, "If you go to hospital they're going to stick you into the Covid ward".

I: **Yeah.**

R: And er, you know, if you don't get the right attention and right er erm er doctors looking after you, you know, it can be worse, it can be fatal. So I, they got myself er a oxygen tank and I was using that as and when needed and er they told me what to take the supplements and stuff like that and then I was using the steamer. I was steaming, you know, hot water and breathing in steam with eucalyptus oil and all that and that's what. Yeah it was difficult, very difficult erm. My wife had Covid but she still hasn't recovered fully. She gets tired erm she gets er, you know, erm er every now and again she she's more prone to infections. Although she, she was diabetic anyway. But she's still diabetic. But she's more prone to infections and stuff like that, so we still have to be careful.

I: **Of course, yeah.**

R: Communication in hospitals was very, very poor, that was a big, big let down.

I: **Mmm.**

R: Erm yeah, you know, as I said earlier, you know families were being told, you know, your next of kin is making progress and then two hours later they get a phone call to say that they've passed away or can you come quickly because they're on their last stages or whatever. You know what I mean.

I: **Yeah, yeah, yeah.**

R: You know, that was, that was and you know the people started doubting the hospitals that they're killing people off.

I: **Mmm, mmm.**

R: Because they've been told one minute that, you know, they're doing progress, they had breakfast this morning and everything and then two hours later.

I: **Mmm.**

R: You know what I mean.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So whether they were lying or they were just making it up, we don't know.

I: **Mmm, mmm.**

R: Economically erm many small businesses closed down, especially the restaurant business, the wedding venues, hospitality, entertainment, erm, lots of them were affected really badly.

I: **Mmm.**

R: Many restaurants closed down erm er even the wedding venues, a lot of people were made redundant, erm. So economically it was, it has affected the Muslim community.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So, sorry about that.

I: **Er sorry I think the signal dropped just for a second.**

R: Right food banks have been er a daily er event now erm too because of Covid, many families are struggling. Erm obviously recently all the price hike for, you know, energy and fuel and everything else. But even during Covid, it was er lots of erm, mosques and communities coming

together er providing hot meals and also erm, you know, food banks up and down the country. So that's, that's had a big impact as well.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: People have lost jobs, you know, erm and things like that, so.

I: Mmm.

R: You know there were a lot of people who were doing like part-time jobs, you know, in, what do you call it erm, schools and things like that.

I: Yeah.

R: They couldn't go to work, obviously they were not on a permanent salary, erm so they were struggling to make ends meet. So, you know, erm a lot of professional people also lost jobs, you know. You probably know, city centre it was like a ghost town.

I: Mmm, mmm, yeah.

R: Still there are businesses in the city centre still struggling to recover. Er as a XXXX [company] engineer I visit a lot of customers and er erm that the, one of the business owners called XXXXX XXXXX on XXXX Street in Birmingham, he was telling me he nearly shut down. There was no help from the government, erm for furloughing staff and everything. He would have to shut down his business.

I: Yeah.

R: He got rid of two staff so he's got only three people now.

I: Mmm.

R: Yeah so there was a lot of economic, you know, people were affected quite a lot.

I: Yeah and I think er just thinking about erm if in terms of faith do you think, do you think there was an impact on people, observance of faith or did the pandemic have an impact on or did faith help people through the pandemic?

R: I think, I think the faith played a big part. You know, erm what happened is that, you know, Muslims, as I say, we believe that torture was destined for you by God is, it's going to happen regardless of yeah. Er many people believe that, you know, whatever was destined had happened. But what happened is that erm you know precaution in Islam it says, you know, precaution is better than cure.

I: Mmm.

R: Yeah we should cure, you know, you should take precaution whatever is in your hand you should do that. The rest you can leave it to God, you know, or whatever is destined is going to happen. You know that sort of thing. So many people, you know, took that advice and you know did as much as they could. Obviously there's always a group of people who are ... Just bear with me one second my battery is ...

I: Sure.

R: And the other thing was, you know, during the first lockdown, you know, Ramadan came.

I: Yes.

R: And the mosques were closed.

I: **Yes.**

R: So that had a very big and negative impact on the community, Muslim community as a whole throughout the UK and beyond because they thought it was double standards by the government. Erm saying that, you know, when Christmas came round you know they changed the rules for Christmas, but for Muslims they didn't change, they didn't have any provision for Muslims.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So that created a lot of erm, you know, er. I used to get abusive phone calls from families and, you know, people who weren't pro-Covid, saying that you know you people are helping the government and all this. I mean social distancing was initially, you know, because we, in communication prayer we stand shoulder to shoulder.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And the social distancing part of it and all that was difficult for especially the elder generations to accept and we know some, some mosques were actually banning older generation people to even attend the mosques. They said, "You can't attend if you're over 65 or 60 years old and especially if you've got health issues, please do not attend mosques".

I: **Oh okay.**

R: But these were, you know, and they had like, you know, security people standing on the, on the door and turning people away which was really causing a lot of problems in the, in the communities.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So there was quite a lot of er, you know, erm but some mosques were very strict, some mosques were relaxed. You know, they said, "Whoever wants to do what they, as long as you". If you, if you, they left it to the individual basically, you know. If you, if you came to the mosque and you, you weren't very happy with the set up you just cover yourself, make sure you've got, you know, a mask on and gloves on and provided all that on site anyway, so.

I: **Yeah.**

R: And everybody had to carry their own prayer mat. Because we kneel down, you know, and what have you, so there is no physical contact with the next person, sort of thing, and or yeah. These were things that erm the mosques, you know, they did everything and then the sanitisers and, you know, they provided all the, all the, all the things anyway.

I: **Mmm, I've spoken to erm people who have responsibility for, for kind of conveying information and they were talking about the questions around, you know, whether practices are halal or haram including things like vaccination.**

R: Yes.

I: **So I think with that in mind, erm you know, is that something that you think would remain in, in, or some of the mosques? Is that something that might remain with ...**

R: Unfortunately there is not one single body that you can console all the, all the Muslim, you know, different er denominations of Islam.

I: **Of course, yeah.**

R: Yeah, so everybody has got their own, you know, interpretations of the Qur'an, interpretations of the Sharia law, erm. So but what has come out after Covid I, from my experience, is that a lot of the young scholars, Muslim scholars have voiced the opinion that, you know, we live in a society now that where we have to be more liberal thinking rather than, you know, being so negative about a lot of things. And, you know, so there is a change. I think there is a big change in some areas of er, er, across the UK. Erm I think the young, because you know the young scholars are born here, educated here, some of them have, er are university graduates as well, has been on the, you know, Sharia er erm er, you know, they've gone to erm Muslim er, erm institutions to qualify as well. As er, as erm Imams and things like that. So I think er, er, the impact moving forward I think it looks positive in that respect.

I: **Mmm.**

R: Erm I also feel that the coordination erm between mosques and cities across and Muslims, I'm hoping anyway, that it will, it will improve because of this. Er because, you know, until, until, if you, if you know about Muslims in, in the UK or Europe in the western er countries, most of the Imams and er, you know, leaders of community have all come from back from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan. Erm they didn't have the command of English. Erm a lot of them, you know, Imams in mosques er now most mosques have got English speaking Imams anyway, a lot of the mosques have. So things are changing slowly. But er I think the mindset has to be changed first in the community. There is still this concept of, you know, the mosque leaders being the elderly, elderly people in the community.

I: **Mmm.**

R: Which is, which will be difficult to remove because, you know, the elderly people they still think they have the right to be separate to these and, you know, chairmen of mosques. Er until that generation I think disappears slowly erm it's going to be difficult er in that respect I think. Er but some communities have moved forward. I mean I'll be, the mosque er here on XXXX Road [large Mosque in Aston] they've brought in all young people running the mosque now and everything is on internet. The letters are accessed every, every programme is, you know, is accessible to anybody all over the country through their You Tube channel and all this. So, you know, and most of the sermons are all in English.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So they are, mosques who are doing all these things. But er, you know, it's, it's going to take another generation I think of, you know, er this half a generation now to move forward.

I: **Yeah and is that, I know time is er running out. So is there anything that I haven't touched upon or that you wanted to mention or make sure was part of, you know, the interview?**

R: Erm uh I think that on the government side I think there needs to be more coordination and involvement. I, I, personally I felt that, you know, until this Covid situation the government did not pay any attention to the report, the Muslim, you know, community. Even now a lot of, I feel, I visit cemeteries up and down the country erm as a national, a vice chairman of the National [Islamic Burial Organisation]. Erm, you know, I feel that the city councils as well look at the Muslim community as second class citizens in many, in many instances. You know in the cemetery you see all the prime, prime, places all in cemeteries are allocated to, you know, the white community. They, the Muslim community are given like edges of the cemetery, you know, although Muslim and Jewish people are the largest community who do burials.

I: **Mmm.**

R: Yeah. Most Christians now or white people, you know, or of faith or no faith they do cremations.

I: Mmm.

R: And you probably notice that in the next year or two there is a lot of private cemeteries now springing up everywhere because of this reason, Muslim cemeteries. Secondly is that, you know, the councils are, you know if you look at councils up and down the country how many Muslims do they employ in the bereavement sector?

I: Yeah.

R: There's none, hardly any.

I: Mmm.

R: Right. I'll give you one example, at, at XXXX XXXXX Hospital in Birmingham, they've got a lady who works in the bereavement service, yeah. She's a Muslim lady, she's been there for a few years. Whenever there is a Muslim death in XXXX XXXXX Hospital and if she's on duty and it's a complicated case, it goes to the coroner or whatever, the, she goes and meets the family and explains the situation. Straightaway the family are, you know, assured that, you know, what she's doing is the correct process, everything. If a white lady, yeah, goes and explains the same situation, you know, the family get all, you know, wound up and everything because they feel that, you know, the lady doesn't know that their faith requires straight to quick burials. I know those ladies, I deal with these ladies all XXXX [name] you know, XXXX XXXX [name] and everybody. They are fantastic people, I've worked with them, yeah, for many years. They know all the requirements, but that er, that erm that er perception by the Muslim side of the, you know, that she doesn't even know that we have to bathe them within 24 hours and she's telling us it's going to take three days, you know and things like this.

So there needs to be more Muslim people in bereavement services, definitely. It will make a hell of difference to the staff in hospitals, it will make a hell of difference to the families, it will make a hell of a difference even in the coroner's office. I've never known a Birmingham coroner having a Muslim person working there.

I: Mmm.

R: I did mention to the senior coroner, you know, er there needs to be a change. I even erm mentioned this to XXXX XXXXX who is the chief exec for services in Birmingham City Council that they need to employ Muslims erm, you know, in cemeteries and places like that. You know in Leicester just recently you know, in Leicester, Leicester City Council employed Muslim people to dig the graves in Leicester. You know, because it's our religion, a lot of those employees would do it for free.

I: Yeah.

R: On a weekend they would come if they know there's a funeral to be done, they would give up their free time to come and help. You know, because they think it's, you know, they're going to get rewarded in the here after.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: You know what I mean. So it's, it's, it's, we need to change that perception in city councils and government departments where they should employ Muslim people in key places like this where it's going to be, make a big difference, not only to the services, but even understanding.

I: Mmm.

R: You know. I'll give you a simple example, er, erm, I, I've been working for XXXXX [employer] for 26 years.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah. My story came out, I was awarded er, erm, er, er, I was honoured by the Queen in the New Years' Honours List.

I: Mmm.

R: So one of my colleagues who works with me he, he informed my manager and then anyway I didn't, I didn't want to make a big fuss of it, anyway. But then it came out and now the director, one of the directors got in touch with me and they said you know XXXXX [employer] is a worldwide brand, we should promote, you know, your achievements. And then, when I, when er I told them what I did during pandemic and why I got awarded and all this, that and the other, now they made a big issue of it in XXXXX [employer]. I'm now nominated as an ambassador for XXXXX [employer]. So XXXXX [employer] is a, is a brand name erm, yeah they were one of the main sponsors of the Commonwealth Games.

I: Yeah.

R: So now I'm, I'm an ambassador for the Commonwealth Games for XXXXX [employer].

I: Wow, okay.

R: You know what I mean. I would never have thought that would have happened three or four years ago.

I: Yeah.

R: You know what I mean. But now there's more awareness in my own company, people when I get managers, people ringing me when they have bereavement issues. You know, I work, there's very, there's only a handful of us Muslims working in XXXXX [employer], but even the non-Muslims they ring me and say that my father-in-law just passed away, what's the best way I, we can deal with this or, you know, how erm you know what is the process? Or you know things like this. So it, it makes a difference, you know, when people, you know, erm. So er we've done funerals for not only Muslims, Sikh families, Chinese families, we've help non-Muslims, Muslims, you know white people, Jamaican communities. You know, we, we've, you know, it's, it's not, because as humans we have to get on with one another. We've got, you know, we've got more things in common than differences in my opinion.

I: Mmm, mmm.

R: So we have to work together.

I: Mmm, yeah.

R: You know the best practice is, you know, to learn from one another's experiences, to learn from one another's coaches, that's the best way. Because otherwise, you know, there are people who don't like, you know, unity and things like that and they want to create, you know, differences and rules and all these standards. To me, you know, at the end of the day we are all, you know, from the same father and mother, Adam and Eve.

I: Mmm.

R: The skin of all colour, the skin of, you know, the colour of our skin doesn't make us any different to be quite honest.

I: Mmm, yeah. Well thank you for all of the insights that you've contributed, it's been, you know, you've, really interesting to hear your, your accounts and I think erm, I'm going to stop recording now

Interview 15

Date: 03/08/2022

Duration: 39:31

Participant characteristics: Female, community leader/organisational lead

Key: -

Interviewer - I

Respondent – R

S.I - sounds like

I: Cool, okay. Right, so the first thing I'll start with is basically, just asking your views on the beginning of the pandemic, what are your views on the biggest impacts? And I think this is the question, one of the last questions we talked about in the focus group. So, for you, what were the biggest impacts of the pandemic?

R: For me personally, I would say the biggest impact of the pandemic would definitely be obviously, I lost three very close family members and it's just about obviously, in our culture, when someone passes away at the Mosque, all the family gets to grieve together. In terms of COVID, we didn't get to see any family members because obviously, nobody was allowed in each other's houses, and obviously my grandmother passed away in the hospital, so she passed away on her own, so nobody could even be with her. In terms of even, I know the hospitals were struggling being short of staff and everything, but it was even harder, I mean, we do understand that they were short-staffed, but it was very frustrating calling the hospital trying to find out what's going on. They're not telling us anything, just saying she is in the room and someone will let you know but we heard nothing, so when she did pass away it was a bit of we don't even know if she passed away then or hours ago. And then, in terms of even receiving the body, normally you take it to the Mosque and all the family gathers, and we get to see the face.

In Islam, the family gets to wash the body before we do the final prayers of the Janazah, but we didn't even get to do that. So, it was very hard for us in terms of knowing that we couldn't even see her for the last time. We couldn't get to see her face, we had to see it through a link online. And then, we couldn't even go to the burial because it was only 10 people and because they were convinced that it was COVID and she passed away from COVID, it wasn't even 10 people that actually went to the funeral. So, it was really hard for our family. Obviously, I had work and had time off but then I wanted to get back into it because it was just, obviously when you're with family, when you're grieving with family, it's different because you get to share how you're feeling and stuff, but we didn't get to do that. So, it was just in terms of getting back into work and obviously, we were quite busy with the food packs. I do the UK food for [an Islamic charity], so it was just about putting my head down and getting into it.

And we obviously had two more deaths in the family, so I mean, it wasn't easy, but it was just more of, you know, and then looking back on it now, it just all feels so unreal that it all happened. Sometimes I look back at it, it just feels like did it actually happen and then, some people feel, like, when you talk to some people you say how was the pandemic? And some people are like, you know, it was good in terms of working from home and all this. But I just feel like it was...so much had happened in the pandemic for us to the point, some of our family members are still not over it because I lost two nephews, one was aged 11 and one was aged 13.

I: Gosh, I'm sorry to hear that.

R: Yeah. So, I mean, it's very hard for obviously their mum and dad who are still struggling. So, I mean, it is hard. I'd say it was a very big impact, but I'd say the only thing that kept me going was probably work because of how busy we were, and we had Ramadan around the corner. So, it was just about prepping for Ramadan, doing the hot food packs, which were getting delivered for Iftar time, so literally all the fasts to open and stuff, so it was just keeping myself really busy that got me through this, otherwise if I'm being honest, mentally I don't know where I would be.

I: **And I mean, in terms of timeframe, is this fairly early on? It sounds like it's full lockdown when this is happening.**

R: Yeah.

I: **And do you have relatable experiences in terms with people that you know, friendship networks, individuals who have been through similar types of impacts? Or do you think your experience was unusual?**

R: To be fair, I wouldn't say it was unusual because I knew quite a lot of people...I mean, we had one volunteer who was volunteering for us in 2019, she started volunteering with us. She had a lot of mental health issues that she was going through, to the point where I still remember sitting at work once and I got a call. I got really close to this volunteer to the point where she wasn't comfortable being at home because she had a lot going on, so she would come into work and sit hours on end at work, and then, we'd finish work and she'd come to my house and she'd be with me until like, 10 or 11 in the night just to keep her from home and what was going on. So, the pandemic was quite hard on her as well because I got a message from...because I was on her emergency contact list, so I got a message to say she had been taken into hospital.

And because she had tried to obviously, overdose, so mentally for her I know it was really bad because it wasn't easy what she was going through at home, family, it got too much for her. So, it got to a point where we had to contact a few people just to get her out the house and find accommodation for her to live at and just be away from family and stuff. So, I guess, it was more of it doesn't matter what you're going through, it's just about being there for others. If you think you can help someone out there, it's not about just...I mean, I didn't think to myself at this time I'm going through too much myself, I can't do it, like I can't be there for someone else if I can't be there for myself. But it was just about helping others too because it's just the way...you helping others, you're probably helping yourself in the same way.

I: **Yeah, and so again, thinking about...is this something where erm, I'm starting to think about how gender might play into things in terms of lockdown, changes in working patterns, people working from home instead of going out into the office. I'm also thinking about things like home-schooling and those kinds of things that might have had impact on households with young children in. I mean, were you aware through your family or friendship networks of what kinds of impacts they had in the home and stuff?**

R: Yeah, I mean, erm, my own family members that had to work from home, like, erm, my husband's sisters, they started working from home right from the beginning. To the point where they are still working from home.

I: **Yeah.**

R: It got to the point where they did feel like it's getting a bit too much now, like, because sometimes it's good to get out, to meet with obviously, your colleagues, change of scenery, erm, so I think at the start it was just about everyone thinking okay, we're working from home, you know, it's nice working from home because you're in your own comfort zone, you

don't have to get changed or anything, you just work from home. But I think it's come to a point now where a lot of places are still working from home, but I don't think they're mentally thinking about people's health in terms of you do need to get out there and obviously, change of scenery really helps, being in the same place five, six days a week, working from the same place sometimes gets too much and seeing the same people in the house can also get too much. And in terms of kids as well, I would say, obviously, my own family the kids that we do have in the house, erm, it's a bit much because kids prefer going out. Obviously, they want to be more active. It was very hard to keep kids locked up at home to say okay, you can only go in your back garden. I mean, there were some people I knew who didn't even have big gardens or didn't have gardens at all. What were they supposed to do? It was really hard.

I: Yeah, yeah. And I guess your working life is, sort of, interesting in that you're out there in the community. So, did you feel like there was much impact in terms of restrictions in terms of what you normally would have had planned, in terms of your own professional development or in terms of planning ahead in terms of career and so on?

R: Erm, to be fair, I would say yes it was. The impact was there because obviously, never ever thought that there's going to be a pandemic and there's going to be a lockdown. Erm, in terms of the local community, erm, I would say there was an impact in terms of knocking doors and stuff, talking to people because, erm, there were a few people that we did go knock the doors and stuff, and just you know when you can just tell from the outside, the curtains were closed, the blinds were done and you just think okay, erm, obviously mentally some people got very, erm, cautious about the virus and stuff and didn't want to, you know, open the blinds thinking...or the windows thinking that the virus is going to come in. So, obviously mentally, a lot of people went through different things.

I: Yeah, yeah. I think you were describing in the focus group as well that [the Islamic charity] catered for at least as many non-Muslim members of the community as Muslim members of the community and so on. But I think with focusing in on the impacts with Muslim communities specifically, did you have a sense that COVID impacted more significantly for Muslim communities?

R: Yes, it did. Even in terms of Ramadan because obviously, normally what it was, the Mosque downstairs is normally open in Ramadan, so you get the people that either live on their own, or obviously, like, don't have enough money to buy themselves food. They would come downstairs, and they have this thing where everyone sits and opens their fast together and stuff. Erm, we didn't have that, erm, through the pandemic. So, it was more about delivering food for these people, like people on their own, but I also sensed that erm, there were a few people that were too embarrassed to call or ring.

I: Okay.

R: Erm, I'm not saying, like, it's...it was ego or anything, but it was more of just being embarrassed to ask for help.

I: Yeah.

R: Erm, so there were a few people that recommended people to say that oh, we think that this person needs help, but they don't to ask. They don't want to...so, at this point, I do remember once we went out, erm, knocked on the door but just made it out that we're...because in Ramadan what we do is erm, in the Asian communities what you do normally do is just, erm, you cook food one day for your local community and you just go knock on family and friends around, erm, your area, and you just go knock their door and give food, like a food pack. So, we gave the food pack, erm, and I just remember seeing, erm, the smile on this person's face and thought erm, you know what, we could do it

everyday but change up the person, so they don't feel like they're getting help or we're giving help. So, it just feels like, you know, it's just something we're doing from the Mosque.

I: Yeah, and I think, you know, in terms of religious observance, what are your views on the impacts that the pandemic might have had on how people engage with their faith? And also, I mean, you've talked a bit about the restrictions on how people were able to engage, but what are your views on the impacts there in terms of people and how they engaged with their faith identity as a result of the pandemic?

R: I mean, I know it was quite hard for a lot of people, especially the elder community, as in like, the men that would always come five times, go to the Mosque to pray and stuff. So, I know it had a lot of, 'cause even with my own family members, there's quite a few that go five times a day to the local Mosque if it's down the road to just go and pray and stuff. Erm, but I just feel like it did, kind of, bring, in the lockdown because if there's one person praying at home because no one's out, everyone's at home, so it's more of like, okay, everyone let's pray together, even erm, like the kids would join in. So, it's just about making them learn about your faith, about how it is and giving more time to your own religion because sometimes, if I'm honest, you get so busy with work that you...we're supposed to pray five times a day, that you forget and you just miss, and you just think oh, I didn't get time to pray. Whereas there was no excuse. Yeah.

I: Yeah, yeah. But in terms of, kind of, the faith element, did you have, kind of, any experiences with again, friends in your networks where people erm, where faith had an aspect of drawing people together in...through a crisis, essentially?

R: Erm, I mean, erm, other than what I've said before in terms of like, obviously, people passing away and stuff. Other than that, I can't really think of anything on top of my head right now.

I: Yeah, yeah. Okay. Erm, and then, I guess thinking about interventions, obviously, you were leading some of these interventions, but what do you think were the things that were most significant in terms of community needs or the needs of Muslim communities working through the pandemic?

R: I would say number one would definitely be, like, the food packs and the, because we even gave out personal hygiene products and stuff. But erm, the other one I would definitely say is, erm, I know my colleague mentioned that we do, er, we did the Eid for the disabled kids at CATs. We were told that basically, obviously, when you go to a Mosque and stuff, not every Mosque allows kids to come, erm, because them kids, obviously some are autistic, autism, disabled, wheelchairs, so they don't allow kids like that to come into the Mosque either probably because they don't let others pray, erm, wheelchairs probably just not allowed in the Mosques. So, we had decided that we're going to do a special prayer for these kids, like, erm, err, like give them a time slot for Eid day and do an Eid Namaz for them. So, in 2019 I had myself organised at JC College, it was an Eid day event because we were told from the parents that they don't even go to family houses because, erm, it's either the houses aren't big enough, or they don't erm, because their kids make too much noise, they don't feel as welcome enough.

So, we did a big, erm, Eid where we had bouncy castles, face painting, erm, Mendi artists, food, erm, we had all sorts of activities. Erm, and then, obviously the pandemic came, so we decided okay, we're going to do this Eid Namaz. Erm, it kind of meant a lot to me because erm, we had at the end, I mean, we had parents in tears, like mothers and stuff whose child was probably like 14, 15, saying that she's never been the Mosque. His dad has never taken him. This is the first time that he's ever entered the Mosque and stuff, and she's very grateful for this. And we've done that ever since. Erm, we've been doing it twice a year now, so we've been doing it, to be fair, that's one of the very important things for me each year as well because I know how much it means to the families to be able to come there as a family and pray the Eid Namaz.

- I: Yeah. And I think as well, you know, as times are moving forward, it seems like...and as you're saying maintaining those kinds of things. Are there other things that came out of the pandemic, which are maybe ongoing for the Muslim community?**
- R:** Erm, I think it's more of because we used to do the Friday food bank every Fridays, if anybody needed any help or needed a food pack. But I do feel that we've gotten more busy ever since the pandemic, erm, because normally we'd get like, six or seven people every Friday that would come and take a food pack. Erm, it wasn't just giving them a food pack, it would be like okay, have a coffee, talk to each other, talk to whoever you want. Getting forms filled out if they were struggling to fill out forms, making calls for them. Now, I feel like they're a bit now, on Fridays, erm, it is a bit more busy. They sometimes come just during the week as well. Erm, they can call in, erm, if they feel comfortable and just book in a slot, and we do have more, erm, with all these grants and stuff going on. Downstairs we have a booker who is there, takes in the calls and erm, calls people in. I would say he's really busy because every 15 minutes he's got an appointment where they help people for, you know, all these grants and stuff. Erm, that they're entitled to, and I'd say it's got a lot more busier.
- I: And that's in terms of supporting people who are applying for funding for themselves. So, it's [the Islamic charity] helping erm, members of the community or other community leaders apply for grants for funding for their initiatives. Is that...am I understanding that right?**
- R:** Yeah. It's [the Islamic charity] with XXXX XXXX downstairs with the Mosque. Yeah.
- I: Yeah, yeah. Okay. Erm, so yeah, okay, let's talk about government-based err, responses, I guess. And I think erm, we did touch on this but I mean, what are your views on how the government responded to the pandemic? Erm, and you can take any examples you like.**
- R:** If I'm totally honest, in terms of the government and stuff, it was very confusing at one point because it was like we were allowed to do something, but then we wasn't. And then, I still remember it was very frustrating when it came to Eid, erm, because it was like, Eid was the next day and it was announced at 10pm that okay, there's restrictions, you're not allowed to go to family houses. I still remember how frustrating that was because you think to yourself, like, it's not fair, because when it came to other holidays, like Christmas for instance, Christmas went ahead and like, how was that fair? Like, that wasn't fair at all. And then, giving orders like okay, you can go out the house, but you can't go out the house. You can work from home, but you can't...you can go into the office, but then you can't go into the office. Work from home if you can. So, it was very confusing. So, erm, if I'm totally honest, I'm not saying we didn't follow the government rules, we did. But we did it from our aspect, like, in terms of if there was something that needed to be done and we thought okay, erm, we can do it where we won't get into trouble, but erm, we're probably pushing the line a little bit, we still did it.
- I: Yeah, yeah. And so, in that...as well, just remind me where exactly is XXXX XXXX located again?**
- R:** We are based on XXXX Road.
- I: Yeah, and which kind of ward, or which area would that be?**
- R:** Erm, Borstall Heath.
- I: Yes, okay. So, thinking about the local lockdown element then, was that something...what was your experience of the local lockdowns and in particular, in Birmingham, what was that like?**

R: If I'm totally honest, it was a bit mixed because we'd have people that are clearly not listening to any of the rules or anything, you could see that okay, they're not listening, or they don't care. Erm, and the other aspect you'd have people that erm, were very scared, afraid to even come out their houses and always wearing, like, if you did see them come out of the house, they're always gloves, masks, to the point where, if I'm honest, I still know a couple of people personally myself that are still wearing the gloves and the masks. Erm, just because I guess, it just, watching the news erm, because I know there were a lot of people saying that oh, we don't watch the news because it has an impact on the way you think and everything, but there were a lot of people who, I guess, took it very serious in terms of like, it actually kind of scared them a bit.

I: **Yeah, yeah. Erm, do you feel like there's a sense now that COVID is in the, sort of, something we're moving away from? Or is there still a sense that we're going to have to live alongside this do you think?**

R: I think we're going to have to live alongside this because when Omicron came, it was just about, it was just one of those things, oh god, there's another one now. Erm, in terms of, it's just something that we've got to live alongside it because, like, there's a lot of people saying that there's going to be another pandemic with all this monkey pox and everything going around. So, it's just... I think it's just something that we've got to learn to live with because I don't think, err, it's going to be like everything has gone back to normal 100 per cent.

I: **Yeah. So, a big part of that in terms of trying to get back to normality was the vaccination strategy. Erm, and I think we did go around the room, but you know, what were your views on the vaccination strategy? Were you aware of wider views that were held? We've talked a little bit about people having sceptical views in the focus group as well, so can you unpack that a little bit in terms of basically, your experience of how people responded to the vaccination programme?**

R: Yep. It was all, if I'm totally honest, it was all mixed, so even in terms of my own family and friends, and erm, people around me, erm, I mean even, erm people that we work with. So, there were some people that were totally against it saying that no, there's definitely something inside the vaccination because erm, they knew some people that had the vaccination and then passed away. Erm, there were some people saying that the vaccinations helped them a lot, erm, and in terms of the vaccination, erm, I mean I got vaccinated.

Erm, I wouldn't say straight away, I did wait a little bit because I was umming and ahh'ing because there were so much different views out and about. So, I wasn't sure. I mean, my mum and dad got the vaccination, so I was kind of like, okay, so they've got it, erm, and then obviously for us to travel for work we needed the vaccinations, so erm, we got vaccinated. And then, there was a lot of erm, I don't know if you heard, but there was a lot of people going around, erm, paying people erm, to get it through...I don't know if it was, how that worked, but paying people to get it stamped to say that they had the vaccination when they didn't.

I: **Right, okay. No, that's new. That is new. Okay, so there were some efforts for people to, kind of, fabricate that they were vaccinated essentially?**

R: Yeah.

I: **Okay. And also, so testing as well? The PCR testing where you'd have to go to a testing centre and so on?**

R: Yes. I still remember, erm, I mean, erm, I got COVID twice.

I: Okay.

R: And I still remember the first time I got it, erm, I wouldn't say I wasn't convinced, but it was more of erm, I wasn't sure how severe it was. Erm, and I still remember we went to do the food, erm, to collect food for the foodbank and I had a really bad headache, and I just thought it was a headache. By the time I had got home I couldn't even lift my head, erm, I had temperature, my body was aching. Then, I had to get erm, obviously, we didn't have the home kits then, so I had to book in to get tested. Went and got tested and it was positive, and then, the symptoms, I would say it was bad, but it wasn't like oh my god, it was so bad. Erm, like I recovered from it after like, a week, come back to work. Erm, it was I think about six or seven months later I had it the second time and then, I think the second time, this was after I had my first vaccination.

I: Yeah.

R: I'm sure it was after my first vaccination. Erm, it was...that's when I had it bad where my breathing, I lost the taste of erm, my taste and my smelling. I couldn't smell anything or taste anything. Erm, I was finding it difficult to breathe and that's when I thought okay, this is really bad.

I: Yeah. And how long did it take for you to recover the second time?

R: Two weeks.

I: Two weeks? Okay, okay. Erm, and that was seven months later. So, we're talking probably sometime in 2021 the second one, and sometime in 2020 for the first or?

R: So, one was in January 2021.

I: Right.

R: And then, err, 2021. And then, I think I had it in 2020. I'm not 100 per cent sure. But my second one, erm, because with my first one when I had tested, erm, it didn't come up on my health app. But with my second one now when I check all my erm, my vaccinations, it comes up on there when I tested positive.

I: Right, okay.

R: Yeah.

I: Okay, yeah. That's interesting. We talked a little bit about conspiracy, sceptical perspectives and so on. And social media, sharing information on social media.

R: Mhm.

I: Those...where do you think those ideas come from or?

R: If I'm totally honest with you, it was just about someone like, for instance, if we were working or like, if we were out working, somebody would be like did you hear this new thing? And you were like, okay, what is it? And it's like you see it all over TikTok, Instagram, and you just think to yourself, it's more...I would say it's more of the people that look into all of these theories thinking okay, it's come from this, it's made out of this. I mean, I don't know if I fall for these conspiracies if I'm totally honest.

I: Yeah. I think also, I guess something that I'm getting to is we've seen with COVID the impacts that we know have kind of happened for in particular, Black and South Asian communities, erm, and there's high representation obviously, Muslim groups are very

diverse, but about 67 per cent I think of Muslim communities, or members of Muslim communities in the UK are from South Asian backgrounds. So, it makes sense to think about the health impacts. Erm, but is there something there in terms of the impacts being disproportionately impacting minority ethnic groups, erm, kind of, what are your views on that?

R: Erm, if I'm totally honest, erm, there was a point where everybody was like there's more Asians, erm, that are dying or erm, going into hospital and not coming back out. Erm, like, they're obviously passing away, or there was a lot of people saying oh, you know, they're injecting. There was this theory that went around saying that oh, somebody goes into hospital, especially if it's someone elder, they're getting injected. And I had...I have one of my school friends that's actually a nurse in the hospital, erm, she's still not been vaccinated and she's totally against it. Erm, and she was just there like oh, erm, she was putting posters up at one point to say that if any of your family members do fall ill, especially the elders, do not bring them into hospital. So, I mean, that does play up on your mind a little bit to think okay, I mean, because obviously, even in the local community, erm, from where I work, erm, where I live, I mean, there were far too many deaths. I mean, everyday you're seeing posts on Facebook, Instagram, different people on your Snapchat to say okay, so and so has passed away, so and so has passed away.

And it did, kind of, make you think like, oh my god, and then even going to the graveyard, erm, because the graveyard that my nephews and my grandmother are buried at, I wouldn't even say it was half full when we got there. It was probably about two lines, erm, they were saying that the cemetery was fully, erm, there was no space left. So, we had buried them in [unclear 0:33:03] and I still remember thinking like, oh my god, it's not that full, it's empty. Coming a week later and there's six, seven lines all full, and you just think oh my god, like, how are so many people dying. And then, I do remember seeing erm, because obviously, half of the cemetery is like, obviously, Christians and obviously, other religions and stuff. Not seeing as full and it did kind of, make you think like, these theories that people are coming out with, are they true or? It does make you think. But I wouldn't say I had an 100 per cent opinion to say okay, this is what I thought and you know, but it did make you think is there something behind this?

I: **Yeah. And just for absolute clarification that [unclear 0:33:56] is somewhere that specifically facilitates Islamic burials?**

R: Erm, not just for erm, Islamic. No, no, no, it's mixed.

I: **Okay. But you could see the designated spaces which were for Muslim burial?**

R: Yeah.

I: **Yeah.**

R: By the way, now they have no, like, now the burials are taking place in Sutton Coldfield because there's actually no space left in [unclear 0:34:25] as well.

I: **Right, okay. So, that kind of scepticism and trust in, I guess social media has had a role in it, and you've talked a bit about that. Is there anything else underlying...?**

R: If I'm totally honest, erm, even on like, social media like I'd said, you'd see now that Islamic pages that would put up videos and from the Islamic perspective to say okay, it's like this. But I guess I wouldn't, I mean, I'm not saying it but you know, if you're weak-minded and you'd fall for it thinking actually, they're right, they're very right because a few people like I've said that I know that are very scared, erm, were the people that it affected a lot, social media for instance. But I guess it's how you are yourself in terms of like, are you strong-minded or like, if you're weak and someone tells you something and you fall for it, and you think oh my

god, they're right. I just guess it's how you are yourself. Erm, in terms of trust, erm, I don't know. I mean, I don't know how I feel about trusting what you see or what you hear until, I mean, I don't know. I really don't know.

I: Okay. And I guess, I think we might be coming towards the end, but I'm thinking about gender and impacts in terms of gender. Erm, is there anything you want to talk about in terms of how the pandemic might have impacted in ways that might have been different for women to men? Maybe in general, and then in particular with regard to Muslim communities?

R: Yeah, definitely. I would say in terms for women, erm, people think, like women...there's some women, well, to be honest, women are not afraid to come out to say they need help. Erm, where in terms of like, for instance, you can have family members that erm, are going through something, they won't be afraid to say you know what, I think I'm depressed, or I think I've got depression, or I'm mentally not well. Erm, or you know, you could tell, whereas men I think are more afraid to speak out that they need help. Erm, I don't know if it's ego or embarrassment to think that okay, they're the man of the house, so you know, they shouldn't feel like that. So, I just think it's just how XXXX said that one of his friends obviously took his life, so it's more men are more afraid to come out to say that they need help.

I: And then, were you aware in your wider friendship networks or family networks of impacts with regard to say, where home-schooling kicked in, or if family members in the household became unwell with COVID. Was there anything in terms of the difference in terms of the expectation towards care and responsibilities, or supporting with learning from home that had anything to do with gender?

R: Erm, no I wouldn't say it had anything to do with gender.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah.

I: And is there anything else that I haven't touched upon? Is there anything that I've missed or haven't raised that you think is important and needs to be documented?

R: Erm, no, I think you've pretty much covered everything.

I: Okay, okay.

R: Yeah.

I: Erm, well thank you for taking the time, it is greatly appreciated and erm, yeah, it's been really interesting and insightful.

R: Yeah, thank you very much for this.

I: Of course, yeah. Alright, well thanks XXXX, take care.

R: Thank you very much. Take care, bye bye.

I: Thanks. Bye, bye.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

Interview 16

Date: 12/08/2022

Duration: 45:15

Participant characteristics: female, medical professional

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: So, I guess, going back to the beginning of the pandemic we're starting to see something emerging and I guess we're moving towards the possibility of something happening in the UK. What was your initial response to that? And kind of, how was that for you kind of going into the pandemic?

R: It was a scary kind of moment. It was the not knowing and all the rumours that had come out of the 5G, there not being no food, they're not being... it was a scary moment, especially I think if you've got children, you kind of fear for them because you don't know.. You can kind of tolerate [coughs], sorry, tolerate things for yourself, but when you have a family it's kind of difficult how you're going to explain or how you're going to make those cuts for them.

I: Yeah. And so for context, I mean, how many children do you have and what are your, sort of, responsibilities in terms of as a family unit, I guess?

R: I have three children. Yeah, so you kind of fear for them because you think, okay, we've got to this part of life, but you know if you haven't got food for them or if you haven't got anything for them, how do you kind of communicate that with them? Especially, like being locked indoors, it was a kind of very difficult time for trying to explain to them you're not allowed to go out. You're not allowed to do anything. You're not allowed to see your cousins. You're not allowed to see your friends or your grandparents.

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And so looking at the lockdown and those circumstances, what, how did that impact for you in terms of home responsibilities, work and employment? Can you give us a bit of context about your working role and what happened? Yeah.

R: So going into work, obviously, it was knowing that we're going to be put in the forefront, we're going to be exposed to all these COVID patients and then bringing that home. It was scary in the sense that, okay, we're there, it's fine, we're risking ourselves, but then you are risking your family because are you bringing something back to them? Are you bringing the illness home? Are you going to make somebody sick of it? It was kind of difficult in that sort of sense.

And it's like, you are working, you're in this profession. You're at the forefront, people are coming in. You don't know their COVID status. You don't know if they're positive, the results are not back yet but you are looking after them. There's been instances where we've looked after patients as non-COVID and then all of a sudden we've had a result back that they're COVID and it's like "Oh my God, I've been exposed to this person. I've been in their care, I've been looking after them." And then so when you come back home you are still in that mind-set thinking, "Oh my God, what if I'm? I've got something and I'm gonna give it to the children or I'm gonna give it to the husband" it was kind of like a scary time to think.

And I'd come back and I'd say "Nobody touch me", my clothes would be at the front door and I'd have a black bag ready to put all my uniform into that black bag and then get my clothes and run into the shower. And after that that's when... so my daughter knew the concept. She'd be "Am I

okay to touch you?" And I would be "No, you can't touch me" and then she'd back off. She'd kind of move back knowing that, "Okay, I can't touch her. She's just come from the hospital."

I: And so in terms of your role, you're working in the front line, is it a senior role that you have within the hospital itself? And what kind of, I guess, we can get to what kind of numbers of COVID patients and so on and so forth, but can you just give a description of the type of role that you have in the hospital?

R: So I'm a nurse, I'm a staff nurse, so we're looking after sick patients coming in onto the ward, the ward was a red ward. So it meant that you have to go in and you have to come into PPE and then each time you're moving an area you're having to take off all of that and then you're having to reapply all of that each time you are moving from one area to the other.

I: And how did that build up? How did it get to being a red ward? What was your experience of seeing things unfold in the workplace, I guess, with regard to COVID?

R: A patient will come in, the patient, their COVID, but the status is not known. Then the patient next to them because they've been in contact with the COVID patient, then they need to have isolation. Before you know it, because everybody's vulnerable, one's coughing on one side, but they've been locked on that ward with the other patients throughout the night. So because of that the people who were non-COVID they ended up getting COVID because they're being exposed to COVID patients. And then staff are getting COVID off the patients, so it's just like it just ended up just becoming an infected ward just because of a few numbers not coming clear at the beginning.

But then even if they were clear at the beginning there was nowhere to put them because the side rooms were full so it was only the ward. So then it was a risk of exposing them to other patients.

I: Oh, yeah. And so how did that unfold? I mean, when did it? The numbers of COVID patients start to come into the hospital and what was, you know, and I guess testing must have been something that wasn't necessarily around right at the start. So what was it like? Yeah, what was it like seeing it unfold for you like the very, very early stages?

R: So at the early stages, I recall a lot of patients being on nebulizers and they're having breathing problems. So they've all got these masks on and they're breathing through that with the oxygen. And as I'm walking through in my mind I was thinking "maybe it's just me", but I knew as I'm... 'cause we had one bay at the back and one bay at the front, to walk through the front bay to get out of the ward you had to walk through the front bay. And for some reason, when I walked through the front bay I was finding that by the time I've reached the front, I can't breathe. I'm actually gasping to take a breath. And I was thinking "Maybe it's just me", but I was thinking, "No, there's something. Either what they're breathing out that's affecting me, my health, because I'm struggling to breathe as I'm getting to the end."

And then it was short after that, that I ended up catching COVID. But it wasn't out then, it was November early stages of December, but COVID, wasn't known then. So I came home and I developed this cough. And my husband would say to me "What is wrong with you? How are you coughing?" And I said, "I don't know, I can't control it. It's just this cough that I can't get rid of." And it lasted for three weeks and it wasn't, I think until the March after that COVID became known, but this happened in the December.

I: And then I guess testing becomes available or there's some sort of protocol for testing and you start to find out, as you say, it becomes known following in March that these are COVID patients. So I guess moving forward and addressing that, kind of, how did things unfold in terms of work, numbers of people on the ward, those kinds of things?

R: Well, it was kind of tough because the staff that are coming in they've got COVID, so they've gone off sick now we're short staffed, but we're spread across so many patients. It actually, kind of, it made you question your profession, but then in a sense you've got this

responsibility, so you have to keep going. You don't have a choice. And in the times that we were in, it was like in a sense, it was at one point I recall coming towards the end of COVID it was a relief to be able to leave the house and have a workplace to go to and have that normality. Although, in the beginning it was different, it was a burden, it was scary. It was somehow, "How do I get out of this?"

But then at the same time, you didn't want to be locked at home because there's no normality. Whereas when you're going to work you've still got that normality of being able to interact with the outside world. Then I think being able to help patients, knowing that their loved ones are not able to attend to them, but then knowing that sense of relief that you're able to get to them and you are able to make that contact for them and give them that sense of relief and be able to reach to them, to be able to help them and support them in that time of need when nobody else can get to them. So there was that satisfaction.

But on the other hand, you did have that fear folding in the background because you are thinking, "Has this patient got COVID? Am I going to catch it from them?" But then at the same time you want to help them.

I: Sorry, go on. I think there was a slight delay, sorry...

R: There was mixed kind of emotion because you want to help, but then there's the fear of holding you back not to get involved, but then you want to get involved because you know they haven't got anything else other than you.

I: Hi. Can you hear me now at all?

R: Yes. Yes I can.

I: Yeah, so it completely dropped off for a moment there. And so how was that for you in terms of supporting people?

R: I think that gave me my job satisfaction, knowing that nobody else can get to them and I can and even connecting them onto a video screen.

I: What it was like in terms of bearing the, I guess, knowing that people didn't have their family members for emotional support in times of experiencing that type of illness.

R: It was that, that I think that kept me going. I think that gave me my job satisfaction, knowing that I can be there when the rest can't and just making that video call for them and giving them that connection, knowing that nobody else can do that for them. But even at that, because they can't speak they haven't got the energy, they're so fatigued. They want to talk to their loved ones but they can't, and then that's making their... they're breathing. It's making it more heavier because they're trying to... the respiratory rate's going up because they're trying to make this effort, but the body's not allowing them. So it kind of, you had to kind of weigh out the pros and cons because it was you know it's going to put them into stress knowing they want to, kind of, see them. But then it gives the family kind of relief that they've seen them.

But at the same time it was nice to be able to do that for them and make that contact for them. I think it was that that kind of gave me that job satisfaction. And even knowing if anybody's loved one isn't there, it was just nice to know that if my parents were here, I would want them to be treated like this. I remember this one patient, they had said, "That's it, it's the end." And I had lots of work on, we were short staffed, but I didn't want him to go alone. So I stood there and held his hand, just so that he's not alone, like, I'm with him. Because I was thinking if I was in that situation I wouldn't want to be alone. So it was just things like that that gave you that, kind of, satisfaction that you're able to do them sort of things for people

I: Yeah. And what was the impact with you having such an active role in terms of being at the front line of everything?

R: For staff themselves, I think it was just like having your face restructured because being in that and I personally, I always get a swelling on my nose, so it's like it doesn't even look like my nose by the end of taking that mask off and your face is all swollen, you've got all these sores on your face and there's no acknowledgement for it. It's just okay, you've chose to do this. So tough luck. This is how it's got to be. I think the effect of it wasn't very nice. On both sides, not for the patients, not for the staff.

Oh my God, my face was dismantled. I'd take off all my masks and everything. The masks that they had given us it was then big black masks that we had to wear. And each time you would breathe, you can hear this vibration in your head. So having that on for like constantly five, six hours at a time, it was like... and you can hear the vibration of the breathing from the mask in your head, it was just awful. And when I'd remove that off my face, I wouldn't even look like myself. My nose, it made me feel like I've got a dent in my nose because of the pressure, but then I would keep the seal tight because I'm trying to protect myself because I know I need to go to my family at the end of the day. So keeping that tight, it was like by the time you've taken it off your face is all swollen. Your cheeks are swollen. And it's like, although it's a caring profession, there's no care for you.

And then when I would come home, it would be that everybody wants to offload about their day or what they kind of, or what relief they've had, but I'm still carrying what I've been through at work.

I: Yeah.

R: And I've not been able to offload that. So it was, kind of, putting me into a really difficult situation where mentally I was feeling burnt out, physically I was burnt out, emotionally I was burnt out. And my face, I'd come home and you could see the swelling on my nose. It'd be red for like the next day. And then by the next day I've gone back again.

I: Yeah. And in terms of in the home, I guess, your working patterns didn't stop. So what kind of implications were there when schools were closed and so on and so forth?

R: It was difficult because school and the teachers are trying to get hold of me to tell me my daughter hasn't logged onto her lesson. But I can't get to my phone because I'm in so much PPE and I'm all covered up in everything. So then as a result of that, by the time I've got to my phone, the school day is over, she's missed out. I've had that complaint from the school, I've come home, but then she's saying she can't learn online so there's no point sitting on there. So I've not been able... do you know how parents were at home and 9 o'clock, they wake their children up and sit them in front of their screens and get all that done, it was kind of difficult to put that in place because they, kind of, listen to me and with their dad they, kind of, get away with a lot of things.

So it's like because they had no routine of the night and the day, although we were trying to make that routine, but it was difficult because I wasn't here to make the routine. And by the time I've come back I'm so knackered that I just need to recharge for the next day because I know there's a whole ward of people who need me. So it's like, I feel my family kind of got neglected. My children got neglected in the process of trying to meet needs for others.

And there was no support for that. Nobody stopped to say, "Oh you know, your face is dried out. You know, this is the cream, use this on your skin to protect yourself." This all came out afterwards, after we had gone through all the damage and all of that, there was like, "Oh, you know, you could refer yourself for this" but like realistically, have you got the time to refer yourself? You haven't got time to sit there to do a referral because you're just recharging yourself when you're home. It just was not practically possible to make, you just didn't have the time to put yourself forward to say that, "Look, I need this" or "I need that" and you just keep going, you keep going, trying to get through it.

Yeah. And I think in your experience kind of a little bit more widely, maybe in terms of your wider sort of networks, friendship networks, family networks and in the community, maybe more widely, was there a sense that Muslim groups were more impacted by COVID?

R: Yes. There was a family in the community and they had lost like four members of their family to COVID with I find maybe with the white community, it's I... Because they're not sort of close, there's some families who are not very close, so they don't know, like, maybe it'd be... because how the Asian community, how they're very tight together, everybody lives together. So you hear about who's died, who's ill, who's alive, who's together, with some of the white communities the parents are from nursing homes or they're from... they live alone. And a lot of the time they don't know where the children are. They don't know where anybody is, so it's like, people are dying and they've got no family, there's no contact there's no...

So you don't know who to contact or who to kind of make with... who to kind of alert on that. Whereas with the Asian community, you know there's going to be like a hundred people phoning you to ask you what's going on now, what's going on now, what's happening. So in that term, there was like an Asian family where they've lost like four members of their family, there's other members who've lost three members in their family. And it's like, it is the loss of one person is a lot and losing three or four people is just unimaginable.

So it was kind of that in itself is like a really hard hit when you see that. But then on the other hand, like, when you see like somebody from a care home or somebody who doesn't have family around, you want to kind of give them that extra support because you know they're alone, they have nobody behind them.

So yeah, I think with the Asian community, it is kind of it was hit hard and it was like, "Oh my God, it's like everybody's dying and that's it. It's going to..." there was a sense of fear that we're going to lose everybody. Who next? It's like they're just waiting to kind of see who, who's going to come in next and who we're going to hear, who's going to die. It was like if you've survived COVID it was like a big thing that you've made it through.

I think it was just the fact that when you've lost one person and you've in the community, you've had a chance where you've met everybody, you've cried it out. You've mourned with them. It gives you a sense of relief because you've let it out on your system. But then when you're not able to attend to anybody, you're not able to see anybody. You're not able to go to this funeral and it's that's it they've just been packed away and gone and buried, done and dusted. I think it was that, that kind of got to a lot of people. And then afterwards, when it came out with the parties at Downing Street, that in itself just gave you the double standards for the black and Asian community and how it was different for them because of how it was okay in times when people wanted to party, in part... part times when people wanted to mourn, not even party, like just mourn together, they weren't allowed, just pray together they weren't allowed. But yet you are okay to celebrate Christmas and have a few drinks together and party.

So that I think it at the end of it there would've probably been a sense of relief to know that everybody was in the same boat, but then when you hear stuff like that, everybody wasn't in the same boat, you actually laid these rules down for us, but yet you are sitting there laughing behind our backs and doing...socialising, enjoying and partying yourself. I think that the anger of that and the frustration, I think it must have hurt so many in the community to know that happened. But then for your own mental state and to move on from it you have to just let go because if you carry that with you mentally it's exhausting.

I: And I mean, that brings us into thinking about government responses. And I guess as somebody who's worked at the front line, I mean, what is your perception of the government response to the pandemic?

R: I think it wasn't fair for the medical staff to be put into that situation and then to have no food at the end of it. I think they were deprived of a lot of like things where it's like, okay, we're just there, we're there to risk our lives. The clap was ridiculous at the end on a Thursday night

because we're not getting fed, we're not getting pay rises. We're being overworked, you're risking our lives. We're risking our families. And at the end of the day, you're giving us a clap on a Thursday, like, that's not gonna pay my bills.

If anything what they should have done was provided food parcels for nurses, provided at least people who were on the forefront they should have got some sort of incentive or a bonus or something, because that would kind of keep you going now for next time, if it happens. Yeah, people have seen what they went through. A lot of staff passed away during COVID and it was where they're doing just bringing the car to the... bringing the body to the car park at the front, and then staff would stand and give them a clap. Like, you've lost your life trying to protect this country, trying to help the people of this country and trying to keep the healthcare system in place. And all that you're going to give them is a clap.

That's like having a smack in the faces, isn't it?

I: Yeah.

R: So it was, kind of, I think that was the government I think they could have responded in a better way. The children could have had... they had to take in account that our children are being deprived. They're stuck at home. Some people...we're not, they're not able to get the education that they need to because the parents are tied up into hospitals. Yes, they did bring out that for key workers it would be open, but then who's going to drop them key workers children off when you were on a 12 hour shift?

I: Hmm mmm.

R: So there was a lot of parents who were single parents and they rather than going and were stressing about the drop-off and the pick-off they'd leave the children at home.

I: Hmm mmm.

R: So the government should have responded with either a bonus for all the staff who worked during that time to show their appreciation that your efforts haven't gone to waste. They should have had food in place, food parcels in place, even at the hospital and says that at the end of a 12 hour shift you don't have to go to a supermarket and look for a loaf of bread or to just to look for something frozen or something to eat at the end of it, if not meal, if meals weren't provided, the least they should have done was done food parcels and done that now because a lot of people feel like they've been taken for mugs.

Next time it happens, will the staff respond the same? I mean, because of the burnout a lot of staff have left. A lot of staff are still leaving because they realize that "You know what, you're just another number and soon as you've gone they replace you, that's it." And you've sacrificed your life or this profession. Was it worth it?

I: Hmm mmm.

R: I think...

I: Yeah, go on. Sorry.

R: I think the government needs to kind of think all of these things and just kind of appreciate the sacrifices that were made during that time. And then if MPs are on highly wages and if the football players on them sort of wages, but then somebody who's risking their life, neglecting their family, going and exposing themselves to all these infections, they're on what? How much an hour? And then half of that the government takes back in taxes.

So even the people who want to work overtime and want to put them hours in because of their circumstances, the government just gives them a smack in the face by taxing them more because they've done more hours.

I: Yeah.

R: So the least they should do if somebody's doing more hours, helping out your short staff, sorting out your staffing levels and putting them self forward, the least they should have is some sort of incentive to kind of, and it might encourage others, but because they've... it's just they've not done any of that instead now the cost of living has increased. It's just kind of annoying for staff to keep going. And because of the tax now people think "Oh, there's no point in me doing that extra shift because most of that will go into tax. So I'd rather not do it."

I: Yeah. And then I think I wanted to ask you something earlier and then the conversation took a slightly different direction, but you were saying about feeling like as you were walking out of the ward that it was you were finding it harder to breathe and so on. I just wanted to ask what, were you worried about having increased exposure, that it might have some other detrimental effects?

R: At the beginning it did. At the beginning there was definitely something that was put out. It, just felt as though something's been put out and people are breathing it in and as they're breathing it in they're getting this. And then the ones who have got it, they're giving it out to others. Because it wasn't in my head because when I was walking through there I was gasping for air and I've never had that ever before. So I knew it was something that I was breathing in that was happening on that ward, whatever they were breathing out, it was I was breathing that in and that's what caused me this cough.

Now people have got COVID and we're on the ward and we go into them, they haven't got them symptoms they had at the beginning. Nobody's catching it from them. Now people have tested positive for COVID, but they're just sitting in the side rooms and there's no symptoms. So at the beginning it was something else, this COVID now is not the same as what it was then.

At the beginning it was contagious, at the beginning it was everybody was getting it off one another. Now people who are in the same ward as somebody who's tested positive as soon as they've got their result they put them into the side room, but then anybody who was on the ward exposed to them they haven't got COVID from them. So there's definitely a difference in what was going out then to what's going out now.

I: Yeah. And I guess, we have to talk about vaccinations. What were your views in terms of how people received kind of the opportunity to be vaccinated? You mentioned a little bit earlier about some things alluding to scepticism or conspiracy theory...

R: I think the vaccination, I personally felt there wasn't enough research done on the vaccines for them to come out that soon. It was a panic moment, they just came out quickly. Everybody reacted differently. Some people who had the vaccinations they ended up with an enlarged heart, they ended up with the side effects; people had sciatica. And it was after the vaccination there was a lot of staff who were limping and I noticed. I noticed it was a trend happening in staff, so I'd heard out in the community that since they've had the vaccination they can't lift their leg, it's literally got it's just so heavy and they can't get a GP appointment.

So it's like, well, hang on, you've introduced these vaccinations. These people are complying, they're going to have these vaccinations and then when they're reacting to the vaccination a week later or a couple of days later there's no support for them. So it's like, it just felt a bit like animal testing.

So the ones that were fine with it, they were like, okay. But it felt as though it's being forced upon because you can't go on holiday if you don't have the vaccine, you can't go into clubs if you haven't got the vaccine, but now there's people who are vaccinated but they are coming in with COVID.

But then now all of a sudden, "Oh, the vaccination doesn't cover this variant and that variant." So if it wasn't going to cover everything, then was it worth taking that risk? Then it felt like, "Oh, healthcare workers, if they've not taken the vaccination they're gonna lose their jobs." So a lot of people ended up leaving. A lot of people ended up taking them, but then towards the end when March was the deadline, if you've not taken it up by then they dropped it because they knew they would have no staff left.

So that felt as though it's being forced upon rather than it's a choice. So I think that, kind of, created a lot of why is it being forced? What's inside there that's being so forced? But then I've seen a lot of the staff limping and I was like "Did you have the vaccine?" And they says, "Yes, we did." And it's "You've got sciatica" because it'd be like "I've got really bad sciatica." And it was a trend because I'd say "Did you have the vaccine?" And they said "Yeah" and I'd be like, "Oh my God, like", and they'd say "We didn't think it could be due to that." But everybody, there was a lot of people who had the same kind side effect so it made... sorry.

I: That's fine.

R: That questioned what is it? What's inside there that's creating sciatica? Why are so many people getting sciatica?

I: Yeah.

R: So it was like a lot of... some people ended up having vertigo, some people have... there was a lot side effects but there wasn't no support for anybody who had the vaccination, they complied with the rules, but the side effects they're just left to deal with on their own.

I: OK, so this project is focused on impacts and kind of impacts within Muslim communities. I wanna get to the point of thinking about scepticism and I wanna unpack that, I can't really ask questions that lead too much. Was there a sense of scepticism, less of a sense of scepticism when engaging with Muslim and non-Muslim patients who may or may not have been vaccinated?

R: No, I think their views were kind of like the same. You had that division, you had some people who were for the vaccination because it's going to protect us. I think that was in both, in all communities, in the black, Asian, white community. You had some people who were all like, no, we all need to quickly get this vaccination as soon as we can. And then in the same families, you would see members where they were just like, "No, we are not having the vaccination. Literally we don't know what's inside there. We don't know what they're putting inside us." So there was that division.

I think it, kind of, divided families because when they would talk on it, the ones who did get vaccinated they're looking down on the ones who are not getting vaccinated. So I think they had that kind of disagreement within the families. It, kind of, divided communities because people would look at each other in a different way "Oh, you've not been vaccinated." And the ones who were vaccinated, they kind of felt as though they had this, kind of, super protection until it came out that no there's variants that don't actually protect you, or until they developed a side effect where it kind of made them kind of question what they've done.

I: And I guess looking forward, what kind of interventions do you feel would've worked well, were needed and with thinking, I guess, with a bit of specificity around the needs in the Muslim community, but also looking forward, should something else happen again, what kinds of interventions would be most helpful?

R: A lot of people who have been affected the result will be mental health, depression, stress, so that burden will lie back on the NHS. And that's going to affect the government because now, like, you've got people who are hit by certain, illnesses and stuff. And then the burden, if they're going to a mental hospital or they're getting psychiatric treatment or anything like that, that burden is going back to them.

So I think there shouldn't be something set up for mental health where it remained the support is there, whether it's online or whether it's, I don't know, whether there's clinic setups or if they stop the clinics then online should be accessible. But then there's people who go through domestic violence and the Asian communities they're not going to voice it out because it's an honour thing. So then people they're going to need support. Before it was like, "Oh, they're doing the school round, they're meeting somebody, a friend or somebody" and just voicing it out. But if they're locked in the house and they're going through that, it's going to be tough on them and on the children.

But now they're still saying there's still COVID around, but in the news it's saying that they're rising, the cases are rising. But so that make you think is there another wave on its way? If they're making it out that it will, if they're saying that it is rising, does that mean are we going to be in the same boat again, if we are, what's going to change? So yeah.

I: Is there anything that you wanted to talk about that I've not covered or we've not discussed?

R: No, I think that's fine.

I: Okay. I'll stop recording.

Interview 17

Date: 17/08/2022

Duration: 53:18

Participant characteristics: male, community leader/organisational lead

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: Brief me in terms of your roles and responsibilities, you've got a number of different roles and responsibilities. So I think, if we start and talk through what those roles and responsibilities are, if that's okay?

R: Yeah, it's I guess, I've always been involved in my local mosque and I guess if you look at it from a strategic point of view I've always wanted to put something back to my local, a bit like around we support our local communities, whatever, and there's lots of different things that happen in the mosque, including Friday prayers and I deliver lectures. So I'll deliver the sermons. We very much are a progressive mosque whereby we have sermons in English rather than traditional Urdu and therefore we've believed that we need to really communicate with the young people and help people understand it and it's also changing attitudes.

So my background is I'm an accountant, I work for XXXX [employer], been six years, all my life I've been an accountant. So that's my job, but I always want to put, bring something back. So I've always volunteered at the mosque. And then more recently over the last 10, 15 years, our mosque is part of a charity, which an institution, which is the oldest Muslim charity in the UK. We're over 60 years old. Established in 1962. So our background...

I: [The oldest Islamic charity in the UK]?

R: Yeah. UK. Yeah, UK.

I: Yeah. And what's the name of the mosque that you?

I: Yeah, so it's, well, locally, we're known as the XXXX XXXX mosque [Trust Mosque between Sparkbrook and Sparkhill], but the actual name okay is XXXX XXXX XXXX mosque. And that goes back to the early 70s where there was a demand for material. So when people came over they wanted...the first thing was to establish mosques and also Madrassas and so there was a demand for printing material, and we used to have a printing... We have a shop at the front of the mosque and we used to distribute nationally printing materials. So although we're a small mosque we're actually known across the country for having helped to develop and print materials that were over the years used across so many mosques. And [The oldest Islamic charity in the UK], we have over 50 branches of mosques up and down the country, England, Wales, Scotland. And so that was my background.

So we already had a national presence, but we also back in then 25 years ago, we were one of the founder members of the [largest National Islamic Governance Organisation (IGO) in the UK], one of the founding affiliates.

I: Yeah.

R: So over the years, I got elected onto the national council. I've served for about six or eight years as the chair of the membership committee as well. Whereby we look after the affiliates and

new affiliates joining and all that sort of stuff. Majority of which we do have, [IGO] does have a lot of mosques as affiliates, but charities as well, madrassas, Muslim organisations like [National Muslim Medical Association]. We've got deaf associations, we've got doctors, dentists, so wherever there is a none... typically it's a non-for-profit organisation that's doing good in the local community, they affiliate and then we have the power then. We've got over 500 affiliates, [IGO]. So we have that. Over the years, we've got the trust, the reach, the understanding, we're very inclusive as well.

So we're very much non-sectarian, so we have one of the unique organising things about [IGO] is that we have both shia, sunni, lots of different backgrounds. They all come. We've got new Muslims, whatever. So demographically and from a diversity point of view as well, Arab, Southeast Asian, we've got a good mix of members and affiliates.

So if you look at it, so I had the ability to take a view, a strategic view at a national level, with my [IGO] hat on, I then dropped down at a national level. So I'm now director of finance at [The oldest Islamic charity in the UK] as a volunteer, appointed about six months ago, but I've always been involved in relief, education, different departments and more, especially the last five years. Most of our, all of our mosques were encouraged to set up a food hub under the banner XXXX. So that's one of our local, so not only food hubs, but we do stuff for Macmillan nurses and local initiatives to help the community, we do under that XXXX banner. So that we help serve Muslim and non-Muslim communities through that banner.

So if you think strategic [IGO], largest affiliate [The oldest Islamic charity in the UK] and having that national view, but then I'm also vice president of the Midland zone. So we've got about eight branches and smaller, about 15 smaller. So we have a presence across the Midlands from Nottingham, Derby down to Cardiff, the West Midlands, Walsall, Wolverhampton. So we cover that area, so I'm vice president of the Midland zone, but I'm also vice president of my own mosque, the XXXX XXXX branch mosque [Trust Mosque between Sparkbrook and Sparkhill].

So it's a bit weird where you get so much responsibility, but it's sometimes it's down to the lack of availability of leadership. And so you tend to have multiple responsibilities, but God willing, I've managed to manage my time. It's always say, if you wanna get something done, give it to a busy person. So at regional level there's a presence and then at the local level where I help run the local mosque and the food hub and things like that. But that's just with the [IGO], [The Islamic Charity].

In addition to that, as [The Islamic Charity] I was encouraged to... we partner with the Prince's Trust, so I trained as a 2014 as a mentor with the Prince's Trust and I sat on the... before COVID, it's kind of changed a bit now, but before COVID, I was sitting on the regional leadership group for Westlands for Mosaic, which was the Prince's Trust delivery arm for the mentoring programme.

And that's mainly into a lot of the rundown inner city schools. And I used to go in there as a, you know, my focus was very much a local lad, aspirational. I went to grammar school. So it's reinforcing those messages about someone who looks like the kids, come from a working class background and got to uni and became an accountant, all that sort of stuff.

And then the other main bit I get involved in is with the West Midlands Police. And that was around, I sit on a stop and search panel, an independent advisory group for Birmingham East, and also the last three years, or just over two years, I sit on the professional standards department, independent advisory group as well, which is effectively the West Midlands Police's internal affairs. It's where all the complaints go and dealt with and the cases go around complaints about officers and staff, how they're dealt with.

And we are an independent body that oversees what they do and trying to encourage best practice. And in all these things I'm involved in my personal interest is around representation, disproportionality, diversity, to ensure that pathways are there are fairness. And West Midland Police hasn't had a fantastic reputation for in that area around equality and proportionality, but

they've made good inroads and they're sincere about wanting to address that, which is why I've been there for three years on that IEG for PSD.

So it's lots of different things I get involved in, but they all...I get involved for a reason. And that is that trying to give a voice to the local community in different forums to enable people to get a fair crack, either it's about access, it's about their voices being heard. And typically it's the reason I... when COVID hit, the first thing that we did as [IGO], even before the government announced anything, we in consultation with [National Muslim Medical Association], we rapidly realised that the risk to our congregations as a means of transmission was very high. So if you had a disease or a virus that was spreading really quickly, our congregations were 400, 500 people, typically that could have a major impact. And we are looking at demographic as well, a lot of elderly people. So, vulnerable people as well.

So we issued, [IGO] issued in early mid-March 2020 a recommendation and that's all it was to encourage mosques to close literally the next day. And although we sent it out, we were individually trying to have conversations at our local mosques. And I was asked by [lead for the Islamic Trust Organisation] XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] as a local [IGO] representative "Could you come to a meeting at XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate]? We'll invite as many mosques as we can" first time ever it happened like that because there's a lot of local differences and politics between different mosques.

But it was the first time we had over 60 - 80 different mosques represented in that meeting in XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] and this is before any guidance has been issued by the government regarding lockdown. And so we had [National Muslim Medical Association] represented there. We had doctors from XXXX XXXX Hospital. We had Doctor XXXX XXXX [Director of the local public health authority] sitting next to me. He was there from represented [the Local Public Health Authority]. And we had a core of where we had a call like [lead for the Islamic Trust Organisation] myself, there was a core of the more senior mosques represented there.

And we took the lead. We said "Look, we need to listen. We need to do something." And on that night, something like 90% of mosques agreed that from the next morning we were gonna close our mosques.

And then the other 10% were like "We are not the trustees, so we can't make the decision, but we'll go back and then we should be able to give you an answer." And I think that shows solidarity and togetherness with the one, the Quran instruction around to save one life is to save the whole of mankind that was the intention by which we recognised that not only for our congregations, but for the wider community we need to act.

And the second thing that happened very rapidly, as soon as lockdown was announced, the other critical factor was that there was talk about cremations. And that really struck a nerve with the Muslim community about not only were people dying, but that they weren't even gonna be allowed a Muslim burial. So on the back of that, we had the start-up of that's where [IGO] got involved. That's the power of [IGO] and [National Muslim Medical Association] whereby we then started running webinars, the following Sunday, the following series of Sundays we were running different set webinars on different topics to advise people. We had over a thousand people, easily, 1,500 people attending these zoom meetings. We had to purchase additional accounts and stuff.

But people were hungry for guidance. And the problem was, and the biggest problems was that the government's guidance was confusing. It wasn't, one, it wasn't necessarily straightforward, but two, people perceived it as being inconsistent. How the hell can you have supermarkets open when you can't have the mosque open? And all the rules around that.

So I think the second trigger was the cremation. And then it naturally flowed that we got our national affiliate involved. We've got affiliates who are funeral directors. We've got the national funeral directors, biggest affiliates. So we were working with them to lead on advice on to their people who were actually performing and responsible for the funerals. Because obviously, if you

think about priorities in the early days it wasn't about vaccination, it was minimise, it was lockdown, it was minimise movement. And also, once people were ill it was about access to patients and the whole thing around what if somebody doesn't understand English, how do you? It was a language thing. And we had all the stuff around bereavement. So bereavement in the early days, I remember attending meetings with XXXX XXXX and people like that, trying to explain to them this is the five step process for a burial. And there's a washing of the shrouding and all these things need to happen.

And so a lot of that early piece was around guidance. We felt it was our responsibility to help Birmingham City Council and everyone, the decision makers to make the decisions with knowledge of what the subject matter is because the guidance was coming out and it didn't fit the circumstances. So what we needed and thank God for people like Doctor XXXX [director for the local public health authority] and XXXX XXXX. We had people at a local level in authority who were prepared to listen. And then go back and then translate our needs and that's where we got a really good building of trust and a good relationship between us.

And then we tackled things as they came along. So we had the issue around how many people can attend the funeral and things like that. And at the same time I remember in the early meetings I had similar conversations with West Midlands Police because they were responsible for enforcement. So if you imagine we've got this perfect storm, people losing their loved ones, not being able to say goodbye to them. And then traditionally people would go to each other's houses to pay their respects that wasn't allowed as well. Then you had the spectre of fines, £10,000.

So you had weddings, you had funerals, there was a whole host of things that needed managing and it wasn't just agreeing the rules, but it was then disseminating the information back out. And that's where the mosques came in really handy because [IGO] was preparing, so we had a special mosque committee and what we were doing was we were preparing the coms, posters, WhatsApp messages, infographics with [a National Muslim Medical Association] and then the specialists like the funeral directors, funeral services. And so we would disseminate that information through our networks and it proved to be really effective because people were hungry for the information.

We put it on our website as well, advising people. So I think early days was the focus was on health. Then it morphed into more around the spiritual side of people's access to, mental health, access to the Imam, the services that are a mosque normally provides, switching things to online. So the madrassas got converted to online zoom teaching. The Imam would do a short video, post it. And so he was talking, advising communities. And then the take up of the vaccine, I mean, that was a massive exercise where the amount of misinformation that was out there, we were getting little video clips of doctors who worked at XXXX XXXX [hospital], doing little videos to say... because there are rumours about once you're in hospital, that's it they're gonna kill you. The injections are killing you, they're not to save you. And there's a whole host of misinformation.

And we were then we were asked, Doctor XXXX XXXX [director of the local public health authority] and [the Local Public Health Authority] were asking us as mosque to set up vaccination centres on our premises to encourage people to come because we were seen as trusted. And also in our Friday sermons to relay the message to encourage people, to take up the vaccine, donate blood, where people had been infected already with the virus so that they could develop antigens.

So I think if you look at it from a response point of view there was some really massive pluses that XXXXX [the lead for the Islamic Trust Organisation], myself we're very proud of the way in which we engaged. And I, on a personal level, I felt me being part of that process we were quite unique in Birmingham.

I: Yeah.

R: I could see with my [IGO] hat on, I would be going into my strategic meetings at a national level with [IGO] talking about what we'd agreed locally with the Birmingham City Council. And they would be going "But our councils, our local authorities, other people are saying won't allow it" and,

and we were then advocating, but you need to build that relationship. You need to help them understand.

So we were using our template to help others. Simple example I'll give you, is in Ramadan, people were worried about the evening prayers, how is that gonna happen? And so the rule was only two people allowed in the mosque, but when we explained and they listened to Doctor XXXX XXXX [director for the local public health authority] that actually we need a third person there, who is the IT guy because he's the one who's responsible for the camera, make sure the live feeds are going and we're still serving the community.

And so we got a concession in Birmingham. We had a concession that the third person was allowed, very practical reason why it was. And we did the full PPE and all that, sort of, stuff. So that was one example of working collaboratively, understanding the rules, but then the trust being there that it wasn't gonna be manipulated or abused. And so we did things like that through the process where we worked together, messaging, I think communication was a key thing. But unfortunately, what happened was typically we were trying to translate what the government was saying in their guidelines at a local level but as soon as they announced the relaxing of the masks and things, then it was a very... you couldn't then enforce. Like for us to say, "We encourage you to wear masks in the mosque still" because it hadn't gone away. But because guidance, government guidance says "not required" we couldn't then. So it was personal choice then, personal preference.

So we would still be advocating to vulnerable people "Keep your masks on, we'll have the ventilation going, we'll do the PPE. We'll still be doing the spraying in between each of the five daily prayers" things like that. So that was just a bit of all round robin, kind of, context around what my involvement was, what my intention was, what responsibility I felt I had at a national level.

So the beauty of it was that because I was operating at both levels, I could translate what the real problems we were having in the practicalities of running a mosque back up to the strategic messaging that we were giving on a national level. So it helped to have that clear line of sight that because there's no point setting rules and guidance, if it's not gonna be implemented practically on the ground, you needed to have that kind of practical experience to say "Guys, that ain't gonna work. Human behaviour says if you'd set it up this way, this is what people are gonna do." And we'd seen it as well, so.

And one of the other things was Eid fell within that period of lockdown. And so, oh no, it was when we reopened the mosques, it was July time and an Eid was falling just immediately as they were about to open up. And there was a worry that we'd get fined. So what we agreed was the registration process. So I remember sitting for four hours outside the mosque the day before Eid registering people so that they had a ticket coming to the mosque, so that we had only a hundred people in the mosque socially distanced each time.

But then once one lot finished we'd spray, the next lot came in. But it was how we managed the 400, 500 people that needed to be processed on that for that Eid prayer, which everyone felt was... And the whole conversations around, "Can we use parks?" And it was weird because you could go for exercise in the park, but you couldn't hold...

I: Yeah.

R: And to us, the logic was why can't you do? Take it out the mosque, it's open, you haven't got those restrictions and why can't you? But some of the local councils they were saying that we can't manage that traffic, all this business. It needs to be... we won't take the responsibility of a hotspot developing because lots of people gathered in one place type thing. So there are always issues.

And it was trying to find that middle ground whereby we were under pressure as mosque leaders, we were under pressure to carry on as normal, but then we had to translate the risks and concerns back to them to make a middle ground whereby we could work together. And that's how we did the

compromise around reopening the mosques and being socially distanced, people weren't able to pray shoulder to shoulder and that was a fundamental tenant of prayer, but we accepted that it was extenuating circumstances. Some people were like belligerent, they just didn't, they were arguing. They wouldn't wear a mask, blah, blah, blah. It's dealing with that side of things as well. It was a tough time, but I think we navigated our way through it by building those really good relationships that we had and access to our, I guess, decision makers.

And I think we had good trust with the police as well, we didn't end up with lots and lots of mosques being fined for non-compliance, actually, we had a very good take up of good behaviours across the mosques and they understood why they had to do it. And so I remember attending a trustees meeting for another mosque to explain to the trustees why they had to do what they had to do. And they still to this day are grateful that when I go to that mosque, they'll go "Oh yeah, you came to our meeting, didn't you?" I said, "Yeah, because you guys needed convincing on what you had to do and why you had to do it."

So it was an interesting time because from my perspective I just wanted to, even if we managed to save one life that was precious to me and my work XXXX [employer], they understood that I was doing that community. So the taskforce meetings were every week, but I was allowed the time to do that, to attend, take part. And then what we did was because we had a faith network start at work, I would share best practice with the other places of worship as well. And in Birmingham we got invited to other meetings, other places of worship where churches and temples and things like that, gurdwaras. So we were sharing what we were experiencing with others as well, to try and share best practice between us, so that was useful.

I: Yeah. Yeah. It's a massively interesting picture that's coming together. I think with looking at the relationship, so if I understand we've got [the Local Public Health Authority], that's a different entity or a sub entity to [the National Health Authority] and it was a particular, if I understand correctly what you're saying, it was a particular relationship that you had with [the Local Public Health Authority], which was a key component of this. And your role, in terms of having senior responsibilities within the mosque, but also national and local responsibilities with [IGO], kind of, facilitated and input into the policing side of things as well and the regulation. Presumably, what the recommendations and regulations that are being discussed, how that would be met on the ground, if you like?

R: Yes, exactly. And it was the police, they wanted to have conversations to say, "Guys, this is what we're hearing. Is this what you are doing? Is this what you are seeing?" And we were all going "Well, hang on. We're all complying. We're all the big ones." And then maybe you'd get the odd one smaller one that didn't quite understand, or they weren't affiliates of [IGO] so we weren't reaching them. Because there are lots of mosques, so the police were always conscious and very sensitive about the enforcement side of things. So they took a very soft softly, softly approach. Even if they found cases of non-compliance or weakness in compliance, they kind of told us to kind of have a quiet word with them to help get the message across that it is serious and they could potentially get fined.

But we didn't have that many, I could count on one hand how many cases like that happened considering we've got hundreds of mosques across the region, that was encouraging.

I: Yeah. And I mean, I've heard in other interviews, talk of military personnel appearing?

R: Yeah, that was later on. That was when they were doing...this happened in, I think, Handsworth and a few of the areas where I think they were trying to encourage take up of the vaccine.

I: Oh, okay.

R: And so they went door to door to knock on doors to say, "Have you been vaccinated?" It's a bit hard to be honest, the military didn't talk to us. Whoever was in charge of that particular thing

didn't talk to our group. Because they just felt that because the numbers were looking low in those areas they felt that they were gonna just... didn't have personnel. So they just...it was a bit heavy ended because what people didn't understand, whoever was in charge of that, was the level of misinformation and distrust about 5G and all this business and what's included in the virus, that whole thing worked completely against. I mean, it was just so beneficial to the rumourmongers that they could just reinforce. "Ah see, this is a government planned military action to get everyone vaccinated. Don't trust the vaccine. You've seen it. Look at these pictures." And social media just went crazy after it, so yeah, it's true. That did happen.

I: Yeah. And so, and I'm piecing together the relationships, also when you talk about the tickets for being able to facilitate the Eid prayers, was this for 2020 or 2021, do you recall?

R: I'm trying to think. 2020 the mosques were closed. It's '21. It was July '21, I think.

I: Yes. Okay.

R: Where we were allowed to reopen, but then there was a concern around how many people would; would people follow the rules? How would mosques manage the? Because the concern was if there was an outbreak, someone tested positive, how would you let the rest of the congregation know? So we had to have a registration system in place to say, if... so we needed to show that we had records that if we were advised that a certain person got...we'd know, right, they were attending this one. So we'd send a message out. Because I wrote down the phone numbers and emails of everyone, phone numbers for everyone who attended. So we said our risk management would be the mitigation is that we would contact all the other people if we were advised and then they could go and get tested. So we had a system in place to do it.

I: Yeah. Yeah. And so thinking, again, sort of strategically piecing this picture together, so it's you, and who are you working with?

R: There was a few. Yeah, there was XXXX [West Midlands lead for Islamic burial organisation]. If you look any of those they're on YouTube. So you could see they were recorded. So if you speak to XXXX [community engagement officer], he'll tell you who the participants were. Regular XXXX XXXX [a large Mosque in Handsworth] we had XXXX XXXX [a large Mosque in Saltley], some of the major mosques in Birmingham were in, but the core was just us four or five. That was the thing, you wouldn't necessarily get...In the beginning, you'd get more numbers, but consistently trying to all the way through the vaccination piece it dwindled at the end because people just got fatigued with all the coms relating to the vaccines and stuff and whatever.

But the real need was at the beginning, those first six months, or I would say first three months, where people were desperate to understand the rules and how it applies. And when we slowly started easing the number of people who could attend a funeral, started off with five. I mean, I think to this day I have an example in my own house where my father-in-law passed away in November '20 and in Bradford. So his family insisted, so it's my wife's dad and my wife had COVID herself, so she couldn't attend, but we were discouraged to travel anyway, we had the restrictions in place. However, it was the family's request that my father-in-law had said he wanted me to be one of the three people that washed his body as a son-in-law. So I spoke to XXXX XXXX [director of the local public health authority], XXXX [community engagement officer] and I said "Can I have permission to go to Bradford, to perform the ghusl, under all the restrictions, PPE. Attend the funeral under the rules, but I will stay in my car. I won't actually go into any of the houses, I will just perform the duties and come back." And I was given that concession because they trusted that I would follow the rules. So I did that.

But the consequence of that was that to this day, my wife's still not had closure because she didn't get to see her dad, like lots of other people. She didn't get to see the burial. She didn't get to see... although we did a live feed, it's that closure side of it where she's still struggling with that. So, and that's something that we, you know, these are things that are remnants of things that happened during COVID that people may not realise that people passed away, they didn't get to

say goodbye to their loved ones in the hospitals. That was another one. Even to this day, you test positive, you go in, you're not allowed. Mum went in to hospital and I wasn't allowed to go, no one was allowed to go with her because of the restrictions, three or four months ago this was.

So I think that human element, I appreciate the health imperative, but the human element really did get bulldozed during the process. And I don't think we, with all this other rubbish that we've had with the government around party gate and all the rest of it, there should have been a real focus on mental health support, counselling. That's what's really needed desperately in our communities because people are still struggling to deal with that whole consequence of COVID and how it impacted people's lives. And some people are still struggling. Some people are still struggling.

I: Yeah. I mean, there's things that you've talked about that you've brought trust into the conversation in terms of your relationship and the way in which [the Local Public Health Authority] would approach things in a slightly novel way with more of a taking into account needs or voices within the community. Trust, what kind of, are there issues, have there been issues around trust in terms of?

R: Well. I'll give you...yes. I mean, it's against...

I: Historically?

R: It's classic that, yeah, it's this thing around people say they're gonna do, so there's a very much, you know, especially the Muslim community. There's very much this view that when people need us it's like, "Oh, you need to do this. You need to do this" and we do. We always do our duty. We'll cooperate. We'll collaborate. We'll do. But when it's us needing something, it's always, "Who are you? We don't know you. You need to..." there's so many stumbling blocks.

A simple example, it must be 15 years now, 10, 15 years that the Muslim community has been asking for a non-invasive post-mortem, MRI scanning facility to be enabled at Birmingham. And to this day, whoever you talk to for whatever reason, budget's not being available, this is something that the Muslim community have said "We'll buy the machine ourselves, we just need you to employ the people to operate it." So it's an operational cost. It's not even a capital cost for them. And yet no progress has been made.

So people there is that distrust that, "Oh, here we go. They need something." But I don't have that. I don't have that attitude because you live in the real world and you realise that unless you are politically connected and you know the right people and there's ways and means of doing things, funds can be made available. That's...

And I've been asked just recently, just for your information, I've been asked to sit on a working group to try and fix this once and for all with Birmingham City Council. So I have not had the invites to the meetings yet, but I've had one of the directors of the funeral directors, he's the chair, I think. He's asked me to get involved. And I said, "Look, I only get involved if we're serious about doing something. I can't be part of just a talking shot. You guys are doing this for Facebook or whatever, I don't care. I'm not on social media. I don't get involved for those reasons."

I said "If we're genuinely gonna get something done and we are serious about..." he said, "Look, we've already done the homework. We've got the contractors from the suppliers from Bradford, Leicester. You know, we've done the homework, we've got the case ready; all the work's been done. It's just, we need someone to listen to us." And that is the crux of it because typically the... I say Muslim, but I would say the inner city areas have been ignored because we are not so active.

You don't have the activist, you don't have the politically savvy people to build the relationships and do all that advocacy work because people give up, there's an apathy within these local communities that nobody bothers because we're Asian because we're whatever. Whatever the reason is access to the economic sanctions and access to equal resources, I mean, I live in Hall Green, across the road is Solihull, chalk and cheese. Yeah. You could see the roads with the

holes in and everything and it's just literally a roundabout difference and chalk and cheese. It's about access. It's about priorities. It's about advocacy.

So there is that definite inequality there and throughout COVID Doctor XXXX XXXX [director of the local public health authority] talked about it, [National Muslim Medical Association], all these other, all the research tells us that we are much more prone to diabetes, dementia, heart diseases, all of these things because the investment isn't put in. But then also it's an attrition of resources, where you used to... if you look at different models working as well, you look at where you had people embedded in the community that would serve the community on behalf of the council, those jobs disappeared. So it's very much a 'them and us' those local relationships aren't there.

They need investment; that needs building. Never mind, you look at the youth, that's another area where the lack of, I mean, we know about these things. Council knows about these things, but it's how do you switch it from knowing about it, to doing something about it? And that's... and they always look for, and there's also the distrust within the Muslim community especially, that if there's any money being made available, especially by central government, then it's gonna be linked to prevent in some way. There's gonna be a, "If you do this, you're gonna have to buy into this. So when we talk about this, you're gonna have..." and people there's an initiative, even so many initiatives come out that when you realise, "Oh, who's running this?" and you find out "Oh, it's lottery money, can't have access to that. It's prevent money, you know."

And so over the years there have been lots of bodies set up with prevent money and people don't engage. So on the one side you think, oh, the government can say, "Oh, but we made these organisations available, abused women working in local community, this, this, this enabling projects" but then people are a bit more wise around, what's your intention? Why are you doing this? And it's always a catch. And that sometimes there's a catch, I won't say it's always like that, but in my limited experience and XXXX [lead for the Islamic trust organisation] and the other guys, you speak to them, these sort of things, issues do come up whereby why can't we have a fair crack at the whip? Why are resources not equally, fairly distributed?

And that's one of my bug bears, this whole thing around disproportionate, do we not matter? Look at the... so, and yes, I appreciate Birmingham's a multicultural city across Midlands and we do have a lot of influx of refugees, asylum seekers. So it is a hotspot. I appreciate, we've probably got more than 50 different languages that are being used across the region easily. So even with the coms, you go back to what [IGO] were doing, we produce coms in different languages, Bengali, Arab, Arabic, Somali, we employ people, or we'd take the cost of actually translating the infographics into something that the members of the community could understand. And Birmingham City Council did try doing that, but they didn't have the network really to disseminate, which is where for a short period of time the mosques were very effective at doing that because we have our networks, [IGO] has its own network of affiliates.

You've got other organisations, we're not the only one. There are other charities that would help or they'd, you know, XXXX [community engagement officer] would wait for our latest. He said "Whenever you produce something, send it to me. We'll disseminate it across our network." So we were advising. So that was quite powerful being able to reach people, but then not everyone goes to a mosque. So you're not necessarily gonna, maybe 10% people go to the mosque, what about the rest of the community? And so how do you? And that's where we said, "Look, WhatsApp videos. No, one's gonna read anything typically" that's why we went down the infographics route where you could just see by images, people could quickly digest the guidance.

And then secondly, was we got the Imams and trusted people to produce videos to encourage people. So I'd stand there. I mean, people at the end of the COVID thought I was a doctor because I'd stand there giving advice so much about the virus and all that business. But you just did your bit, you tried to do what you needed because the health imperative, the saving of lives imperative, and trying to control the spread of the virus.

But yeah, typically there is that element to it. Unfortunately, people have this distrust, there's an apathy. I sum it up as apathy, if something's going on in Palestine or Kashmir, then people get

very animated, but it'll drop for a very, sort of... if you then said to them that we need to write to our MPs and we need to do this, you don't get that same follow through. And that's because there's generally people feel that that doesn't work.

We've had leaders, counsellors, MPs, saying that we will advocate on behalf of this, this, this, but they never see any outcome, there's never an outcome to it. I think COVID was a first example of a direct relationship of cause and effect. We could demonstrate in our weekly meetings that we asked for this and we got this. And the rules were being implemented and changed and people could see the benefit and that's where the trust built up. And that's why we spent as much time as we did every week, for two years, we attended those meetings because we felt it was important to do so.

I: Yeah. And I think it's an interesting thing to think about putting the trust in community leaders. Do you feel like it's, was that a watershed moment? Am I misreading something? Is it? Was it a significant moment in terms of local authorities putting that trust into community leaders to deliver what they felt they needed?

R: Massive.

I: And do you think it will continue?

R: Well, I think we are known, I think they know who to come to. But I think what the problem we've got is since then we've kind of fallen back into because the emergency imperative has gone away, then you've got people now, some of the mosques have invested in people who write bids and do good PR and things like that. So they kind of grab any funding that's available, they'll know about it first because they're deemed to be the ones that get things done. Whereas other mosques haven't made that investment. So it still depends on people like me, volunteers, having the time with all the other responsibilities we've got to try and get things done. So it definitely could be made easier that whole access to funding, to resources, definitely could be done, made easier, so that it doesn't... It isn't just a simple email that goes out to say, "You've got this deadline, there's some funding available. Apply."

But people don't know how to write bids. They don't know how to. So there's something there to you could and the biggest complaint from XXXX [community engagement officer] and some of the team post COVID has been, "Well, we sent, we let you know about this, this, this, but nobody, very few people responded" because we're not employed, we are volunteers. It's not our day to day imperative to be tracking that. And the time it needs to sometimes get people and get those things done as well.

I: Yeah. Yeah. And then the other thing I wanted to ask is in terms of looking across the timeline of the pandemic and now compared to the worst moments of the pandemic and what do we do looking forward living alongside COVID?

R: If I said from a health perspective, I'd say that the day to day health issues, the backlog of appointments and things like that, that's still there. That's still there. The access, the understanding, the amount of engagement that needs to be done to help people come in and get themselves tested for diabetes, all those things that's ongoing, that still needs, that deficit is still there.

I think the more immediate imperative is quality of life at the moment with the economic situation, we've reopened our food hub last month for the first time, because I finally got volunteers. A local businessman had said, you know, he offered his van, his time, his staff, and he said, "Look, I'll help you." And even with five days' notice we had 25 families come on the Friday to the mosque, and that was like half were Muslim, half were non-Muslim.

I: Yeah.

R: So, and then we know that there's other mosques that are dealing with a hundred people a day feeding them so if you imagine that you've already got people who are very vulnerable and then the current circumstances are making them even more vulnerable. And our fear is that we're gonna lose people along the way, because they might get attracted into crime because they're desperate and other factors might come into play. But the biggest one is the health piece, again, because they're making choices between their health, food, the basic, isn't it?

So, I think honestly, I think we've got so much work to do within the communities and that's not even... I mean, I'm not even touching on the mental health side of things. There's so much we need to do.

People have not really dealt with the reality of what they went through in COVID. I don't believe it. I mean, I talk to professional people, I've got people at work and outside and different networks and they all talk about "I lost someone. I still haven't got used to it. I need to talk to someone about this." And usually the men are the head of the household, so they don't feel like they can open up even to their wives, daughters, family, because they've gotta be the solid ones. If they go, then who's gonna look after the rest?

So I honestly believe that's just a volcano waiting to erupt that side of things, because people, you know. And sometimes, when you... people don't deal with stress, you get the physical ailments. Depression and other things that need to be dealt with as well. So I think it's tough one.

We're just organising the first weekend in September, we're organising a national visit my mosque day. And it's the first time the mosques are doing this after COVID. And I asked the guys who were organising it at [IGO] "What's the theme that you've chosen for this year?" And they said, "Oh, it's just welcome. Welcome back. We're just asking people to come back, come and have a look at your mosque and talk to us. And we'll, you know." And I said, "Well, I think a stronger theme would've been the whole imperative of cost of living, the fact that how are people handling." So I was advocating that maybe we... you could say, "Welcome back, but have a strap line around we're here to help" because genuinely that's what we're there for is to help and support our communities. And maybe on that day, we have people in that help signpost people to other things that might be able to help them, mental health, maybe something like that.

So I haven't officially launched the date yet for our mosque because I'm still planning, I'm listening to people about what could we do? What could we potentially do on that day to help? But it does worry me. It does worry me.

I: Okay. Is there anything that you haven't talked about that you think needs?

R: Well, I did make some notes before, so let me just check if I've covered.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: Yeah, we mentioned about the building of trust, the WhatsApp group. That was interesting. So on that first meeting we created a WhatsApp group called C19 group. So that was the first time, and even to this day we still have that group, where if we wanna disseminate information to 80 - 100 mosques across the Midlands, we could do it. And that's all the trustees and senior leadership are on that group, so that's quite powerful.

Solidarity, I talked about. We built new networks, new relationships, that was one of the biggest powers of [IGO] was that we have trusted voices for British Muslims and when we said something, people trusted it. And others, when we produced material and guidance, where we were trying to translate what the government was saying, we could... people took that guidance and said, "Okay, we'll apply that in our workplace. We'll apply it." So that was quite, quite powerful.

Yeah, PPE was another key thing around because of that relationship we had, XXXX would... he said to the mosques, he said, "Let us know if you need any PPE equipment, then we'll drop it off to you." And that was a lovely service that they had. So if you needed masks or something for your

congregation or the cleaning fluids or whatever, literally, it was one email and it was done. So that was really good. That was a really good positive.

The coms piece, I think that was key. The weekly meetings they were really, and it did take a lot for, I mean, Doctor XXXX XXXX [director for the local public health authority], he dropped off after about six months, eight months because he just couldn't, he was getting pulled in all directions. So we had other people come in to take over.

Yeah, we talked about registration, that one's done. I had one title, I said, oh yeah. Government guidelines, confusion. Encouraging the vaccine take up, the misinformation, the sharing, the best practice with other places of worship. And then yeah, yeah, the inconsistency piece that killed us with the guidance. Yeah. And I mentioned the MRI scanner.

So I just mentioned that just as an example of do people listen to you and it was interesting that I put in an email via XXXX [community engagement officer] to both XXXX XXXX and Doctor XXXX XXXX [lead for the public health authority] on that topic and I didn't receive a reply. And I would've thought having done what we'd done together it would've at least had the respect to just reply and say, "Sorry, can't help you" but to have no reply that does say something as well. I know they must be busy guys, but you'd think you've built some good relationships.

The other part of this is that I think some of it's my own fault that I don't do a bigger song and dance about. I mean, I'm talking to you, but I feel really self-conscious about talking about what I did.

I: No, you shouldn't, no.

R: But it's not in my nature because what we do is we say when we serve people, this is us serving God through serving his creation. So it's like, it's you don't wanna take the sincerity of what you do out of that piece, but I'm quite happy in the background. XXXX [lead for the Islamic Trust Organisation] knows that I will support, I will try and articulate what we are trying to say as best we can to make sure that our voices are heard.

I: Yeah.

R: But I don't need a job title. I don't need a position. I don't, you know, that's not what I'm about. So maybe if you're more of a personality, maybe you get listened to more. I don't know.

I: Well, I don't know. But I'm gonna stop recording

Interview 18

Date: 26/08/2022

Duration: 50:54

Participant characteristics: female, working within a community organisation

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: So, thanks for taking the time to do an interview. We're focusing on the impact of Covid on Muslim communities in Birmingham and I guess the best place to start is to ask you to go back to the beginning of the pandemic and what was your initial response to news that there might be some sort of virus? If you can take me through that, your recollection of that?

R: Well there's always something on the news about something being of concern, but no way did I imagine we'd be going into a lockdown at all. It was wholly unexpected especially the emotional and practical impact that would come and how jarring it would be for so long, so definitely disconcerting. I did not expect what happened to happen. Most organisations and institutions didn't really know how to respond initially which also mean I was slightly ambiguous about what was going on.

I: Yes. So when you say organisations were slow to respond can you give us some examples?

R: Informing staff, making the community aware of really know what was going on. I think it was one of the dangers because at least in the South Asian community WhatsApp is abysmal with getting information around. It's a bit like whispers. A lot of misinformation is shared through WhatsApp. I would say in Birmingham the South Asian community was a platform of trouble.

I: Okay. Because WhatsApp and social media have been recurring themes, so when you say there's the potential for trouble, what kind of things were going round on WhatsApp initially in those very early stages then?

R: So a lot of conspiracy theories, that the government were trying to kill minority ethnics, that the Covid jabs were another way of trying to get rid of people who were undesirable in the UK. That it was a way of tracking people, that they would leave little nano bytes in there. I remember just before I was about to get the jab and just after I got the jab I kept having people send on WhatsApp videos about how I was going to die in three years.

I: Okay.

R: Which was exceptionally stressful.

I: Yes. So in those early stages then I guess we get to a point where something is going to happen. There are cases on UK soil and then there's lockdown, we're going into lockdown. So what was your recollection of that and what were you doing at the time in terms of work?

- R: Initially I was in the last few months, I think, at XXXX [employer, Higher Educational Institution] with the lockdown. Because I remember I was in one day and the next day I came in and then it's go home.
- I: **Yes, okay.**
- R: You're working from home now. So initially I was at XXXX [employer, Higher Educational Institution] and then when we hit, because I started volunteering at XXXX XXXX [organisation which supports families of incarcerated individuals] just after the second lockdown started.
- I: **Right.**
- R: A month after it. I have to say Covid two years is blurred. In some ways it was good, but also in some ways it was so problematic. Because you know what it was like working from home, between personal time and work had just vanished, at least at XXXX [employer, Higher Educational Institution]. One of the things I think I believed from work when I moved to XXXX XXXX [organisation which supports families of incarcerated individuals] we were in the office and we stayed in the office, except for when I actually Covid and it was bad. The first time I caught Covid it wasn't bad but I isolated and the second time I just wasn't functioning. So I was off sick. We were in the office throughout.
- I: **So can you talk to me a bit about XXXX XXXX [organisation which supports families of incarcerated individuals] and the things that they do and what your role is there as well, because you have some sort of responsibilities with that role as well if you're working in the office.**
- R: Yes, we did some home visits which were interesting. So XXXX XXXX [organisation which supports families of incarcerated individuals] is a non-profit that provides support, emotional, practical for the families of offenders and prisoners. So we focus on the loved ones of those who have been arrested because we find that they're often on the outside that's forgotten and they need help navigating the criminal justice system and learning to live in their new reality. So we provide full support, mentoring for the kids if they have a risk of offending or struggling to deal with the arrest or imprisonment of a family member, to go to the court visits with them, explaining the judicial procedure, registering prison visits and the like day to day. On the family engagement each worker, so I'm the one that's usually the first point of contact for our service users.
- I: **Yes. So with that role, so you have to be working, it's a frontline service or it's an organisation which had the ability for you to be able to be physically working in the office and going to work.**
- R: Yes. We're happy to adjust our home visit policy and the risk assessments we are taking there. But it's also difficult because we provide support to anyone who comes to us, but we find that a lot of our service users are Kashmiri Muslim Pakistani because of the demographics of Birmingham. So we find that a lot of our service users fit within those groups. From the onset of the lot coming because of the lockdown coming a lot of people in that community group were very dubious about Covid, about what it meant, where it was coming from and how legitimate it was. So me and my boss went to one home visit, even though we have told them and asked them because of our risk assessments, has anyone got Covid, have you tested? They went, "No". But then the week later when we were going to them and we told them, "Let us know if anything changes," we get to the door and we knock and they open it and they told us they'd tested negative.
- I: **Okay.**
- R: Yes, it could've been very easy the other way round.

- I: **Yes.**
- R: A week and a half ago we went for an urgent home visit and another case worker rang us up the day after to give us a head's up that the client had Covid but didn't tell us.
- I: **Okay.**
- R: Yes, but after my last bout with it, I'm not going to lie, I was panicking a bit.
- I: **Yes. So you were very exposed to that level of risk. You've been exposed to that level of risk throughout, I guess.**
- R: Yes. We've had the conversations with our service users, because you cannot come from your position, you have to be neutral. So our service users have been comfortable enough to say to us, "Oh this Covid thing is not real, it's the government trying to control us, or trying to kill us Asians and others". It's one of the reasons why, for example, it's slightly peculiar in that when I told someone that I had the Covid jab at least in certain community Muslim groups and individuals, there was a pause where they were like, "Are you sure you should've done that, don't you regret it, you don't know what's going to happen to your DNA". Then again those WhatsApp videos where I had to put my family on mute.
- I: **Right okay.**
- R: They were sending videos about how I might die in three years and I'd say, "Really".
- I: **Yes, that's a lot of complicated moving parts.**
- R: Yes.
- I: **So give us a little bit of context as well. Give us a picture of your career pathway. So where are you headed? What are you working on? Where do you want to be? Because that'll be important for getting an idea of your profile. We can then talk about how the pandemic then might've impacted your planned progress or journey or whatever.**
- R: So before the pandemic started and at the onset of it I was at XXXX [employer, Higher Education Institution] and they changed my contract for a time which was meant to be extended with other colleagues. So apparently the document for all their HR and it was meant to be extended and then copied here and they said that what was the reason given. Oh right, students needed consistency.
- I: **Okay.**
- R: So they weren't going to extend our contracts.
- I: **Right okay.**
- R: I mean during the meeting I nodded because I was slightly baffled. Afterwards in my head I was like "sorry?" But I think honestly it was a blessing in disguise just because of how – I mean I miss my students, don't get me wrong. I've do miss my students and I do think it's left me here and there. But I found one of the problems with academia was the blurring between personal and work time. It got very toxic for staff, in particular, and I think that's still the case that Covid was used as in justification for management to undertake initiatives that don't respect or acknowledge the well-being of staff in the long term.
- I: **Right okay.**

- R: Because I have enough friends and colleagues who have given academia teaching research who I talk to and having a lot of online yoga sessions and mental health well-being classes do not help staff mental health and well-being.
- I: **Yes.**
- R: So there was that. But I've always wanted to do work in research in the third sector. I just wasn't sure of how to bridge the gap.
- I: **Yes.**
- R: Then I was having one random conversation with XXXX XXXX.
- I: **Oh yes.**
- R: Yes and he went, "I know someone you might be interested in talking to, I think you'll get on". Then I had a phone call, the next thing I know I'm volunteering at XXXX XXXX [organisation which supports families of incarcerated individuals] and the next thing I know I'm working there.
- I: **Okay.**
- R: So I started as a volunteer and it's been brilliant. It's been so invaluable for my PhD.
- I: **Yes.**
- R: Just because it's so starkly different. I'm using a completely different part of my brain for the work I do in XXXX XXXX [organisation which supports families of incarcerated individuals] generally speaking. Although we do do some research and research projects and depending on some of the cases that are hard to leave at the office. But there's a better break, so I found that it helped with my thesis a substantial amount. But I'm still getting to do research, I'm still getting to write, because we're doing quite a few projects. I think because I and another colleague are also social scientists and researchers.
- I: **Yes.**
- R: We're starting to do more projects like that as well.
- I: **Yes, that's interesting. So do you think that's where you're going to progress in terms of working with the third sector using your academic background and doing research within that context or are you looking to come back into academic..?**
- R: No, academia! I'm not sure how I'll bridge it because I do miss teaching, but I also know what I'm doing right now and the fact that the research is at the front lines and that when we disseminate it and we engage with it and we take action, there should be action that ripples, where sometimes even with the best of intention in academia the bridging can be problematic when it comes to action.
- I: **Yes. I hear what you're saying. So let's go back to thinking about impact. So whereabouts are you located in terms of – are you living within a local Muslim community or are you living in a diversified place?**
- R: I was.
- I: **Yes. How's that changed?**
- R: I moved as well.

- I: Oh right, okay.**
- R: Covid was really stressful with the lockdown impacted because we were meant to move before Covid, but then Covid happened and then everything stopped. Moving house, renting, all that it was exceptionally stressful. So I used to live in Aston which is very South Asian Muslim concentrated. Where I am now is Erdington and I haven't had a chance to look around between work and what not, but it's more diverse.
- I: I didn't know you were in Erdington, okay, that's interesting.**
- R: I'm on XXXX XXXX Road which just from saying hi to the neighbours and going to the grocery store because I need to wander a bit. The street is a very long one, it's very diverse which I like.
- I: So thinking about before you moved then let's get an insight into Aston, I guess. So what were the impacts do you think for that community in terms of thinking this project is focused on Muslim communities but it's part of a BAME highlight notice. So there is scope to talk about race and inequality in more general terms, but I think if you think about a Muslim community initially what are the initial impacts?**
- R: The local grocery store, the South Asian grocery store, on XXXX Road and XXXX Road, they're kind of crafty and cheeky. The prices sky rocketed for basics like atta - flour, it was insane initially, it was really bad. So before we had inflation there was a bit of financial struggles at the onset because of basics in South Asian households and Muslim households.
- I: Yes.**
- R: The corner shops some of them, actually a lot of them were doubling their prices up because it did change. But initially there was a lot of panic buying.
- I: Yes I was going to ask you about that. So did you notice the impact of panic buying and availability of products and those types of things?**
- R: They were definitely panic buying. I mean I remember face masks were treble the price.
- I: Right.**
- R: I remember talking to some people and they said that they'd bought a second fridge or freezer.
- I: Yes.**
- R: But also people were buying things like toilet paper that they can't use and people were saying this is going to go out of stock. But they were part of the reason that it would go out of stock. So I live just off XXXX Road and we have several halal shops and several grocery stores and there's a big Tesco.
- I: Yes.**
- R: But the Asian grocery stores are brilliant for buying vegetables and herbs and things. You save a lot of money and they're really good quality and you were seeing certain things just disappear. But people were rush buying milk and bread that they couldn't eat as fast as they were buying it.
- I: Yes.**
- R: Atta was going really fast.

- I: Flour.**
- R: Yes, the specific kind of flour you use for chapatis and things. That was going really fast and oil, vegetable oil.
- I: Yes. So thinking about like were there closures of businesses or were there other types of business which were impacted by the lockdown and the lack of people being able to go out and all of that stuff?**
- R: I think the clothes shops have certainly struggled because I remember when I started working, XXXX XXXX [organisation which supports families of incarcerated individuals] is based on XXXX Road and talking to some of the store workers when I went in and the clothes shops really struggled and the taxi drivers.
- I: Yes.**
- R: I've had so many conversations with taxi drivers who have said it was a struggle or they started doing taxi work because they had to close their business.
- I: Right.**
- R: But I was thinking the clothes stores struggled a lot, especially because a lot of them weren't established online, so foot traffic was essential.
- I: Yes.**
- R: Most of the takeaways found that apps were a good way of navigating that, just dropping it off home. But I also think big chains like the fact that Amazon do Amazon Fresh with Morrisons, it also hit them as well, especially the multi-grocery shop.
- I: Yes sorry.**
- R: You go.
- I: Yes, so thinking about the economic impacts around the community then I guess it sounds like - did you feel economically impacted by everything that was going on?**
- R: I did when I first lost my job.
- I: Right of course.**
- R: I was slightly worried because I had saved so we would've been okay for a few months, but then I was worrying.
- I: Yes.**
- R: What are we going to do? I think the way in which Covid and how Covid was used by certain institutions and employers to justify casualization and so forth was problematic and still is. I'm not just saying in academia in a number of places. I think it was very, very problematic and remains so. Initially we didn't see a financial hit compared to say now when you notice how much higher your grocery bills have gone. I think it was more the stress of all the whispers going around about what Covid was, the suspicion, the conspiracy theories. It was strange because I had friends and colleagues who were researchers, social scientists in biology and chemistry, who had a specific view of the Covid jabs and Covid and then the community where I was one of the exceptions in having the jab and wearing the face masks.

- I: **Yes.**
- R: So I would go to South Asian roads and there would be no-one with a face mask on.
- I: **Right.**
- R: Or XXXX Road or XXXX Road which are quite heavily South Asian Muslim concentrated and people staring at me or looking at me oddly and especially if I said that I'd had the jab, the lectures I would get about what could happen to me.
- I: **You've got a sociological mind, where do you think it comes from? How have those conditions come to be do you think?**
- R: I think there's been decades of development with the government, where they've ensured there's a level of mistrust.
- I: **Okay.**
- R: Especially since Britain's gone so far right and I think it's become more explicitly clear to people in practice the government is not there to help them, which means they mistrust them.
- I: **So I'm trying to avoid leading questions.**
- R: Hear that.
- I: **It's challenging though because there's things I want to ask you about that are hard to frame neutrally. So what about the impacts in terms of health impacts, bereavements, hospitalisations? What are your views on how impacted the Muslim community was?**
- R: It was tremendous. One thing I think everyone, not just in the Muslim community, I think at society level people on the whole forgot the emotional impact for funeral directors and those dealing with the funerals. Through work my boss, and then I through her, had contacted one of the funeral directors who had back to back funerals. Sometimes in two weeks four or three people from the same family, the emotional toll on them, I just can't imagine it and they were on the front line, never stopping. Especially because of you know how Muslim burials work and how fast a body has to be prepared.
- I: **Yes.**
- R: I don't know how they did it, I really don't know. The emotional strain, the practical strain, the fact that they were always, especially early on when the deaths were happening constantly. I don't know how they did it. Because I don't know if it's the same when it comes to other communities, but often the Muslim funeral directors I'm talking about doing the funeral are deeply embedded in the community. They often know a lot of the people or at least the family of who they're going to help bury. So yes, the toll, yes.
- I: **Did you experience any bereavements or family members being severely ill with Covid?**
- R: I have to say I was lucky in no, but I did have extended family members, friends and others where because of Covid dominating so much in hospitals and medically, other health conditions weren't caught in time. So there's been a lot of someone saying that someone is dying from cancer because they caught it so late, because there was such a delay in testing, which has been one of the scary things with Covid. Because other tests for other illnesses have been delayed or because of the phone calls from doctors they can't really

diagnose everything. Misdiagnoses that's a headache when it was actually brain cancer or something.

I: Right, okay yes. So thinking about, I guess, I want to move forward to think about mental health as well. I guess I'm interested in your own experience and I'm also interested in your perspectives on how other people were impacted and also the fact that you had contact with people frequently through your working role as well. What kind of insights did you get into the impact of the pandemic on mental health?

R: People who have been isolated, lonely and struggling. We increased the phone calls we did to our service users just to check in on them and gave them 10 minutes of company. So that was one thing we did. I started doing a weekly phone call to a number of clients because they needed company. They had family and so forth but because they couldn't see them they were feeling isolated and they had other responsibilities, so I was that one constant. We did try to do a WhatsApp kind of chit chat coffee morning because a lot of our clients come from a background where they struggle with technology.

I: Yes.

R: But the problem is a lot of our clients speak different languages, English is everyone's primary. So we had some people talking in Urdu, Mipuri and sometimes speaking English, so that did not go well.

I: Yes. I think as well that's an interesting point you touch upon. Do you think there were some issues to access to services that might've had something to do with language barriers and things?

R: Definitely. I had this conversation with someone from NHS when it came to the mental health. They have this really good book on dealing with suicide.

I: Okay.

R: I have it in the office, but I don't think I have one here. It's really, really informative but they only have it in English right now.

I: Right okay.

R: Also the problem is, for example, a lot of South Asian Pakistani Muslims come from Mirpur are in Birmingham right and Mirpuri is a verbal language, it's not written.

I: Okay, I did not know that.

R: Yes and the Pakistani Muslim community in Birmingham is from Mirpur and Mirpuri is a kind of a combination of Urdu, Panjabi, but it's not a written language. For example I don't know how to read or write Urdu.

I: Then you have all of the complications of using the Gregorian alphabet or whatever of using the European alphabet to articulate as well.

R: Yes. Some people definitely struggle with that, especially a lot of the leaflets and pamphlets. There are certain languages they may have translated into them after a while and we had a lot of third sector organisations working really hard to translate into other languages, the medical advice that was coming out in English. But again that was in the third sector and they had to find money to pay for that marketing and that information. Immediately it occurred more structurally from councils and the government.

I: Were you getting direct guidance from [the Local Public Health Authority] or [the National Public Health Authority]?

R: No.

I: **Okay.**

R: We were keeping a very sharp eye on the news.

I: **Yes and that was how you were getting your information?**

R: Yes and because we're based in the Women's XXXX XXXX Hub the hub's management team would also notify tenants of policies. So we had the internal XXXX XXXX [organisation which supports families of incarcerated individuals] policies, but then there was also the hub policies of helping where to put the face mask, what to do and so forth.

I: **Right and so you mentioned the Women's XXXX Hub. So let's talk about gender. How do you think the impact of the pandemic, were there elements of differentiation in terms of gender impact? What about that within a context of Muslim communities?**

R: I would say yes. In Muslim communities still sadly when it comes to primary care children it's still highly gendered. So women had to try, whatever type of labour they were doing, that combined with still caring for the children and teaching them because the schools were closed.

I: **Yes.**

R: That's another job in itself. So that was highly difficult and that was one of the problems. A lot of employers said, "Okay you can work at home". But you have kids, you know how it is.

I: **Yes.**

R: Right, it's 100 per cent not that simple, when they want you, they want you.

I: **Yes. Yes. But did you have friends then who have kids or family members, extended family members, home schooling or those responsibilities kicking in and everything being in the same space?**

R: So some family members and then also service users don't get the gist of technology. So they were very worried about how much their kids were on computers but didn't know how to navigate that and talk to them about it or what they should be worried about or not.

I: **Yes, okay. Then also thinking about I guess dynamics, maybe you've touched upon it. But did you get the sense of, in terms of, was there any shifting or changing or do you think there were any changes in gender roles?**

R: Can I just say, I know I had a conversation with a few people. I can't remember exactly who, but they were talking to their partner, because both of them – one was a teacher and one was something else, so they could go to work, but they had the kids at home. So they had to discuss which wage they could survive without, who is going to stay home.

I: **Got it.**

R: It ended up being the woman.

I: **Right okay.**

R: So I know those conversations happened quite a bit with quite a few people.

I: **Do you live with your family? Do you live with your parents?**

R: I do.

I: **So did you have concerns about going to work and coming back and potentially being at risk and that kind of thing?**

R: Yes. Because my mum has health issues. I was getting sprayed with Dettol before I entered the door.

I: **Okay, wow.**

R: Yes, I was getting sprayed with Dettol.

I: **Wow and they were okay, they didn't contract Covid.**

R: The first time I caught Covid from them and they were barely going out.

I: **Okay.**

R: The first time I caught Covid from them, I got it about a week after they got it and the second time I caught it but I don't know where and I was in isolation in my room. I was not allowed out. They were panicking and I was sad a bit. But yes they were very worried, especially because of the work I do. Also we were worried at work, management, the directors were very, very keen on seeing how we could adapt to reduce risk for everyone.

I: **Yes.**

R: I think one of the benefits for us was that we could use technology. So now, unless it's an urgent home visit that needs to happen, we do everything via the phone or a video call.

I: **Yes.**

R: But the problem is we can do that, but when it came to our clients seeking help from elsewhere, we need you to do something, a lot of them can't afford computers or they can't afford the Wi-Fi.

I: **Yes.**

R: So that's a big issue.

I: **Yes. I think again just thinking about the development of things over a timeline, with things like testing, access to testing and you've given me some insight into scepticism within the community. So what would your view be on those initial responses, whether it's the NHS rolling out testing, door to door testing, being able to send off kits, testing centres? How was that received?**

R: I know some people said test at home but don't send it off and don't let them know because it's another way of them monitoring you.

I: **Right okay.**

R: Especially remember when they first got with the app it would ping if you were near someone.

I: **Yes.**

- R: A fair few people were wary and they didn't want to disclose more information than they were happy to.
- I: **Why do you think that is?**
- R: Mistrust. Deep seated mistrust and suspicion of the government.
- I: **Do you think the Muslim community and/or South Asian communities were disproportionately impacted in terms of health outcomes from Covid?**
- R: I think a lot of them impacted ethnic groups. Many already feel there's a bias in certain things such as childbirth and so forth.
- I: **Right.**
- R: They thought that was exacerbated by Covid. Because I had a conversation with a few women who had given birth during Covid in the hospitals and some of the stuff they said was nightmare inducing. Especially because one of the nurses may say something to them, but then they would hear another patient being told something else.
- I: **Right.**
- R: Yes, it caused a level of trauma through the experience that they haven't forgotten.
- I: **So I know what you're talking about in terms of pre-existing literature and you say childbirth is the example. Can you just outline it for people who aren't familiar with the stigma?**
- R: Yes, so someone I talked to it was her first birth and they adamantly told her that no-one could stay with her.
- I: **Right okay.**
- R: While she waits to give birth they had to go home. So her partner went home and then she gets up to the ward and then she sees other women with their partners.
- I: **Okay. How does race and/or religion factor into the identity?**
- R: According to her all the other women were white.
- I: **Yes okay.**
- R: Also another mum said that she felt her concerns about the birth and how it was feeling wasn't taken seriously.
- I: **Okay.**
- R: This was both, she felt just because of her age and because she was a single mum, so she was looked at suspiciously.
- I: **Right okay.**
- R: They released her and the baby and then a few days later her midwife came and they had to actually take the baby back to hospital to get checked and there were some issues.
- I: **Okay and these are both South Asian women?**
- R: Yes.

- I: **Yes.**
- R: One was Bangladeshi and I'm not sure what the other one was. Because we say South Asian but that's an umbrella category.
- I: **I know.**
- R: They don't really identify with. So one was Bangladeshi and I can't recall the other ethnic group.
- I: **I'm still wrestling with how to translate BAME into something meaningful, yes it's challenging.**
- R: Yes, we're forced to use it in the third sector when we do applications for funding.
- I: **Yes.**
- R: But we would never use it with our service users.
- I: **Yes. So thinking about, you were working the whole time, but coming out of lockdown and these kinds of things start to become available like testing centres, vaccinations and so on. So thinking about when these interventions come into place, were there other interventions that were coming from community organisations or coming from – we focused a lot on mosques.**
- R: Yes, the mosque community workers. I mean the third sector I was amazed at what I was seeing, they were trying to be a voice of calm and encouraging people to follow the rules for their own safety. So you definitely think within communities, especially for example, it's kind of strange because I found, at least from what I saw, in Aston I wasn't hearing as much within the community members. But in Small Heath, definitely.
- I: **So to give us a picture of the kind of things, so what kinds of interventions were coming from ...**
- R: Emotional support, dealing not just with bereavement, but how people's reality was so changed.
- I: **Okay.**
- R: So there was a lot of emotional support coming from the mosque and other community organisations.
- I: **Okay.**
- R: Also practical resource. Because the Women's XXXX Hub had a food bank.
- I: **Yes okay.**
- R: There were queues out of the car park.
- I: **Yes.**
- R: We did food hampers during Christmas and the reactions families had to those, every little bit they were more than grateful for it. So we saw a lot of organisations and also collaborations to try and supply support, whether that was emotional, practical, highlighting to people where they could get food, things a bit cheaper, school uniforms, etc., clothing.

- I: So of those things what would you say was most valuable? I'm trying to get a picture of the ways in which community organisations which have strong Muslim cohorts or stakeholder and also religious organisations, mosques essentially.**
- R:** Yes.
- I: Responded to community needs in the pandemic and we've got a picture of that. There's also a question about what were the needs? How far had the government responses met the needs of the community and what's the bigger picture in terms of government responses? What that did for the community?**
- R:** The government responses needed to involve them actively engaging with frontline organisations, community groups. I mean the one thing about Covid you had funding, for example, from the National Lottery that was very fast, after Covid. But the government needed to strategically engage with the groups and organisations within the communities to disseminate information, but also resources.
- I: Yes.**
- R:** I think even now that's still an issue, for example the Household Support Fund, so many people have not known about that. Our phones have been ringing never endingly, because we told all of our clients, "Come to us and we'll help you, we'll apply for you if you need it". Then they tell someone else and they tell someone else and the phone calls didn't stop. I think we did over £4,000 worth of applications and then the local council restricted who could apply, because they found out the 65 plus cohort weren't applying as much.
- I: Yes.**
- R:** So they were the only people 65 and plus could apply and we were still getting phone calls from people saying, "We're really struggling, I don't know what to do". I told them, I can save your name and your number and if the application reopens or is widened again I will give you a call.
- I: Yes. So were things that the government fell short on do you think in terms of thinking about either the Muslim community, thinking about race and the impacts of Covid?**
- R:** Yes, when it comes to health, isolation, especially of the elderly.
- I: Right.**
- R:** Especially since Muslim and South Asian communities and other minority ethnic communities place emphasis on care within the home, but how that materialises because it doesn't always work, especially because of other responsibilities, family members. Which can exacerbate isolation that an elderly person faces, especially if they don't speak English, which is still a reality and if they don't have engagement with technology. Also the government entirely, I think, underestimated digital literacy or illiteracy, I'm positive. So they did give some laptops, well they changed the policy because we started applying for our families, you know when they were given the laptops, but then they changed the policy where they were given them all to schools.
- I: Right okay.**
- R:** The school would allocate it to a family, that didn't help. Also the families that had one of the laptops, I met a parent who was studying themselves decided that okay the kids need it more so I can't use it, so their grades were going down. Or trying to distribute one laptop between four kids so they can all do their work. Also where was the internet coming from,

the Wi-Fi connection? We found digital literacy was an issue, but also poverty, the financial strain, it just added.

I: Yes. I guess, are you particularly religiously observant or did the pandemic – are you aware of the pandemic having an impact on other people's engagement with their faith? Or was faith something which featured in the pandemic as a crisis within the community?

R: Okay, so I would identify as a Muslim. I don't pray, but it did make me a bit more conscious of my Islamic identity and some of the richness of it, especially who I've engaged with and been able to engage with. It's introduced me more to the magic side of Islam rather than the far right conservative that I grew up with, if that makes sense.

I: Yes.

R: But in the community but also, for example, in prisons, people were missing going to a mosque to pray and the sense of community and belonging.

I: Yes.

R: Because that was also another way people felt connected. I think that was disconcerting and jarring for quite a few people that I talked to. But there were also good networks created through a lot of the Islamic groups and they were very proactive across the cities, not just within.

I: Yes.

R: Which was really nice to see the collaboration across cities and across groups rather than one group saying, "No we'll do this if you keep out".

I: So how was that network connected or mediated? How was it coordinated and was your organisation involved or was this just something that you were aware of?

R: What's it called? I never remember their name. It's a Muslim – I can't remember what they're called. There's a few Muslim organisations, national ones, but also, for example, the Muslim chaplaincy team across the prisons.

I: Yes.

R: They made sure they communicated and engaged with wider community organisations and with each other to help.

I: Yes.

R: And see what good practice was working and could be implemented in their areas. Also, for example, with the third sector and it's one of my favourite things, the fact that people were sharing when there was funding available, urgent Covid funding, for giving advice and how to apply, sharing good practice. But also sharing practice about how to deal with Covid and how to adapt to it.

I: Yes. Moving forward I guess Covid has become an endemic. But what do you think the pandemic exposed or drew attention to that would be things to hold on to moving forward, lessons learned I guess with regard to impacts around race or impacts within the Muslim communities in Birmingham?

R: I need coffee.

I: I'm sorry, the timing isn't ideal.

- R: It's just been one of those days. I think structurally both are from councils and the government. They influenced our social infrastructure. Wasn't able to or didn't recognise the need for nuanced engagement with those on the frontline. I think that's one of the big problems. A lot of mistrust, a lot of emotional pain caused could've been potentially alleviated or removed if the government and councils had strategically engaged with local organisations and individuals and community members who are trusted by the community. There was a potential for a really good relationship to be created and facilitate a reliable knowledge that could be shared with community members and resources.
- I: **Okay. Is there anything else you want to talk about that I haven't asked you about that you think is important with regards the pandemic, minority ethnic groups?**
- R: The health inequalities that you highlighted massively and the fractures in our health system that is significantly highlighted as well. Because I'm still having people who come and talk to me about this, how the ongoing unease with Covid and the restrictions when it comes to how you engage with the doctor or the hospital is leading to other health conditions being diagnosed too late or not recognised.
- I: **Yes.**
- R: The frustration that that's causing and the fact, for example, because of Covid and the fact that we were having a phone call with doctors somehow suggested that that's the way to go, right. I've had a talk with a lot of service users and community people, individuals from the community when I'm shopping or something who are really, really worried about that and what it means in the long term.
- I: **Yes. Is there anything else you want to mention?**
- R: Probably, but I can't remember.
- I: **I know, don't worry. Well hopefully you'll be in a room at some point in a focus group and I can ask you.**
- R: I talked to my boss and she said definitely. We just got really busy with some urgent cases, so we didn't fix a date, but as soon as we're back in on 5th I'll get two dates confirmed and get on to you and see if they work for you.
- I: **Absolutely, trust me I'll make it work. So I'm going to stop recording.**

Interview 19

Date: 26/01/2022

Duration: 49:25

Participant characteristics: female, community member

Key:

H = Interviewer

S = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

H: Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. Erm, I've started the recording for the session now. So, erm, I'm gonna go through a series of questions with you. All of them are to do with the impacts of the pandemic and the subsequent restrictions So, obviously because you took part in the, erm, remote assessment session a couple of months ago, erm, you'll already kind of be familiar with some of the questions that I'm gonna ask but obviously because this is now a one-to-one interview, erm, you will have the opportunity to explore some of your, er, kind of responses in much more depth if you like, okay? So, erm, you will have received the participant information sheet and the consent form as well. Erm, so I'll obviously await, erm, your response to that but obviously you've already verbally agreed to take part in this, okay? So is there anything, erm, you would like to ask before we begin the questions?

S: No.

H: Okay, thank you. Alright. Okay, so going back to the beginning of the pandemic, erm, what would you say have been the main impacts on the Muslim community of the, of the pandemic and the, and the restrictions, et cetera?

S: Erm, I think it was a, a social element of it, er, people because they couldn't get out.

H: Yeah.

S: Because they couldn't get out, er, they were stuck indoors, a lot of elderly people, a lot of people who don't drive...

H: Yeah.

S: ...children, they were stuck the doors and the mosques were closed.

H: Yeah.

S: So, yeah, they didn't have the access to help or access to get out. So, they were stuck indoors and I think it really impacted on them emotionally, socially, 'cause they didn't have any support.

H: Yeah, so what about for you personally? What were the first impacts for you of the, the pandemic? Especially at the beginning. So if you think back to 2020 when we had that announcement in March that the country was gonna go into a lockdown what would you say were the kind of initial impacts for you at the beginning of the pandemic when the first lockdown hit?

S: Erm, it was the fact that I had no family help, no friends help and I have a disabled child.

H: Yeah.

S: I have a toddler.

H: Yeah.

S: Another child who's nine goes to junior school. Er, not having that help, not being able to get out, not being able to take the children out or and the fact that with the homeschooling element added in with two children having to do that, juggle the housework, then shopping, everything else, you know, not having that help, you know, my husband had to stop work as well. It financially impacted as well. So in every, in every way it kind of impacted us socially, emotionally in every way.

H: Yeah, what would you say of those experiences as well that you've just kind of talked about? Which one would you say had the most impact for you and....

S: The emotional.

H: ...yeah, yeah.

S: The emotional impact, I think because you were stuck in and it, you know, you're stuck in four walls...

H: Yeah.

S: ...with three children, with three, with three children, nowhere to go, you couldn't get out.

H: Yeah.

S: You couldn't get, you know, yeah, I think it was more emotional with me the social element.

H: So, yeah, so would you say that you experienced any, erm, anxiety or any other kind of impacts, negative impacts on your wellbeing as a result in that case?

S: Yeah, anxiety, definitely.

H: Yeah, yeah.

S: You know, anxiety.

H: Yeah.

S: Because of the, you know, the unknowing nature of what was going on...

H: **Yes.**

S: ...I think was, you know, in the press as well, they had, they weren't talking clearly. Nothing was clear, was it? So, it was very hard to understand what's going on from one minute to the next.

H: **Yeah.**

S: If they were more clear...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...if the government was more clear with their message, then it, we wouldn't have had such an emotional impact on our lives. I don't think we wouldn't have had that, you know, unsurety which was giving the anxiety and the depression and everything else that came with it.

H: **Yeah (...), so just kind of moving on from that. Erm, did you contract COVID yourself at any point? And if so, what was that particular experience like bearing in mind you've just kind of detailed as well that you had, you know, the emotional impact, what was that experience like as a whole as well?**

S: Yes, I did contract COVID. I had no help, erm...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...'cause my husband went back to, he was out of work the first, I think it was three weeks then, 'cause he's a takeout worker. He went back, he had to go back and get into work. Erm, so I had three children with me. No help, no family, no friends. I lived far from all my family and...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...yeah, it was, it was very hard emotionally, physically. I had to get up, still cook, still do everything...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...and I had to manage all that with, you know, no kind of help indoors..

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...and it's, it's very hard because I had it quite severe.

H: **Yeah. So how did you kind of manage that?**

S: At first also, yeah, also the GP services were open. Er, you couldn't go to a hospital just symptoms.

H: Yeah.

S: So, 'cause it was so severe, I was very unsure of what's going on and when to go...

H: Yeah.

S: ...where to go. I mean, they were telling us we can't go into hospitals, you can't go into GPs...

H: Yeah.

S: ...so you know, that was terrifying. That was terrifying having the children and being unsure of what's gonna happen to you, you know, and not having that place to go to for safety to reassure...

H: Yeah.

S: ...you know, to be reassured by the NHS...

H: Yeah.

S: ...you know, you didn't have that place to go to. That was, I think that was the most scary.

H: Yeah. What about for family members? So did, did you have, for example, any family members that were hospitalized or had kind of confirmed cases of COVID as well? Did, did you experience any of that?

S: Yes, I did. I, I had family members who had it, you know...

H: Yeah.

S: ...and it was quite severe. They weren't hospitalized.

H: Yeah.

S: One family member had died, you know...

H: Yeah.

S: ...from COVID. A family member died and you know, the funeral, you know, it was very sad because nobody could go to the funeral, you know...

H: Yeah.

S: ...nobody...

H: Yeah.

S: ...see, see the other family members that were impacted by it we couldn't go and see them. We couldn't go to the funeral, we couldn't attend it, you know, yeah, erm, and the other family members who had it severely, it was my father, erm, my sister, a lot of family members...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...had it that...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...had it quite severe we couldn't reach them. You can't go and help them. You can't, you know, you felt helpless.

H: **Yeah.**

S: But yeah it...

H: **How do you feel? How do you feel that the NHS responded in those cases?**

S: ...very badly. Very badly.

H: **Yeah.**

S: They weren't helpful unless you were going into cardiac arrest. I think that's the only type that you were able to call the ambulance service, otherwise they told you to treat yourself, however severe...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...at how would, you know, when you're at that point, you'd have to be very...do you get it? It was terrifying. So...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...it was very, you know, it was a scary time because you didn't know when to call them, even if you had less severe symptoms, I, I would, I didn't know myself. I could barely lift my head but I, I was dragging myself out and I thought if I could still walk, you know...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...I'm not gonna call them because they're pushing us away. They're telling us we can't go, if you've got COVID, get tested, stay home but it was...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...terrifying.

H: **So did you use the 111 or 999 services at any point? And if you did use 111 or, erm, the emergency services or the GP even?**

S: I called the 111 service. I, and they told me to stay home, stay hydrated...

H: Yeah.

S: ...er, and if you could breathe okay, you know, stay home, stay put. Er, GP service, they were not existent. They weren't even answering the phone. They weren't answering the phone at all. It, it just rang out constantly...

H: Yeah.

S: ...so it was absolutely, it was horrendous, the GP service. I, I mean, they're still the same. They're still not open. Well, after all these months, they're still not open, our GP service. They're just, they answer the phone but they don't give appointments.

H: Yeah.

S: It's, it's impacted still to this day and at the start of the pandemic throughout it, we couldn't even the land, the line would just call out. There was, there was...

H: Yeah.

S: ...a message service. It would just go to the message service. So there was no...

H: Yeah.

S: ...help there.

H: Yeah, would you say that that's still ongoing then? 'Cause you've just said that the GP services still kind of...

S: Yes. That's still, that's still ongoing. They're not seeing face to face. It's over the phone...

H: Yeah.

S: ...and they tell you the service they offer is just that the GP will call you back from this time to this time. If that's, if you get the appointment in the first place and if you don't get...

H: Yeah.

S: ...the appointment, you just have to keep calling back and it just, it rings out or they'll say there's no appointments left...

H: Yeah.

S: ...even though we'd call at eight o'clock. Erm, but they're still not doing face to face in my GP surgery. They're still...

H: Yeah.

S: ...not seeing my children who have, my children have had seizures. Erm, my son's epileptic. They refuse to see him. They refuse to give an appointment. We had to take him to A&E. So the GP thing is still got, ongoing.

H: Yeah, would you say that that is a direct result of the pandemic? The kind of the impact on GP services and the, the, the subsequent kind of lack of service that they've provided you, would you say that that's a direct impact of COVID?

S: It's direct.

H: Yeah.

S: Yes, it's, it's direct. It was, it was not like this. I mean, they've always been bad with giving appointments but not like this where the fact that we can't see our own GP, we can't see any GP for that matter. We can't see anyone in there. You can't get in.

H: Yeah.

S: You can't get...it, it's a direct impact. It's completely changed the GP service where they're just, it's over the phone consultation if you get that and through the pandemic we didn't even have that. So it's directly, it's completely changed the system. Before you could go in. Before the pandemic...

H: Yeah.

S: ...we could go in and get an appointment. We didn't get it on the phone. We'd go in and...

H: Yeah.

S: ...you know, you'd make that appointment in front with the reception stuff. You can't do that anymore. You can't see anyone. We then at least...

H: Yeah.

S: ...get a welcome, you know, to see...

H: Yeah.

S: ...ourselves or our children. So it's, it's changed the whole system. The NHS service, it's changed overall.

H: Yeah, okay. Right. So, erm, this is another kind of health-related question. So the question I'm gonna ask now is on vaccines. So, what are your views on the available vaccines and what do you think, what factors do you think impact on whether people choose to take the vaccines or not? So, I've given you two questions there. So I'll probably break that down again. What are your views on the vaccines that we have available at the moment?

S: Erm, I, I feel they don't work. I feel...

H: Yeah.

S: ...that, er, there's not much information around it. There's not been enough studies around it. I don't feel they're safe. Er, the fact that people are contracting COVID after three jabs, including the booster, the latest one...

H: Yeah.

S: ...and they're still contracting it, I don't feel that they're working at all. I don't think they, they're working. The fact that my family members have all had...my, my parents have had that booster, er, the third one and they're still contracting COVID, you know...

H: Yeah.

S: ...if there's no protection, there's no point to the...that's my viewpoint.

H: Yeah, yeah. So has that had an impact on your attitude to the vaccine as well that people have had the vaccine and the booster and that they're catch, still catching it? Would you say that that's had an impact on you choosing to have it?

S: Yeah, it, it's had a direct impact because...

H: Yeah.

S: ...they're falling just as ill. You know, everyone around me who's had it, they've had the three, you know, they're, they're still getting COVID and they get it the exact same symptoms as the person who hasn't...

H: Yeah.

S: ...had it. So it's like...

H: Yeah.

S: ...you know, there's, does it seem to be working? And they're rolling out more and more boosters. So for me, it's like what is the point of these? You know. Erm, and there's a lot of misinformation about it, you know, it's everything's confusing. It's not straightforward. It's not direct the information that's being handed out about it. You know, they say it protects you that on the other hand, then they say, you know, you're still gonna contract COVID. How has it protected you if you could still contract COVID, you know?

H: Yeah.

S: And you're getting it and over with each booster.

H: Yeah.

S: So, it's, it's confusing to me. Very confusing.

H: Yeah, what do you think attitudes have been like in the wider community towards the vaccine? So, erm, your local Muslim community, for example, what do you think

attitudes have been like there towards the vaccine? What do you think generally people's kind of attitude has been towards the vaccine?

S: I'd say it's mixed. I'd say it's...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...mixed. It's 50, 50, you know, half aren't sure, other half are, probably they're going along with it because you know, they have, they're so scared...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...they're just going along with it. They're not questioning it. They're not questioning anything. They're just going along and there's the other half are very confused, very scared. Fearful of it because there's so much misinformation about it.

H: **Yeah, okay. Alright. So what do you think could be done in terms of kind of government responses with the vaccine? What do you think would encourage people to kind of, erm, uptake the vaccine a little bit more? What kinds of things do you think would people, give people a bit more faith in the whole vaccine system?**

S: Erm, if they were more transparent with the...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...results with how many people are actually contracting COVID and how severe and how many hospitalizations that are...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...happening still after having all these vaccinations, all three? Erm...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...I don't, it's realistic what the statistics they put out that there's more people dying from COVID who have not been vaccinated and then they're not putting out any numbers for the amount of people who have had the vaccine and are still dying.

H: **Yeah.**

S: You know, if it was, if that was transparent, then I'd have no problems. I would not be confused if they'd put...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...the real numbers of how many deaths and linked to vaccine, you know, vaccine injuries...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...or vaccine deaths. If that was transparent, then I'd have no problem, but the fact that, that is being covered and then they're putting everything out about just people dying from COVID, generally...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...they're just putting it out, you know, without the statistic on the other side of it but people with the vaccinations what's happening to them, you know...

H: **Uh-huh.**

S: ...that's what's confusing me. That's what's, you know, making me go against it...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...the fact that...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...we've not had transparency on both sides, it's gonna be the same both ways.

H: **Yeah, okay. Thank you for that. Okay, so, right. So the next question I'm gonna ask you, this one I suppose I'm gonna kind of go circle back to something that you mentioned, erm, in the question around, er, whether COVID impacted on family members. So you did mention that, that a family member had died and that you weren't able to attend that family member's, erm, funeral, for example because of COVID restrictions. So how do you think that, erm, the kind of conditions around the pandemic impacted on funeral arrangements and death and burial in general? How do you think the, the, erm, pandemic impacted on that, on funerals and deaths and burials?**

S: Oh, that was the most awful. That was, that was the worst because...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...you couldn't be a part of the funeral. You couldn't go console or, you know, comfort the loved ones who had been impacted by it directly. You couldn't go...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...and visit anyone. We couldn't even go...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...and you know, it was all over the phone and the person who had died, I mean, you couldn't, you couldn't go to the house, you couldn't go and mourn, you know...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...you're all, we were all stuck indoors. We couldn't go to attend the funeral.

H: **Yeah.**

S: It was...and it was very bad, emotionally. I think that was the worst part of everything...

H: Yeah.

S: ...where the deaths were happening and we were...

H: Yeah.

S: ...stuck. We had no choice, you know...

H: Yeah.

S: ...we had no choices given to us.

H: Yeah.

S: ...it was awful. It was awful.

H: **Do you think that the mosque or kind of any, erm, Muslim organizations local to you assisted in supporting with kind of rituals around death and burial, would you say that those responses were sufficient? Or would you say that they were kind of more in line with what the government's attitude was towards this?**

S: Yes, they were more in line with the government attitude, you know...

H: Yeah.

S: ...stay put. Stay indoors, you know, they went along with all the rules and regulations.

H: Yeah.

S: So they, no, they didn't, erm, make way for any, you know, the rules where the rules, weren't they?

H: Yeah.

S: So I guess they're [unclear] as well.

H: **Yeah, I mean, would you like to have seen a bit more intervention on the part of mosques where death and burial was concerned? Do you think that, that would've helped a little bit if their rules were slightly different, for example, if, or if they offered any kind of additional support, do you think that would've helped people in the community?**

S: No, not really be, because they had, I, I think they hands were tied there.

H: Yeah.

S: The fact that, you know, there's nothing they could have done. What could they really? If we were told to stay put and you can't go to the funeral, what else could they do? Erm...

H: Yeah.

S: ...there isn't a support system there in the first place with the Muslim community. We don't have that...

H: Yeah.

S: ...er, support system where they give emotional support, anyway, I think it's family members who give it...

H: Yeah.

S: ...at the time, time of death...

H: Yeah.

S: ...we see each other and we'll console each other but they could, I don't think the mosque could have done anything more there because their hands, like I said, were tied...

H: Yeah.

S: ...they were told. They had the same restrictions as everybody else...

H: Yeah.

S: ...so I don't think they could have done anything more and the fact that COVID was going around and everyone was catching it a lot, erm...

H: Yeah.

S: ...there was a lot of people who were stuck indoors, so they, the people who do in the community, the Muslim community, there are people that...

H: Yeah.

S: ...go door to door and ask for help but because they were contracted COVID themselves...

H: Yeah.

S: ...they could help, they couldn't help themselves let alone help us...

H: Yeah.

S: ...and it was more, I think the government that should have been helping...

H: Yeah.

S: ...the government services.

H: Yeah, okay. Just kind of continuing on that conversation about, erm, the kind of religion and the Muslim community, do you think that the pandemic had an impact on your religious observance or your faith in any kind of way? What would you say the kind of impacts were on your faith and, and belief?

S: It, it strengthened. It strengthened it *[laughter]*.

H: Yeah.

S: ...if anything, it strengthened it more so...

H: Yeah.

S: ...because my faith was everything at that point because you...

H: Yeah.

S: ...there was nothing else that my faith was what brought me out of it.

H: Yeah.

S: It's what, you know, console me, it's what give me strength, it's what give me, you know, that surety that everything's gonna be okay no matter what, you know...

H: Yeah.

S: ...it's meant to be and having the faith, I think it just, yeah, it placed me in a better position to not get depressed.

H: Yeah.

S: Erm, I had anxiety but when I'd go to my faith and looked to my faith, I thought, you know, in, in Islam it teaches, you know, to have faith in Allah. So in our God...

H: Yeah.

S: ...erm, and everything will be okay. It will work itself out and it's happening for a reason. So...

H: Yeah.

S: ...that was, you know, our faith is based solely around. I think the message is mainly that everything's gonna be right. Everything's for a reason...

H: Yeah.

S: ...erm, whatever the outcome is, it's gonna be okay because that's what's meant to be.

H: Yeah.

S: So that strengthened me a lot.

H: Yeah.

S: That give me if, even more faith because we didn't have the NHS, we didn't have science helping us then, you know...

H: Yeah.

S: ...it was us and our faith and that's what pulls you out of I think, erm, of that dark hole of depression...

H: Yeah.

S: ...that pulls you out, that you go to the Quran and it's everything's written there. Everything's played black and white. You've got an explanation for everything and...

H: Yeah.

S: ...it really, it really helped me...

H: Yeah.

S: ...in every way. Yeah, I think that helped me. Emotionally it helped me a lot. It pulled me out of panic attacks, everything. Yeah.

H: Would you say that your faith helped you more than any kind of intervention from the government in that case?

S: Yes.

H: Yeah.

S: Yes.

H: Okay.

S: You know, there wasn't any intervention with the government in the first place. I mean, if anything, they were putting the fear there...

H: Yeah.

S: ...erm, they, they told you the news and they left you with it to suffer with it...

H: Yeah.

S: ...and it was fear among them. It was like scaring people. It's, I think it put people in a worse state of health than they would've been if the government were, were sending out positive messages along with...

H: Yeah.

S: ...you know, you don't say, say something so big to people, people to human, to humans. You don't say something so big and then leave them with it to worry them and then not give any kind of, you know, reassurance...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...erm, what the next steps are and what they could do for emotional support. You had no kind of, you know, help from the...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...if anything, they, they give you the news and then they left you to it, like, you know, go fend for yourselves and...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...I think the stress and everything else 'cause a lot of people who don't have faith, you know, that were turning to suicide, turning to, they got depression, alcoholics, you know...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...they were turning to the drink more, drugs, overdosing, suicide went up...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...you know, it's still impacting people to this day.

H: **Yeah.**

S: People who haven't got the faith, you know, they were looking to the government for that help...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...and it's very sad that they didn't have that because...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...we've got our faith. I think that's what pulled a lot of Muslims through...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...who have that faith...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...and you look there, you know.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Yeah.

H: So obviously faith was, was something that was quite powerful for you in terms of getting you through the, the pandemic and the restrictions.

S: It was everything. Yeah, it was everything...

H: Yeah.

S: ...for me.

H: Okay.

S: Yeah, it, I think it, it helped my health. It helped my mental health, you know, I, you look there however dark it went...

H: Yeah.

S: ...go back to your faith and it was just calming...

H: Yeah.

S: ...and the government, you look on the news switched on the BBC or ITV and it was just worrisome news scaring you with these strange people standing there, you know, bug eyed [laughter] and they're clueless that it was all robotic and strange...

H: Yeah.

S: ...and you know, I just wanted, I just switched it off. At a certain point I just switched it off and I wouldn't look at it and I wouldn't look at the news anymore 'cause I knew it was just the media and you know, the media and government trying to scare people and it was impacted on people's health, mental wellbeing, you know, socially, emotionally, you know, they were losing their jobs. They, they didn't have any income coming in, you know, they couldn't pay their bills and they were just putting out these news headlines all about...

H: Yeah.

S: ...more this, more that, you know, everything, negativity. It was just negativity, no positivity there.

H: Yeah.

S: So my faith was everything there...

H: Yeah.

S: ...so I'll switch this off and it's like a former meditation. Erm, it, it was calming and I, you know, you just look to your face and like I said is like everything is written there black and white for you...

H: Yeah.

S: And it's just so calming.

H: Yeah, okay, thank you. Right. Just kind of to follow on from that question, I suppose. Did you manage to stay connected with other Muslims during the pandemic? And if so, how and in what ways did you stay connected with, with other Muslims?

S: Erm, no, I didn't really stay connected with other Muslims. Erm, we, I did with my neighbours, erm, my neighbours we have WhatsApp put on WhatsApp...

H: Yeah, okay.

S: ...like we, we'd text each other. If everyone's okay, you know, we'd ask each other from time to time...

H: Yeah.

S: ...and but otherwise we couldn't really connect. We couldn't see each other, you know...

H: Yeah.

S: ...we were all stuck indoors. So there was no way of really connecting apart from WhatsApp messaging...

H: Yeah.

S: ...and everybody was like I said everyone had their own problems. So everyone was busy with that because you know, the government wasn't helping at all.

H: Yeah.

S: So everyone has children around me, you know, the, from the Muslim community and everyone had the homeschooling going on, you know...

H: Yeah.

S: ...everyone had their own problems to deal with.

H: Yeah.

S: Erm, so, so I couldn't really, everyone was in the same boat, I guess.

H: Yeah, yeah.

S: Erm.

H: Okay, right, erm, do, I mean, this question is again about, erm, faith. Do you attend a mosque? Do you attend one you personally yourself?

S: No.

H: No? Okay.

S: No.

H: Erm, I mean, you, you've said you don't attend one but just kind of knowledge of any local mosques around you. Are you aware of any particular role that local mosques played for the community during the pandemic? Are you aware if they were doing anything for example to support people in your community?

S: Er, no.

H: No?

S: No, they weren't doing anything. They, they went along with the government guidelines. They were pushing for the vaccine, erm...

H: Yeah.

S: ...they weren't really going, like I said, a lot of people contracted COVID so...

H: Yeah.

S: ...they were unwell and 'cause the NHS services were down...

H: Yeah.

S: ...the people who, it wasn't just COVID but other illnesses, they couldn't get to GP services or anything. So there was a lot of people with health problems that were stuck...

H: Yeah.

S: ...indoors that were from the mosque community. So...

H: Yeah.

S: ...we knew a lot of the Muslim leaders that had got, you know, heart problems, cancer.

H: Yeah.

S: Erm, a lot of, you know, illnesses that they weren't getting treatment for.

H: Yeah.

S: So they were stuck themselves. So they...

H: Yeah.

S: ...some people who were advised about the vaccine rollout, a few people...

H: Yeah.

S: ...went around, erm, standing outside the mosque but that's all they could really do, I guess, erm...

H: **Yeah.**

S: Yes, they, they were pushing...it was the vaccine role. That's the only thing I notice for...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...everyone who had health problems, they were stuck at home themselves.

H: **Yeah. Well, in that case, what interventions do you think would have benefited the Muslim community early on during the pandemic? What kind of interventions do you think would've helped people in the Muslim community. On the part of mosques, for example, what do you think they could have done a bit more of to support people early on during the pandemic?**

S: Well, they could have gone door to door, I guess.

H: **Yeah.**

S: You know, people that were available could have gone door to door...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...checked on people, you know, if anyone stuck indoors, if anyone needed that emotional support...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...done some kind of WhatsApp group...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...a neighbourhood WhatsApp group.

H: **Hmm.**

S: You know, you, you had a phone call or say, I need this shopping or I need these medical supplies. I, I can't get out, you know...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...people with children who had contracted COVID, they could have done that, I guess.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Erm, yeah. Yeah, didn't have those services. We didn't have any kind of service available where, you know, if you needed that...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...and if you got into an emergency situation, leave your children, where would you get your shopping from? Do you get it? Erm...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...say we've all got, we'd contracted COVID at the same time, it would've been a problem because I have no family here. Erm, and there would've been no way of getting the shopping apart from online shopping which we're...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...having problems with delivery...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...service anyway...

H: **Uh-huh.**

S: ...you know. We, we were lucky enough that we'd had got, caught it at different times. So my husband, if I couldn't go my husband could go.

H: **Yeah.**

S: But I'd caught it...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...you couldn't get the shopping but yeah, if they could have helped it that way, it would've been a big help, yeah.

H: **Yeah, okay, great. Okay, so, erm, the next set of questions I'm gonna ask about are about the economic impacts of the pandemic. Erm, so this is for you individually and for the, for the Muslim community more widely. So, erm, I mean, I suppose the first question I'm gonna ask because you've already told me this, do you, do you work?**

S: No.

H: **No. Okay, so I'm not gonna ask that question 'cause that was gonna be about how it's impacted your working life. So I suppose, erm, the next question is about kind of the impact of the pandemic on your, erm, erm, kind of finances, I suppose, if that's not too much of a personal question. So do you feel there were any kind of economic impacts in your house as a result of the, the pandemic?**

S: Er, my husband was out of work. Erm...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...and then, because they weren't any customers when he did go back...

H: Yeah.

S: ...his wage wasn't coming in as much. Erm, yeah, it, it did directly impact us, erm, financially.

H: Yeah.

S: And when, when I'd gotten unwell, we had to get, we had to get a lot more food from out.

H: Yeah.

S: Get to outsource and take outs..

H: Yeah.

S: ...a lot more, which is very expensive, you know, 'cause I couldn't get up physically. I didn't have the help.

H: Hmm.

S: ...we were spending more money, erm, that we didn't really have. So yeah, it kind of, it directly impacted us financially.

H: Yeah.

S: Erm, it still is. I mean, from now, erm, at that time it was, it was very bad. It was very bad. Er, yeah. Er.

H: So you'd say it's had a long-term...

S: Yeah.

H: ...impact on you financially?

S: It had an impact because the price are our bills now. It's, you know, the job hasn't changed a bit. His wage hasn't gone up. Erm...

H: Yeah.

S: ...and you're left with customers are still dwindling where he's working er, because of all this COVID. It's still impacted directly. Erm...

H: Yeah.

S: ...the price hikes are the worst now. After everything that's happened now they put the prices up on food, on bills, gas, elec, yeah.

H: Yeah.

S: You know, it's awful. So it's, it's still, it's directly impacted us right now.

H: Yeah. Yeah, okay. Right. Okay, so, erm, right, the next set of questions I'm gonna ask you are around attitudes towards the Muslim community. So, erm, again, if you think that, you know, this isn't a question that applies to you, then you can obviously just say so, okay? But do you feel at any point that there was any increased tension or hostility towards the Muslim community from other communities during the pandemic? So do you think that there was any hostile kind of attitude or behaviours towards Muslims during the pandemic or?

S: Erm, yeah, I, I do. I think, er, the news, but...

H: Yeah.

S: ...they started flashing that, you know, the, is it the BAME? Do they call it BAME? Where it's, you know, the Asian community and the Black community.

H: Oh, BAME, BAME, yes, yeah.

S: Yeah, yeah, that, yeah, they were, they started labelling that, you know, our communities were not taking up the vaccine seriously. They weren't taking out that role at, from my experience, the mosque leaders, one thing they did do at the mosque, they were pushing for the vaccine. They were going along with the government rollout from the straight, from the onset...

H: Yeah.

S: ...they applied the rules. They did everything the government said and then they were showing in the media that they're not doing enough that they're not pushing for the vaccine. It was a complete lie because...

H: Yeah.

S: ...from my experience, the community were pushing for the vaccine. They were going along with all the guidelines.

H: Yeah.

S: If anything, more so the, the government, they were following the rules. They closed out the mosque. They didn't interact as soon as, you know, they saw the cases, you know, had started.

H: Yeah.

S: They, erm, were pushing for the vaccine. They were telling, they were giving out leaflets. They were putting leaflets through the doors pushing you to go and have your vaccine and not, you know, be scared of it. Not be afraid of it.

H: Yeah.

S: Erm, so that, yeah, when it come out in the media that, you know, our communities were slow on the uptake of it...

H: Yeah.

S: ...that, and it was due to the mosque leaders and the mosque not representing, you know...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...the vaccine, the right, correct way.

H: **Yeah.**

S: That was a lot of lies, er, because like I said, from my experience where we did go out the house, where we did go shopping outside the mosques, they were standing there with leaflets encouraging people to go and have the vaccines.

H: **Yeah, so you feel that there was a kind of misrepresentation in the media. Hello? Sorry, I think your, erm...**

S: Yeah.

H: **...sorry, I didn't catch any of that. Erm, I think the connection cut out a little bit. Erm, so, erm, I'll just kind of repeat that last bit. Just on the basis of what you'd said. Erm, so did you feel that there was a misrepresentation of Muslims and the BAME community in the media whereas in reality Muslims and for example, mosques were quite proactive in pushing the vaccine, for example?**

S: Yeah, yeah.

H: **Yeah.**

S: It was completely misrepresented because they were very proactive in pushing for the vaccine and the government guidelines. They followed it down to a T.

H: **Yeah.**

S: And that's straight away. So I didn't understand when I saw in the media...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...because where I live...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...it's a big Muslim community...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...and the majority are a very friendly bunch and they follow all the guidelines, you know, they do everything they are told. Erm, and when they're getting misrepresented in the media that you know, they're backwards and they're not taking, you know, they're scaring people, they're not doing enough to push out for the vaccine. It was complete lies...

H: Yes.

S: ...because from my experience, I don't even attend the mosque myself but...

H: Yeah.

S: ...the community but they were going around doing that. Did emotional support or not. They were pushing for the vaccine. They were pushing for the government guidelines. They was telling people to stay indoors, don't go to the mosque, do not attend, you know...

H: Yeah, yeah.

S: ...the vaccine. Stay put and have your vaccines. Go and have all your vaccines on time.

H: Yeah.

S: It's not gonna harm you. It's not gonna affect you. They were pushing for it a lot.

H: Yeah.

S: So the media misrepresenting that...

H: Yeah.

S: ...was a shock to me.

H: Yeah.

S: You know, it didn't make any sense.

H: Yeah. Okay, right. Did you personally experience any, erm, hate incidents during the pandemic?

S: Yes. Er, I had some people, er, from the Caucasian community.

H: Yeah.

S: They, er, but one girl she spat at. Yeah, she spat and I saw women having their head scarfs yanked down but we'd go shopping because, you know, I, I don't know what it was. They thought we were having the vaccine.

H: Yeah.

S: What media was doing...

H: Yeah.

S: ...when they were saying that the Muslim community were not, you know, pushing for the vaccine...

H: Yeah.

S: Which was lies. Erm, they...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...misrepresented the other side of it where the racists, they all come out...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...and started attacking. It was a reason to attack, wasn't? So they were going after the women when you were going out spitting to you, you know, thinking that we're not having it and like I said, the uptake was a lot down here.

H: **Yeah.**

S: People were going and having the vaccine.

H: **Yeah.**

S: They were running for it...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...like queuing up to go and get it. You know, the discussions between the Muslim community and vaccine, a lot of people were take, taking it up because of the mosques pushing for it. So when that was happening, the racist attacks, you know, it was shocking to me.

H: **Yeah, so do you feel that the, the media and the government played any kind of role in...**

S: Representative.

H: **...yeah.**

S: Yes, a direct.

H: **Yeah.**

S: It was direct. It was direct.

H: **Yeah, can I ask...**

S: Because Muslim people are very, misinformed, yeah.

H: **Yeah, no, sorry. I, I was just kinda, kinda ask kind of those incidents of hate crime. Would they have been things that you would've considered reporting to the police or was it something that you kind of wanted to deal with yourself?**

S: The police don't really help in those kind of matters.

H: **Yeah.**

S: They don't do anything...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...you know, they, they don't help at all. So you just, we just got on with it because you report it and nothing happens...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...you know, what just happened a lot down here. Erm, the hate crimes happened a lot against Muslims down here.

H: **Yeah.**

S: You know, as soon as media flashes so they come to our community, that's what they come out in full force. They'll just come out and start spiting, getting, keep head scarf off, you know, start attacking, start throwing things at you.

H: **Yeah.**

S: You know, but erm, around that time I do specifically remember they were pulling women's head scarfs there, spiting at them, you know.

H: **Yeah.**

S: It, it wasn't nice.

H: **Yeah. Okay.**

S: And directly from media reports because they personally that person whether they've had the vaccine or not.

H: **Yeah.**

S: So, you know, it was, it was directly impacted from what they were reading.

H: **Yeah, yes, yeah. Okay, great. Thank you for sharing that. Okay, right. Erm, so the final kind of, erm, questions that I'm gonna get time to are around, erm, the needs of the Muslim community, erm, in regards to the pandemic. So in an ideal world what would you like to see the government do to better respond to the needs of the Muslim community?**

S: Erm, they can stop putting out the false report about the Muslim community not going along with guidelines...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...and not speaking up, speaking up enough and you know...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...when matters come up that, that com, the Muslim community don't stand up for what's going on and they're against this, that, and the other. The, the Muslim community from my experience down here, majority of them there are some backwards people. Obviously in every community you have...

H: Yeah.

S: ...the people with different views. The majority of Muslims, and whatever's going on, you know, they, they go along with that program and they will encourage and (.....) it, it will push in the Muslim community is not going out and doing this stuff and they are...

H: Yeah.

S: ...so, erm, the misrepresentation, I think that is the biggest problem.

H: Yeah.

S: The media headlines. The lies. Yeah, the government needs to stop that. They need to stop doing it and playing a part in it.

H: **Yeah. Do you think that there's any ways that mosques or other community organizations could respond to the kind of ongoing challenges that we still have around COVID for the Muslim community? So mosques and kind of local community organizations. Do you think they could play a role in improving the situation for Muslims?**

S: Yeah, I think, erm, they could give up more emotional support to people...

H: Yeah.

S: ...and where, you know, you, you have a place to go where you could go and, you know, if you've got problems.

H: Yeah.

S: If you do have problems, where you could go to them, they, if they were more open to that side of things where you could go to them for emotional support, or, you know, if you're having financial difficulties, I mean, they do have food banks here. They do have that kind of service but emotional support more so I'd say, yeah.

H: Yeah.

S: If they had a service for that, they, they don't really have that.

H: **Yeah. Was this, would you say that was the, the kind of saying before the pandemic as well, in terms of giving people...**

S: Yeah.

H: ...additional forms of support? Yeah.

S: Yeah, yeah, they've never had that side.

H: **Yeah.**

S: In the most...

H: **Do you think that would help people? Yeah.**

S: ...yes, it would help people a lot, yeah.

H: **Yeah.**

S: They need to be more open to the emotional support that people need. You know, there should be a place where we could go and speak.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Especially as Islam encourages, you know, that we should have that support.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Erm, they don't have that kind of service law.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Kind of left to your own thoughts and you can't go, you don't have a place to go and if they had that service, it would be a lot different.

H: **Can I ask, do you think that it, it's any different for men and women in the Muslim community in terms of the kind of support that they can get from mosques? Because obviously with jumaa, for example, let's say on a Friday, okay. This is something exclusively that Muslim men have traditionally attended, okay? And mosques have traditionally been kind of been places that, you know, men in the community will attend rather than women, even though we do know obviously now that you do have many mosques that accommodate for women as well. So they'll have, for example, a side that, you know, is for sisters, okay? In terms of praying and being able to practice their faith, et cetera. Would you say that, that plays a role in it as well, that, you know, women, erm, in Muslim communities traditionally haven't been able to access the mosque as a source of support? What, what would you say your view is on that? Do you think that plays a role in it?**

S: Yeah, that plays a big role in it. Erm, the fact that we're made to feel uncomfortable to go, we can't, I, I know we're allowed to.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Sometimes we're made...it's from the beginning of time from as far as I was, you know, where, since I was young, erm, it's been a place for men more so the women, erm...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...the men could go and add their grievances, financial problems, anything they could go for openly...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...whereas in women, it's like a taboo subject. You can't really go because, you know, the, I guess gossip spreads and...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...you know, there isn't really the, there service there provides for women to go there to have that safe, you know, place to go where, where you're in trouble...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...it's, you know, family circumstances, you know...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...emotional support, financial support, you know...

H: **Hmm.**

S: ...any kind of problem you've got with your children or anything.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Like I've got a disabled child. I haven't got an outlet to speak. There's no service in the mosque...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...that allows me to go and speak or have emotional support with that.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Or any kind of support if it, if that, you know, my son, he's disabled. Er, I can't, there's not really a place for him to go. It's not...he's, what can I say? He's not (...) basically if he makes noises 'cause he's autistic, he's severely on the spectrum. He's severe on it.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Erm, he's got epilepsy. I mean, he could, I could take him but people wouldn't like it if I took him. There's not a service there that provides for these disabled children as well. Not just...

H: **Yeah.**

S: ...me as a mother, we did that extra support. I don't have an outlet there, you know.

H: **Yeah.**

S: And that's, from the beginning of time, they haven't changed that part of the mosque.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Erm, but you could go and have emotional support. They don't have that.

H: **Yeah.**

S: At all.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Women especially. It's women, it's women that, yeah missed out on everything with, on that side of things.

H: **Yeah. Okay, right. So do you feel as if they could obviously put some interventions in place or getting women more involved generally in these types of organizations it would be a big source of help.**

S: Yes, yeah.

H: **Yeah, okay. Erm, I think, that's probably, erm, the end of the questions. So, erm, this is just the point where I'll ask you, is there anything else that you wanna kind of add about the impact of COVID or anything that you think might help? Erm, is there any kind of comment that you kind of wanna make now?**

S: No. No, I think, I think everything's been covered.

H: **Okay, brilliant. Okay, thank you. Erm, I'm just gonna stop the recording now then in that case, that's the end of the interview.**

S: Okay.

Interview 20

Date: 04/02/2022

Duration: 39:01

Participant characteristics: female, community member

Key:

I – Interviewer

J – Respondent

I: Okay, good afternoon.

J: Hi.

I: Okay. So, um, I'm just gonna start our interview now. Okay.

J: Okay.

I: So, um, prior to, um, taking part in this, you will have received a participant information sheet and a consent form as well that you've signed.

J: Yeah.

I: Okay, so that's just for the purposes of the recording. So, um, I'm gonna ask you a series of questions now that are kind of a follow on from the questionnaire...

J: Okay.

I: ...that you participated in very kindly. Um, and then obviously you agreed to a subsequent interview as well, which we're having there. Okay. So, the questions are gonna be around the pandemic and the specific impacts on yourself, family members, community, et cetera.

J: Yeah.

I: Okay. If there are any questions that you aren't comfortable with, um, then you know, you don't have to answer them. Uh, if there's anything that you think doesn't apply, you also don't have to answer those questions. And if you wanna stop or withdraw from the interview at any point, you are also able to do that.

J: Okay.

I: Okay. Thank you. All right. So, going back to the beginning of the pandemic, what have been the main impacts on, um, the Muslim community do you feel?

J: The Muslim community?

I: Yeah. So as a kind of whole. So obviously you live in Birmingham, and you've said that you live in a community that does have quite a strong network of Muslims.

Um, do you think that the pandemic had any specific impacts on the Muslim community as a whole?

J: Um, yeah. I mean, not particularly any more so than what everyone else has kind of felt, but, um, like prayer, like, you know, like we have Friday prayers.

I: Yeah.

J: And those were impacted so we obviously can't, you know, go into – at, particularly at the start of the pandemic, we couldn't go in and do those because obviously there was like an accumulation of like 100 people in the room and you can't really do that. You couldn't really do that at the time. But other than that, I wouldn't say that it's been and, oh, and like celebrating Eid as well.

I: Mm-hmm.

J: Which again, you know, everyone had to kind of, um, set aside like any kind of celebrations that they wanted to celebrate. But yeah, other than that, I wouldn't say it's any different.

I: Yeah. What about for yourself specifically? What do you think the first impacts were for you of the pandemic? So, if you think back to the first lockdown we had in March of 2020, um, can you just kind of, um...

J: Yeah.

I: ...elaborate on some of the impacts.

J: Um, for me, it was really difficult in the first few months because I lived with my parents, both of are quite vulnerable and it was just very difficult, even roaming around the house at the time, because, you know, I had to kind of be very careful that if I was feeling like I had any kind of symptoms, I wasn't, you know, passing them on to my parents. But, um, yeah, there was a lot of – it was quite mentally quite jarring, I think those first few months.

I: Yep.

J: For me personally.

I: Yep. And of those experiences, what would you say had the kind of most impact for you out of everything that you've just detailed? What do you think was the most difficult?

J: Um, I think the news was very difficult just listening to the news every day. That, I just remember that being very daunting and terrifying and just hearing, you know, the number count, whether it was the death count or the, the cases count.

I: Yeah.

J: Just going up. Um, that was very, that was scary.

I: Yeah.

J: I remember that being probably the most frightening experience of those first few months.

I: Yeah. So, what was your kind of reaction to some of those new reports early on and did that change over time as well during the pandemic? Would you say that it got better or it got worse what some of your kind of initial reactions were?

J: Initial reaction was fearful. Like, um, a lot of it was, I mean, particularly there was a few news articles that were kind of saying that, you know, um, there's no cure, you know, don't try and, you know, cure it yourself at home. You know, like herbal sort of, um, cures are just not gonna work. So, you know, don't even try and it felt like, you know, walking out the house, I was gonna catch something like the front door, you know, like something. I was gonna breathe something in through the air.

I: Yeah.

J: So that was quite jarring and I do think definitely that it changed; quite quickly actually. 'Cause I went from one extreme to the other.

I: Yeah.

J: To like thinking, oh, you know, it was imminent death to walk out the door to, oh, there's nothing out here. It's perfectly fine.

I: Yeah.

J: You know it, what is COVID even?

I: Yeah.

J: Kind of to that extent.

I: Yeah.

J: I think now I'm kind of at a place where I understand the dangers of COVID.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, I adhere to kind of lead, uh, social distancing when I do feel like I have some symptoms, I do, I am quite careful. But I'm not so fearful of it anymore.

I: Yeah.

J: Even whatsoever I'd say.

I: All right. Okay. So, in terms of your own wellbeing, how did the pandemic affect you? Did you experience any anxiety, for example, uh, uncertainty or any of the kind of negative impacts on your kind of mental health and wellbeing?

J: Uh, yeah, definitely. Particularly, like I said, in the first few months, those were very – I'm quite an anxious person to begin with and the thought of me affecting my parents' health and stuff like that has just had such a huge impact on me.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, now I would say not as much, but then when the thought of like me catching something and then giving it to my parents still kind of does affect me, I would say.

I: Yeah.

J: Even though I am quite, I'm not as fearful of it as I used to be.

I: Yeah. Okay. Thank you.

J: That's all right.

I: Okay. So, what were, um, the more direct impacts of COVID for you? So, for example, did you contract COVID yourself? Um, did any family members contract COVID and what was that like kind of, how did you manage that if, if it did impact you directly or indirectly?

J: Um, if I've ever got COVID, I don't know.

I: Yeah.

J: I don't – I've never been, I've not really been very sick for the past two years since we've had COVID around and I've never really been tested, so I wouldn't know, even if I have contracted it.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, my dad got really sick. Um, he didn't get tested, uh, but we, we were quite certain that he had COVID, um, and that was quite scary 'cause for about three weeks or so he got really, really, really sick.

I: Yeah.

J: And at that point I was kind of in the mental frame, like the mind frame of kind of not being so afraid of COVID and seeing him that way.

I: Yeah.

J: Kind of brought it back, I would say, that fear. During those – during that period, particularly I was quite scared, you know, like, you know, people coming over or anything like that, even if it was just to the door, I was like, oh, I'd rather you wouldn't just because I didn't want anyone else to get sick.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

J: But that was probably the only time I personally impacted I'd say.

I: Okay. Um, so did you have to take on any additional responsibilities as a result of your father contracting Covid for example?

J: Oh yeah, definitely. Um, grocery shopping. Just, um, any kind of, 'cause my mom doesn't drive.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, my dad is generally the one who's going to pick up the groceries or medicine or anything like that so I had to be doing that for like three weeks. But other than that, not really. Feeding him, taking care of him, stuff like that as well, but that was about it.

I: Okay. Right. Um, so the next set of questions are gonna be about kind of economic impacts of the pandemic for yourself and for the community more widely.

J: Yeah.

I: So, um, the first of these questions. Was your working life affected by the pandemic, and if so, in what ways?

J: Uh, yes. So, I work at a warehouse.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, during the first lockdown, we weren't actually allowed to go in only people that, I didn't really know if I counted as an essential worker. So, I hadn't gone into work for about eight weeks, I'd say during which I had no money. So, you know, no means to earn anyway. And so, I wasn't making any money. And then, um, after that I went back in during, like I was working really, really crazy hours 'cause I was only going in two days a week. So, I was usually doing like 12, 13 hours during those two days, um, which wasn't great for my health either because I usually was just doing about five hours before then.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, so I think during the first lockdown business went up, 'cause people were ordering offline.

I: Yeah.

J: And then I don't know what happened. I think it was something to do with just imports and stuff like that business just went really, really, really low, like lower than it was before COVID. So, it went high and then it went back low and yes, that's impacted my hours.

I: Yeah. Okay. So, do you, would you say that your work aspirations changed as a result of the pandemic? Did it have any kind of impact on your outlook on your career and your working life?

J: Oh yeah, definitely. Um, before COVID I wanted to start my own business.

I: Yep.

J: Um, I don't have such aspirations anymore just because imports have just gone, the prices have just fluctuated so much that it's kind of even thinking about it now, it's kind of ridiculous. So yes, I am having a career change so to speak, um, now just because I don't think a business is viable for me anymore.

I: Yeah. And that was a direct result of the pandemic you'd say?

J: Yes. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I: Yeah. So, were there, um, any other economic impacts in your household? So did your income, for example, have an impact on, um, the kind of overall income of, of, of the whole family?

J: Um, not directly. I don't help with bills. Um, I occasionally pick up groceries.

I: Yeah.

J: But, um, I did have to lean more heavily on my dad on occasions when I didn't have enough cash.

I: Yeah.

J: So, I would, you know, he had to like give me a little bit more here and there, but other than that, no.

I: Okay. All right. So, would you say that your role in the family changed as a result of any changes to your working life, um, or your ordinary routines arising from the pandemic? So, your role in the family, um, if you were furloughed, for example, did your role in the household changed?

J: Um, not particularly, but yes. I did have to do more errands I'd say.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, for my dad, you know, grocery or that sort of stuff. Other than that, no.

I: Okay. All right. Okay. So, the next set of questions are gonna be around kind of your religious observance and religious practice. So, at the beginning of the interview, you, we kind of touched on, um, the kind of impacts on the Muslim community as a whole.

J: Yeah.

I: And you did mention, um, the mosques were closed for example. So, people couldn't, um, attend mosque to, for their daily prayers and you also mentioned Eid as well.

J: Yeah.

I: So, um, how would you say that the pandemic impacted on your faith or your religious observance and practice?

J: Um, well I think it was, it had like kind of a slow effect. I wouldn't say it was a dramatic effect, but just kind of a slow effect because I wasn't – we usually have Friday sermons, which I would listen into.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, which I liked listening into and I think it strengthens my faith, but I wasn't, obviously, because we weren't holding Jummah prayers, Friday prayers. Um, they were old sermons and so I felt like there was a part of me that really missed that, like just being able to hear, you know, the leaders of, of our community be able to, you know, give us some guidance, some light in times which were quite scary sometimes. Um, so that was, that really did have an impact on me, I think. And it wasn't dramatic initially, I didn't even feel it, but after a while it did start to feel a bit like there was an emptiness there.

I: Yeah. Okay. The other thing I kind of wanted to hone in on was about, um, Eid and Ramadhan.

J: Yes.

I: So, what kind of impact do you think?

J: So, we couldn't obviously celebrate it.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, like did we work around that a little bit maybe, but we didn't, we couldn't freely celebrate it. So, we couldn't go to people's houses. Um, in Ramadhan it was just seeing your family, not eating all day and then, you know, going to bed. And I think part of COVID, um, during COVID food was something that kept you entertained.

I: Yeah.

J: And in Ramadan, obviously you can't eat food for the most majority of the day, so it was just literally just lying in bed all day for, for most days during those 30 days.

I: Yeah.

J: Which was quite, um, it was quite difficult. But, you know, we made it through and it was fine, but.

I: Okay. Um, do you, um, usually attend a mosque? So that doesn't have to be frequent. Are you kind of a member of, of a local mosque in Birmingham?

J: Yes.

I: Um, so what role would you say that the mosque played for you during the pandemic?

J: Um, during the start for me personally, nothing so much, but we do have some group chats on WhatsApp and stuff.

I: Yeah.

J: And I could see that there were like, um, certain individuals that were helping elderly people with their medicines and their groceries and stuff like that. Not something that we partook in, but I could see some of that going on, happening.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, other than that – sorry, what was the question?

I: **Um, around the kind of role that the mosque had for you during the pandemic.**

J: And then towards the end, when mosque prayers were back in and we could listen to our sermons, that was quite, that felt quite good because obviously they were reflecting on the times and they poured faith back into times which were quite scary; and you felt a bit helpless and how to control. And then in those cases, faith can kind of provide a sense of help, I think.

I: **Yeah. I mean, I think that was probably gonna be my next question.**

J: Oh, sorry.

I: **Whether – oh, no, that's fine. Um, I'm glad you touched on it. It, it was whether, um, your faith played a role in how you experienced the pandemic.**

J: Yeah.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, I can go into a bit more depth with that.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Uh, definitely.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, when I, when it first started, obviously, because you're just scared, um, of a bad new thing. You know, in, in initially naturally I just feel scared. You feel scared, you feel allowed to control, you know, there's no medicine for it. There's no cure for it. You've got parents and stuff like that, so. But when I kind of just leaned into my faith and, you know, you know, knew that when I leave the house, if I say certain prayer, I felt safer.

I: **Mm-hmm.**

J: Um, it kind of made me feel – or like just believing in fate as well, like you're gonna die when you're gonna die.

I: **Mm-hmm.**

J: Um, those sorts of things really kind of helped me kind of mentally cope.

I: **Yeah.**

J: And feel comfortable going outside again.

I: **Yeah.**

J: I'd say.

I: Yeah. So, you had a kind of positive impact on your faith in the sense it kind of strengthened it, would you say, the pandemic?

J: Uh, yeah. In ways, in certain ways.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, it helped me kind of rely – it was kind of a fallback, like it felt a bit more like something I could, a comfort blanket kind of.

I: Yeah. Yeah.

J: Um, obviously you do lean more. I think it's natural, but you do lean more into faith when you're going through hard times and COVID obviously, so to speak was a hard time.

I: Yeah.

J: Is a hard time.

I: Yeah.

J: So yeah, I would say so.

I: Okay. So, do you feel that faith or Muslim identity had something to do with how the community as a whole got through the pandemic?

J: I would say so. Yeah. I mean, um, I remember when there was, there was a slight shift in mentality about COVID even with the mosque, when it first happened, there were very, very strict and, you know, could understand why the government was doing, why the government was, what the government was doing. And then afterwards, when certain things start stopped making sense to the community, like, why can't we do this when other people can do this? And why can't we do this when that's allowed still?

I: Mm-hmm.

J: And when stuff like that happened, then there was a shift like, okay, um, we need to like get together as a community and just like, you know, talk about these things so that it makes us less fearful of the unknown, you know, when you talk about things, it's, it's more, it's comforting in a way.

I: Yeah.

J: So, when they started doing that, I think, yes.

I: Okay. Um, so again, you did mention about having, um, WhatsApp groups with, um, members of the mosque on there.

J: Yes.

I: So how did you manage to stay connect, connected with other Muslim community members during the pandemic? So, you mentioned WhatsApp. Could you just elaborate that on a, um, a little bit?

J: Um, there's a few groups on WhatsApp particularly that, you know, they will put, um, generally it's like they'll sell stuff on there.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Or share, you know, information on there.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, but one of the things like, even in COVID, but I think that still happens outside of COVID as well is like sharing food, like leftovers for people who cannot at that point afford it or just, you know, just cheap food essentially or free food.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, that sort of stuff goes on, on there a lot, I'd say. Um, yeah, I mean, there's also, um, other than WhatsApp, there's a sort of, um, I forget the name of the app, but like a radio type of situation where, um, leaders kind of like people who do sermons, they can do it online.

I: **Okay.**

J: So, and that was quite helpful during COVID days, because obviously not everyone you can go in to do, do their prayers and such, um, and sit in large groups. So that was, that was also something that was there at the time.

I: **Yeah. Would you say that that was a source of support for you then, kind of being a member of those groups and having that connection?**

J: Uh, yeah, particularly the radio I'd say.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, I'm not super prominent on the WhatsApp groups.

I: **Yeah.**

J: But I can see that other people were helping and leaning on other people.

I: **Yeah.**

J: I wasn't personally partaking in that, but yes.

I: **Okay. So, what were some of the things that your local mosque provided, which became quite significant during the pandemic? So, what were the kind of sources of help and support they offered, um, to Muslim communities, the mosque specifically?**

J: Um, as far as I'm aware.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, just, I could, I remember seeing certain people helping with groceries.

I: Yeah.

J: That was, that was, I've already mentioned that.

I: Yeah.

J: And medicine as well.

I: Yeah.

J: So, there were – I knew there was a few like young people going, running around helping elderly people with their medicine and their groceries, just errands and stuff.

I: Yeah.

J: Other than that, I'm not sure.

I: Yeah. Do you know of any other community organizations that were providing relief or interventions for, for Muslim communities?

J: Like religious communities?

I: Yeah.

J: Not that I'm aware of, no.

I: Okay. That's fine. Okay. Um, the next thing I kind of want touch on was, um, death and burial. So, this is obviously quite a sensitive topic.

J: Mm-hmm.

I: So, um, you know, if you don't wanna answer, that's completely fine.

J: Yeah.

I: Um, but it was just to kind of ask you whether you experienced any bereavements as a result of COVID?

J: Uh, not immediate family. No.

I: Okay.

J: Um, some distant family.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, my dad's brother, just a few people that, you know, I'm not really in contact with that much, but, uh, yes, we did.

I: Okay. Was that here in the UK?

J: Um, my dad's brother, no.

I: Okay.

J: But I do know some people, yes, in the UK that were also, um, had lost their lives to COVID.

I: And were you aware of what the kind of funeral, funeral arrangements were and how death and burial was dealt with, for example?

J: I did hear that it was very difficult to get a hold of bodies...

I: Yeah.

J: ...during the COVID period.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, that was immediate, not immediate families. Sorry, just family in general and friends, actually, even the Muslim community was kind of complaining about stuff like that.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, that, you know, when we can't get our hands on the body and, you know, we, as Muslims, we pray Janazah, which is a prayer that is, um, upon someone's death.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, that was sometimes delayed because they didn't have the body or...

I: Okay.

J: You know, and some people were like sending their – the bodies to a different country because a Muslim, like in a Muslim country.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, some people prefer being buried in a Muslim country.

I: Yeah.

J: And that wasn't obviously able at the time during COVID, because people weren't even able to get hold of the bodies in time, so.

I: Yeah. So, it did obviously have a negative impact on...

J: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

I: ...death and burial. Okay. All right. So just kind of going back to, um, kind of interventions and the role of the mosque. Um, what do you think were the things that the mosque provided, which were important for the Muslim community? What kinds of things were the most useful in terms of what they were offering people? So, you said the WhatsApp groups, for example.

J: Yeah.

I: Um, you also mentioned about helping elderly people shopping and medicine and stuff like that. Of those interventions, which would you say were kind of the most helpful?

J: Of those. for me personally, nothing.

I: Yeah.

J: Because, uh, you know, with me being capable enough, I was capable to help my parents, so were my brothers.

I: Yeah.

R: So, we didn't really rely on any of those services personally.

I: Yeah.

J: I think for me predominantly, um, just the sense of hope, union, all of those things, the, the Mosque provided, which I think you did need in COVID 'cause you kind of felt quite alone, especially during like isolation and stuff like that.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, that's just me personally, but I think outside of me...

I: Yeah.

J: ...you know, in the community, I would say probably the medicine was helpful.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, a lot of people couldn't get their hands on certain things and other people were sharing with them and stuff like that.

I: Yeah.

J: So that, that's, that's what I'd say for the community.

I: Okay. What do you think they could – do you think that the mosques or community organizations could have done a bit more in terms of helping people in the local community?

J: Um, looking back?

I: Yeah.

J: Yes. I think there was always, I think there's always room for improvement, but I think also those were very confusing times. We didn't exactly know how long COVID it was gonna last.

I: Yeah.

J: We didn't – there was no like exact plan, like, oh yeah, this is gonna happen. It was usually like a three-week lockdown and it just would be another three weeks. And then there was another three weeks. So, it's not something that we ever accepted was our new way of life.

I: **Mm-hmm.**

J: And by the time we had accepted it, you know, the, the facilities that were available were kind of open up, opened up anywhere like the pharmacies or, you know, those sorts of things were opening up anyway, by the time we'd adjusted to the new way of life.

I: **Mm-hmm.**

J: So, I would say, no, they did as well as they could in the times.

I: **Yeah.**

J: That they, at the time.

I: **Yeah. Okay. All right. So, um, at any point during the pandemic, did you feel that there was any kind of increasing tension or hostility towards Muslim communities or Black and ethnic minority communities as a whole? Do you think there were any tensions or hostility towards them, people from these communities?**

J: Not that I personally felt.

I: **Okay.**

J: But I do spend a lot of time online.

I: **Yeah.**

J: And I know that a lot of Chinese people or people with, or, you know, orient. I don't know if oriental is the right word to use. But people of those, um, ethnicities.

I: **Yeah.**

J: I know they were struggling obviously because people like Donald Trump were calling it the Chinese, um, virus and stuff like that. So naturally that had an impact on people, you know, you felt – oh, I know of another thing as well. Like there's, um, local supermarket, Chinese supermarket.

I: **Yeah.**

J: And I remember when I used to go in it prior to COVID, it was always quite busy.

I: **Yeah.**

J: And then when I went into it, like not in lockdown, but just, just a few like months into lockdown.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, it wasn't as busy anymore. And I, naturally at the time I thought, oh, it's impacting their business because obviously they're getting stuff imported from China, Japan and Korea where COVID was really prominent at the time.

I: **Yeah.**

J: And people were just not buying from them because they thought, oh, we're gonna catch the virus off their products. So that's the only thing I can think of.

I: **Okay. So why do you think the representation of Muslims was in, um, in the media at that time? Would you say that it had changed? It was more negative?**

J: Um, not that I can think of, to be honest.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, when I was looking at news – I don't really follow news media to a dot anyway.

I: **Yeah.**

J: And especially like I told you when they were doing the death count and stuff like that, just because it was impacting me inevitably.

I: **Yeah.**

J: I don't think I was following it as much to be honest, but nothing that I picked up on. No.

I: **Okay. Okay. That's fine. All right. So, the next set of questions are about government responses and um, the NHS responses as well.**

J: Yeah.

I: **So how do you feel that the NHS responded to the pandemic?**

J: Um, that's kind of a hard one. I mean, I know, I, I don't know anyone personally that works for the NHS...

I: **Mm-hmm.**

J: ...um, that I speak to. But, from a personal point of view, I really struggled with the NHS because I had a few medical issues during that time.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Which I felt like I couldn't even go to the NHS for, because what is, my problem's nothing compared to what's going on in the world right now.

I: **Mm-hmm.**

J: Um, so yes, they had a way of making you feel like that, but that being said, I understand, from what I've heard, they were saving a lot of live, and, you know, they were

busy and you know, it, it wasn't something that they intended to do, like putting certain patients aside.

I: Yeah.

J: But yes. yeah.

I: So, would you say, for example, your GP service was impacted by COVID?

J: Definitely.

I: Yeah.

J: Yeah. I mean, it was kind of hard to get a hold of your GP prior to COVID as well, like there was the whole, you know, call 8:00 a.m. and you'll get an appointment, otherwise you won't.

I: Yeah.

J: But, um, I had a foot problem during COVID. It started in COVID and I just did not call for way too long thinking it's not important.

I: Yeah.

J: And it got worse.

I: Yeah.

J: To a point where it was very difficult to then like, uh, not cure, but deal with; it got worse.

I: Yeah.

J: And then by the time I had, I was able to get a hands on my GP. It was through the 111.

I: Yeah.

J: I could actually never get through to my GP calling, you know, calling my GP practice. Um, and then I was able to get an appointment the next day. And so that stuff like that would just make me question, like, why can I not get an appointment through my GP, but can through the 111? I didn't understand that.

I: Yeah. Okay. All right. Okay. So, did you use 111 or 999 services during those periods?

J: Yes.

I: And what was your experience of using 111 for example?

J: I used the 111; I didn't use 999.

I: Yeah.

J: Uh, it was really good.

I: **Yeah.**

J: And very fast, very receptive.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, I didn't feel like a burden when I called them or, you know, I felt like I was heard and they understood the, the severity of the situation if it was severe.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, I only call them once during the lockdown, the first, I think the second lockdown.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, and yeah, I got an appointment the day after and the situation was dealt with.

I: **So, what do you feel were the most significant gaps in government responses in terms of dealing with the pandemic?**

J: I mean, I'd say probably just GP services.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, those that they have been, and they are quite, um, not as reliable, I'd say. I mean, I, sometimes you have an issue and you don't, I think at this point I don't even know who to go to anymore because I'm just like, oh, it's fine, just leave it. And I will ignore something that then progressively gets worse.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, but other than that...

I: **Yeah.**

J: ...um, I've not really been to the hospital, I've not had any hospital experiences, so I wouldn't know.

I: **Okay. That's fine. Okay. So, as you know, um, there was a vaccine rollout that started, um, I wanna say in the 2021.**

J: Yeah.

I: **Yeah. We had, um, a vaccine rollout.**

J: Mm-hmm.

I: **Um, so there were obviously a lot of people deployed, um, including some mosques and community organizations that also, um, acted as vaccine centres.**

J: Yes.

I: So, um, it's just to kind of get your view on that. So, your local mosque or any mosques local to you, any community organizations, do you know of any of that provided, um, vaccines?

J: Not to my knowledge, no.

I: Okay. All right. So, what are your kind of general views on the vaccines that we do have available?

J: Um, I was quite sceptical initially. I think from the get go, um, I kind of, as someone that relies on natural sort of, um, trying to be immune naturally if you can.

I: Mm-hmm.

J: Um, when I heard that they might be mandatory on stuff like that, that, you know, that made me made me quite anxious because I just feel like it should be your choice.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, I think now I, I'm even like more – my faith in that statement is even more stronger, I'd say ...

I: Mm-hmm.

J: ...just because of the whole booster vaccine situation. I feel like if you're being vaccinated, I don't understand why you need to a booster shot every month or so.

I: Yeah.

J: I feel like your body is far more capable...

I: Mm-hmm.

J: ...um, to be able to like create natural immunity rather than having to rely on things that will have, um, a negative effect on you.

I: Yeah. Okay.

J: In the long run.

I: What do you think attitudes have been like in the wider kind of community to, um, vaccines? So, in the Muslim community, for example.

J: Yeah.

I: Um, what do you think the attitudes have been like towards the vaccine?

J: I'd say it's quite mixed.

I: Yeah.

J: Um, most of the people that I know sort of at my age group, I'd say, are not very receptive to it.

I: **Mm-hmm.**

J: In my community. I'm talking about the Muslim community. Um, I think everyone's quite, you know, uh, like a bit critical of it generally and you know, don't fully understand how it works.

I: **Mm-hmm.**

J: Um, those sorts of things, but I think anything a bit older than my age group, 'cause I'm 25 now.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, some...

I: **Sorry. So, this is just kind of continuing the recording. So, um, sorry. You were saying, um, that, um, people in your age group are a little bit more sceptical. Um, and then you started to kind of talk about what older people are like in your community in terms of their attitude towards the vaccine.**

J: Uh, yeah, I think particularly like my dad, I saw he, he was – as soon as the vaccine became available, he was quite on board to go and get it. Um, I think I was quite sceptical so was my brother and we were trying to tell him like, you know, these are the setbacks, da, da, da, but he, when he was quite strong in his sense that he wanted to go and get one.

I: **Yeah.**

J: And, um, I think most people, like some of my aunts and stuff like that, a lot of them have been double vaxxed. Um, and there's a slight difference in their opinion to like our opinion, because they're so reliant on medication and stuff like that as well.

I: **Yeah.**

J: And so, I think they're already putting so much stuff in their body that, you know, can have, you know, side effects and stuff like that. So, they're a bit more open to vaccinations, whereas me and my brother who aren't really on vaccinations or, you know, some of my cousins were kind of like, well, why do I have to put that inside me?

I: **Yeah.**

J: When I'm perfectly fine.

I: **Yeah. So, what kinds of things do you think specifically are impacting on whether people choose to take the vaccines or not? Is it, for example, the source of information people rely on or people's approach to healthcare and immunity, like you were saying about, uh, your own attitude to immunity, for example.**

J: Mm-hmm.

I: **You kind of prefer natural sources of building immunity.**

J: Yeah.

I: **Um, what would you say, um, has kind of primarily impacted on people's decisions on, um, on vaccines and whether or not they should take one?**

J: Um, that's kind of difficult. I can't speak for everyone.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, obviously, but I know there's a sort of distrust with certain medical practices.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, whether that be vaccinations or just like with CDC and just what they say and what they allocate to be the truth at certain times in life, because you kind of, you have your own idea of your own body and what your body can accept and what your body can handle.

I: **Yeah.**

J: And when someone else who doesn't know your body is saying, well, actually it's like this.

I: **Yeah.**

J: It's kind of hard to accept what they're saying.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, I think a lot of it, I mean, not in a – to sound like an arrogant or anything, a lot of it is a bit logical as well, where you think, okay, I'm not sick. I'm not about to be sick. I'm not someone that catches illnesses quickly. You know, I can – I'm eating all of these supplements or I'm eating all of these healthy things. And I feel like I can tackle this in such a way, rather than having to take, you know, something that does have side effects.

I: **Yeah.**

J: Um, and is chemically produced.

I: **Yeah.**

J: You know, why, why do I ha – why do I have to make that choice just because everyone else is doing it?

I: **Yeah.**

- J: So, I think it's just a matter of logic and just feeling like this is my truth and this is how I will tackle this.
- I: **Yeah. Yeah. Okay. That's fine. Okay. So, what would you kind of say are the main sources of information for people on vaccines? Is it the media that people get their information from or WhatsApp groups or online sources of information? What has it been like for you, for example, kind of, where do you draw most of your information from when you are looking at things like the vaccine, what kind of informs your decision around it?**
- J: Well, with the vaccination initially, yes. It was the BBC. Um, you would kind of look to them for that information. This is early COVID days, I'd say.
- I: **Yeah.**
- J: I did stop seeking information from them after a point.
- I: **Yeah.**
- J: And then I started to rely on, I think, Instagram more so than anything else, because I realized even on YouTube, there was a lot of censorship that was going on with information, which I didn't appreciate.
- I: **Yeah.**
- J: Um, I think everyone's allowed to say what they want to say.
- I: **Yeah.**
- J: And that censorship kind of stopped people from having an opinion, you know, it silenced some people, some videos were being like buried or, you know, just deleted just because they were saying, oh, this is misinformation, but I think everyone's allowed to do research and everyone's allowed to say their piece.
- I: **Yeah.**
- J: You know, it's inevitably up to a human being whether or not they decide to take that information and, you know, radicalize it or anything like that.
- I: **Mm-hmm.**
- J: But, um, I just didn't appreciate the censorship. And, um, so I was relying mostly on Instagram, I would say for information. And then after that also just Google kind of researching, you know, what's in this vaccination? How does it work? You know, why is this vaccination different to that vaccination?
- I: **Mm-hmm.**
- J: You know, all of that, that would just a Google search really.
- I: **Okay.**
- J: Um, but that's how I'd say I got my information.

- I:** Okay, great. Okay. So, these, the last set of questions I'm gonna ask you are about, um, kind of the needs of the Muslim community looking forward with regard to the pandemic.
- J:** Mm-hmm.
- I:** So, in an ideal world, what would you like to see the government do to respond to the community's needs?
- J:** Um, can I ask you to elaborate? Sorry.
- I:** Yeah. So, if you think of some of the responses that the government have had to date, so this can be through the NHS, for example.
- J:** Mm-hmm.
- I:** Um, what do you think the government could do to better respond to the needs of local communities, Muslim communities? I mean, if you wanna specify and related to Muslim communities, you can, but if you wanna talk about it in a broader sense, you can. So, what do you think the government could do to respond in situations like this in the future?
- J:** It's hard to say because I'm not a government official and I don't know how it works, but just from the outside, I'd say a better sense of communicating, like information for how it is rather than what you think public needs to hear.
- I:** Yeah.
- J:** Um, I think that's quite important whether that be my community or your community, everyone feels like we can't really trust. I'm not certain, not everyone, but the people, some people that I've spoken to have said that they can't really trust what the government says.
- I:** Yeah.
- J:** You know, we don't really know whether we need to take the vaccination for certain, or this is just, you know.
- I:** Yeah.
- J:** There's a lot of, uh, information out there...
- I:** Mm-hmm.
- J:** ...that is really hard to like wrap your head around. I wish there was a bit more clear information, even if it's a hard truth.
- I:** Yeah.
- J:** Just, just be honest rather than say what you think people need to hear.

- I: **Yeah. So, you'd prefer kind of better forms of communication, and more transparency perhaps.**
- J: Yes, especially with the news media. Um, I think like a lot of why I think I got very, um, put off news media, especially during the first few stages of, of COVID, um, was just because information was being relayed in like various different ways, you know, you'd hear one thing, one place and then the next day it'd be something else.
- I: **Yeah.**
- J: Whether it be the mask situation. I remember when we first heard about the masks, you know, there was a lot of like, oh, we don't need to wear masks. Like government officials were saying, oh, it's fine. You know, you don't need to wear it. China's wearing it. So, and so's wearing it, but you don't need to wear it. And then not so long after that, it was like, oh, actually we need to wear two masks or three masks. You know, there was a lot of like getting things, just very confused. And I think that's very puzzling for people who don't have any information or, you know, we can't talk to a scientist or a medical, someone who's working directly with COVID or in that environment. So, I think it's very misleading when you get like two different stories.
- I: **Yeah.**
- J: So that I think is, for me personally, that's what I would say I would make a difference upon. Also, the NHS, sorry.
- I: **Mm-hmm.**
- J: Um, just the GP service. I think your GP is there for a reason. You should be able to contact them when you have a symptom for something. If you feel like, I'm just giving you an example, a lump in your breast.
- I: **Yeah.**
- J: Right. I know it's just something that might be cancer, but it can be cancer, right?
- I: **Yeah.**
- J: If I don't feel like I can call my GP and I'm gonna be served or heard, I'm not gonna call them and then I can have cancer a bit later on. So, I think certain things need to be a bit more available to the public, um, that, you know, the NHS claim to provide for us.
- I: **Yeah.**
- J: That's what all it is. I don't mean to sound ungrateful.
- I: **No, no, that's fine. Okay. All right. So, is there anything else that you kind of wanna comment on in terms of the pandemic or vaccines or how the pandemic was dealt with or, um, anything relating to the Muslim community? Is there anything additional that you wanna kind of comment on that we haven't covered already?**
- J: Um, no. I think that's kind of everything really.

I: Okay. Right. Okay. So that is, um, the end of the interview then.

J: Thank you.

I: Okay.

Interview 21

Date: 11/02/2022

Duration: 54:18

Participant characteristics: female, community member

I = Interviewer

H = Interviewee

s.l. sounds like

I: Okay, so you will have received a notification that the meeting is being recorded, is that okay?

H: Yes.

I: Okay, brilliant, thank you. Okay, so the other thing that I just wanted to confirm before we start the interview is that you've given your full consent to take part and that you're aware of what the aims and objectives are of this particular piece of research?

H: Yeah.

I: Okay, brilliant, thank you. Right, so as you know, we're exploring the experiences of Muslims who reside in Birmingham, looking specifically at the pandemic, the subsequent lockdowns and the aftermath of that as well, okay. We're gonna focus on a few different areas, okay, so we're gonna be looking at some of the general kinds of impacts on yourself, your family, people in your wider social network, any impacts that you think were felt within the wider Muslim community.

H: Uh-huh.

I: What some of the direct or indirect impacts were for you personally. Any impacts in terms of economic or health, whether you experienced any bereavements as a result of the pandemic. The impact on your religious observance or religious practice and your relationship as well with other Muslim community members, okay, during the pandemic. So, these are just some of the things that we're gonna be exploring during the course of the interview this evening, okay. So, if there's anything at any point that, you know, you're not comfortable answering, okay, or you think that you need to stop the interview or take a break at any point, then please just let me know, okay. You are free to withdraw from the interview at any point as well.

H: Okay.

I: Okay, thank you. Right, so I'm just gonna start off with a general question. So, going back to the beginning of the pandemic, okay, so if you think of when the pandemic initially kind of started here in the UK, which was around March 2020, what were the kind of first impacts that you felt at the beginning of that first lockdown? What were the initial impacts for you personally?

H: Erm, well, I was working as a healthcare assistant at the time in nursing homes...

I: Yeah.

H: ... and then erm, as I was watching like, the news and how like the COVID outbreak happened, erm, the first thought that went through my mind was it would impact the elderly and vulnerable people, and then I thought of my mum and I was like, okay, and they were saying that

they shouldn't go out. So, then I stopped going to work because I didn't want to erm... I didn't want to... because COVID was, well, they were saying that there is an outbreak and everyone could get it, especially vulnerable and elderly people.

So, then I quit my job and then my mum got sick, even though she didn't go out and then I did say that I would go out, but then she became restless and said that she wanted to go out, she just wanted to go for a walk, but even at that time, she didn't have a mask. So, I said that I would go out and I'd get the shopping and things like that. But then, she became worse erm, and she became like antsy because she didn't wanna go out, and even if it was to a friend's house, erm so I was just like a bit antsy myself because I know that she wanted to go out and I felt bad. It was just a bit like, I don't know how to explain it, just a bit on edge really.

I: Yeah, yeah, so a lot of anxiety for you at the beginning because of the effect it might have had on your mum...

H: Yes.

I: ... and then obviously, she got ill as well during the kind of, that initial period as well.

H: Yeah.

I: So, of those experiences that you've had, which would you say has had the most impact? So, for example, you stated that it had an impact on your job, like a direct impact, and then it had the impact as well in terms of affecting your mum's health. So, what impact would you say you felt the most out of some of those experiences?

H: Again, not going out as much, and even myself, like I stopped going out, I had to order shopping and erm, you probably know yourself, there were other people that had to order groceries from like supermarkets, and even then, they'd be late because a lot of people were doing that.

I: Yeah.

H: And so, I did have anxiety as well because I didn't want to bring back something that would make my mum get worse. But yeah, like a lot of anxiety and the fact that I couldn't go out or even go to see my friends, like for support, they were just like a phone call away. But then, my mum was getting, like, worse and worse by the day so I just had to make sure she was eating and like, my brothers were eating as well. So, like, I had to take on that kind of lead role, kind of thing, trying to like, battle anxiety and like the role of making sure that everyone's okay, in a sense.

I: Yeah, yeah, so would you say that your role in the family changed as a result of the pandemic?

H: Yeah, definitely.

I: Yeah, did you have more caring responsibilities towards your mum and your brothers?

H: Yeah, yeah.

I: So, were there any kinds of ways you alleviated that stress and anxiety you mentioned? Did you have any kind of outlet in terms of being able to express that anxiety and that stress that you were feeling?

H: I'd say just by calling some of my friends. They were being supportive, just saying that erm, just be strong and keep praying and just try not to let it break you, in a sense. But then, I was just thinking like, it's easier said than done, cause I would break down here and there, but yeah...

I: So, you had your friends for sort of kind of support, yeah, calling them and things like that.

H: Yeah.

I: So, you did mention that your mum was unwell, for example, so just if you're okay obviously, to talk about it, just kind of explore that a little bit further. So, the kind of question I wanted to ask was around whether you yourself and family members were directly affected by COVID in terms of contracting it. So, did you have any confirmed cases of COVID within your family?

H: Erm, well, they did... well, the paramedics erm, they did say that my mum did have COVID symptoms, erm, and when she was unwell, she did say that erm, she lost her taste buds, even though she was saying that she couldn't have solid foods. So, I was giving her soup and erm, trying to keep her hydrated with water but, even then, she wasn't really drinking the water, she was just like... she said she was just putting the water on the tip of her lips, to keep her hydrated in that sense. But erm, yeah, in that sense, she was saying that she lost her taste buds and she didn't really wanna eat solid foods.

I: Yeah, so it was difficult for her to swallow?

H: Yeah.

I: Yeah, and she couldn't taste anything. Erm, so what were the kind of events after that had happened? So, you said that she got worse, for example, are you okay to talk about that in a little bit more detail?

H: Yeah, so erm, so she was erm, cause when she was like, she had a health condition before COVID. Me and my mum would share a room, we shared the same bedroom. But when they said that she had COVID and she lost her taste buds, and then she would get hot and cold flushes, she said. And when I used to wake up from when I was sleeping and then I woke up in the morning, I'd see that she wasn't in my room. So, like, I went downstairs and she'd be sleeping downstairs because she erm, when I went down and I asked her why didn't she come up, she said she didn't have the energy to come up the stairs.

I: Yeah, yeah.

H: So, she just lost all energy so she would just lie on the sofa and she couldn't even move, even when it came to going to the toilet, erm, but she got out of breath and she was panting. So, when I went to her, she was on the floor and I asked her why she was on the floor and erm, she was just like, "I couldn't make it to the toilet, I just feel really hot, and I think I fainted," that's what she said. Erm, so, I said, "Okay, I'll take you to the toilet," and then she's like, "No, no, no, I don't want to put that on you." I was like, "You're not putting anything on me because I want to take care of you because you need help going to the toilet." And then, she said she couldn't make to the toilet, even though I was helping her, but she just couldn't go to the toilet, she was just sat there because she was feeling too hot and feeling dehydrated, even though she was sipping on water.

I: Yeah, so her condition deteriorated?

H: Yeah.

I: Can I ask roughly when it was that she died after presenting with the symptoms of her illness?

H: So, the death day was April 19th, 2020.

I: Yeah, and when did her symptoms roughly start, kind of prior to that? Was it kind of weeks or was it days that she kind of suffered?

H: Erm, so I think it was the beginning... the first week of April, not too sure. Because I left my job before April 1st, something like that, that's when I left, so it was the first of week of April that she was getting these symptoms.

I: **Yeah, so she had it for a period of just over two weeks?**

H: Yeah.

I: **So, and then, you said that when the paramedics came, they said that they felt that she had COVID on the basis of the kind of symptoms that she presented with?**

H: So, erm, she passed away on April 19th but the day that she lost her taste buds and whatnot, you know, when she couldn't make it to the toilet, it was the day before that she passed away. So, when I said that I would take her to the toilet, she was like, "No, I don't have enough energy, you don't need to do this," I was like, "Okay, if you want to do it here, you can, I will clean it up." And she was like, "Okay, erm, but like, you don't have to do that." I'm like, "Okay," and she was apologising, "Forgive me for what I've done," and I said, "You don't need to say that because there's nothing to forgive because you've done nothing wrong. So, if you need to do it, then do it, cause I'll clean it up."

So, I took her to the toilet and then she did the toilet and then I put her into bed and then I got her a glass of water and I would check on her every 20 minutes, but she was saying that she was feeling hot. So, I put the fan on but she said she didn't like how it felt, so she asked me to turn it off. I was like, "Okay, if you need anything, then just call me, I'm just downstairs." So, I checked in on her like, every 20 minutes and then she was just, erm saying she was just feeling too hot and I was just saying, "Keep on drinking your water, it will help."

But then when I came back after the 20 minutes, like, her eyes were open and I felt her head and that was cold, and I felt her pulse and she had no pulse, and that's when I called the paramedics and this was around 4am. And I told them that she's not breathing, I felt no pulse, and I'd just touched her forehead and it was cold. So, they came within a minute or two and then they put her on the floor and they put adrenaline in her, and they just said that there's nothing that can be done because they've tried everything, and they just said that they're not gonna rule COVID out because it seems that she did have COVID symptoms.

I: **Yeah.**

H: Yeah.

I: **I'm really sorry to hear that, so thank you for giving so much detail around it as well, cause I know that must have been really difficult for you. So, this is just an additional question on the basis of that last comment you made, did they record her death as caused by COVID?**

H: Yes, because erm, because I felt like erm, okay, I don't know how to put this. I don't know if you've known someone to have a stroke, erm, because when a person has a stroke, their mouth gets slanted to one side.

I: **Yeah.**

H: So, to me, it seemed as though she had a stroke because it was lopsided, like... So, to me, it felt like it was a stroke but they said that because there's COVID now, like, they're not gonna rule it out, also they're gonna put that on the death certificate as well as having a stroke.

I: **Okay, so they kind of recorded two kind of different things then?**

H: Yeah.

I: So, COVID plus ... yeah, and stroke as well. So, just kind of in the immediate... if you're still okay to talk about it, of course? If you do wanna stop at any point, obviously, just tell me.

H: Okay.

I: Just kind of in the aftermath of it, I suppose the next question I was kind of gonna ask was around the subsequent funeral arrangements and burial as well, after she'd passed away. So, I suppose the first question, what happens when a Muslim person passes away? So, after you got the death certificate, for example, I assume they released her body, and then what's the kind of process after that? At what point does the mosque get involved?

H: So, basically, erm, what I had to do was, erm, basically, because it was during COVID, erm, after her death they had to put... what are they called? Erm, I'm sorry, I don't know what they're called when they zip up the bag.

I: Okay.

H: They put that on but they put like, it's like a cable tidy, they put on it, because they put a mask on her and then, they zipped it up and they kind of locked it with a cable tidy thing, I'm not sure what it's called. Erm, they did that and I called one of my friends because erm, she was the first person that I called because erm, her mum passed away a few years ago, so she initially came into my head because I thought she would know because she has experience in this. Erm, so, I called her because I just said, "My mum just passed away, I just don't know what to do. I'm in shock and in disbelief because I don't know what to do at this point." So, she said that she can arrange someone and call a funeral directory. So, she forwarded me a number and that person called me back and said that they would get my mum's body on the same day, but it would be after... I think it was around three or four hours later.

I: Okay.

H: Yeah, erm, so they did come and they had to get a... sorry, I don't even know what it's called... err...

I: It's okay, you don't have to know all the terms, if you can just describe what it was, it's fine.

H: I kind of... I don't even know, it's like, err... You know, those kind of hospital, kind of beds...

I: Yeah, yeah.

H: ... like with wheels on them?

I: Yeah, yeah, yes.

H: They had to get that and then put my mum's body on there, and then wheel her out, and then they have a van so they put her in there. And because of COVID, erm, her body had to be in the morgue...

I: The morgue?

H: Yeah, her body had to be there for, I think it was a week, not a couple of days, it was a week, erm, and because err, they needed to find out, they needed the death certificate to come out first. And then, they needed to find out erm, which place they can bury her, because there were a lot of people that had died from COVID and there were a lot of places that have been taken in the place that we wanted to bury her. So, luckily, we got the place that we wanted to bury her and then erm, the funeral took place a few days after. And they said because of COVID, only six people

were allowed to attend the funeral. But no women were allowed to attend erm, because religiously what they say is, erm, a woman, they start wailing when it comes to a person passing away in term so of like, you know, like how someone overacts but like...

I: Becomes hysterical.

H: ...yeah, that's the word. That's why that religiously they say that a woman should not attend the funeral. But I did erm, ask if I could attend erm, in terms of shrouding, which means like washing of the body.

I: Okay.

H: But the woman who was in charge of that said that she doesn't think that's advised because she doesn't think that I would be able to handle it emotionally.

I: Okay. How did you feel about that, when she kind of had made that comment?

H: Erm, I was really disheartened and I really did want to attend, even though erm, she was right, I probably wouldn't be able to hack it, but I still wanted to go.

I: Yeah.

H: But yeah, I just... it was just erm, I just didn't want to be home, like while my mother's getting washed by someone else who was a stranger, because I wanted to oversee that and I wanted to wash my mum myself before she got buried. So, in that it was disheartening and, yeah, yeah.

I: I'm sorry to hear that. I think sometimes with the burial and then the shrouding and that kind of ritual, erm, it does vary for people obviously. I think some people feel a sense of closure from it, but it is a mixed bag of emotions, isn't it?

H: Yeah.

I: Were you gonna say something, sorry?

H: No, no, no.

I: Okay, how do you think... ? I mean, you've elaborated on shrouding and the washing of the body, erm, and then you've also touched on funeral arrangements. For example, you've said because of COVID obviously, it was very limited, six people?

H: Yeah.

I: Now obviously, if the circumstances were different, if it wasn't... if we didn't have all those restrictions in place, my assumption is that it would have been a much bigger funeral?

H: Yeah.

I: So, do you have quite a big family, a big extended family?

H: Yeah.

I: Yeah? Do you think that that had any kind of bearing on how you felt ,as well, that it was so restricted?

H: Oh, definitely, yeah, definitely. Erm, yeah, I just felt like erm, I don't know how to put it. Erm, yeah, I don't know what to say to that, to be honest.

I: Do you think there were more people that wanted to attend that couldn't because of that six person restriction?

H: Yeah, yeah, most definitely.

I: Okay, so I suppose the next thing I wanna ask is about the role of the mosque in terms of assisting you with the death and the burial particularly. So, was the mosque able to give you adequate assistance in supporting you with the burial? Would you say that the mosque played a supportive role there?

H: Yeah, they definitely did, yeah, in terms of erm, getting here when they did and erm, being gentle as possible, erm and offering support as well. Erm, they were saying if I ever need anything or if I need a support after this or during it, erm, yeah, in that kind of sense. But yeah, they were really good at what they did, I'd say.

I: Yeah. So, you said that they said that they could provide you with additional support as well after, did you reach out to them afterwards to get any additional support?

H: Erm, no, because I was just trying to get my head around it, because after my mum passed away, I actually didn't sleep in my bed for about two months. I was sleeping downstairs because she did pass away in our bedroom and it just didn't seem the same, and I couldn't get any sleep and erm, I think a week later it was Ramadan, erm and I found it difficult to fast as well. So, I couldn't... I couldn't even fast, but saying that, I couldn't even eat or drink either, and yeah, I couldn't even come to my bedroom, and I couldn't even do like little things like have a shower or go outside or anything like that.

So, erm, in terms of support, I just, I was just trying to get my head around like, "What's just happened or if it's really happened, or is it a nightmare?" Erm, but I was just trying to block myself away from people, like even when it came to like the funeral service, like even though they offered the support, I didn't call them and say, "Look, this is what I'm going through, I need the additional support." Even though they did call me as well, but I just didn't answer because I didn't want to talk to anyone, I was just in that mind frame of, "Has it really happened, or has it really happened" kind of thing?

I: Yeah, and did you struggle with processing it all?

H: Yeah, yeah.

I: Understandable. Am I okay to ask which mosque it was that helped with the burial and offered you those support services?

H: I'm not too sure what the name is but it was on XXXX Road, erm, I think it's opposite Barclays Bank.

I: Okay, is it one that you're familiar with? So, was it one that you've visited before or had any prior knowledge of?

H: Yeah, yeah, but I'm just not too sure what the name is.

I: Is it quite a big mosque? Are you aware if it's quite a significant... kind of ...?

H: No, it's a small mosque but erm, certain mosques do offer funeral services and some don't.

I: Okay, yeah.

H: Yeah.

I: Okay, right. So, just focussing a little bit more in terms of the bereavement side of it, would you say that your faith kind of factored into how you dealt with that experience? Did your faith help kind of deal with it?

H: Yeah, because erm, even while my mum was alive I was praying five times a day and even after she died I was still praying, but I don't think erm, I lost that, erm that side. Erm, yeah, yeah, I don't think I've lost that, but I was praying five times a day during and before and still now, so yeah.

I: Yeah, okay. Right, so I'm gonna move on to another set of questions now, okay, so thank you for giving me so much detail around your mum's death, erm, and kind of how you felt as well in the aftermath of it. Erm, so the next set of questions I'm now gonna ask you are around kind of the ways in which the mosque and other community organisation local to you, responded to the needs of the Muslim community, in the midst of the pandemic and in the aftermath of it as well. So, are you affiliated with any mosque in Birmingham?

H: Yes, there is a mosque/centre, when I say centre, they have like erm other activities that they have for kids, like fundraisers and things like that. So, I do attend that here and there but not as much now, not after my mum's death.

I: Okay.

H: But I am in contact with members there, yeah.

I: Okay, so would you say that you're quite active in that particular mosque?

H: I was before my mum's death but I don't go as much now as I used to, with the responsibilities that I have now.

I: Yeah, yeah, the kind of caring responsibilities that you have now with your brother.

H: Yeah.

I: So, kind of that mosque particularly, did they offer any kind of support services or any kinds of forms of support or help for Muslims in the community? So, for example, did they provide any help with delivering shopping to elderly people, or medicine? So, did they serve the community in any way, are you aware?

H: Yes, erm, from that I know, erm, there do have a WhatsApp group that I'm a part of, erm, and during the pandemic what they were doing, they were helping the vulnerable and erm, the elderly in terms of their shopping and erm... So, they would go from door to door asking if anyone needed shopping and they'd write a list and they've even ask whoever is willing to, or can, if they can donate some money towards the shopping, so they can get it for the vulnerable and the elderly people and then deliver the shopping to them.

I: Yeah, okay, that's useful. Did you make use of any of the facilities or kind of services that they offered?

H: Yeah, I did when my mum was ill, when she had the COVID symptoms, erm, I did ask if they could deliver to me as well, and they did, so that was very helpful of them and that was very nice of them.

I: Okay, so what kinds of... I mean, we've looked at some of the interventions and some of the services that that particular mosque offered, do you think there's anything else that they could have done that would have benefitted the Muslim community early on during the pandemic? Do you think there's anything more that they could have done? And if so, what kinds of things do you think would have been helpful?

H: I think erm, I don't think there's any more they could have done because they were doing a lot to help and support the community in terms of like the elderly, the young, erm, the vulnerable a well. Because they'd always have like the broadcast messages in the WhatsApp groups, like how we could help the community in terms of like erm, funding and things like that and fundraisers. But they were very active and did help the community.

I: Yeah, what about other mosques in the area? So, we focussed on the one that you're familiar with, are you aware if any other mosques local to you, or in the Birmingham area more generally, are you aware if any other mosques offered services of a similar nature to help people in the community?

H: Not that I'm aware of, no.

I: Okay, right, okay, so the next set of questions I'm gonna focus on are around the economic impacts of the pandemic, okay. So, these include some of the impacts for you individually and for the community more broadly. So, the first question I'm gonna ask you as part of this, was your working life, your career, affected by the pandemic? And if so, in what kinds of ways?

H: Yeah, cause I was a healthcare assistant in different nursing homes within the West Midlands for about erm, three years, and at that time I was doing my degree in health studies as well, in order to become a registered nurse. So, I did have to leave that because my mum got ill, so I didn't want to risk erm, going to work and bringing something back because she was vulnerable or she was elderly. It was no question for me, like there was no ultimatum, I just like, I just left because my priority was my mum, so yeah, it affected it in that way. But even though it was kind of my dream job, but then the family comes first, so there was no question about it, to be honest.

I: Yeah, what about your situation now? Did you go back to that line of work when things had kind of settled a little bit more for you?

H: I did try to go back erm, but they said that I needed to get both vaccinations done in order to go back to the line of work, but I refused to have the vaccinations done, because from my understanding, erm, a few people that have had the vaccines can still get COVID and seem to have gotten worse. But they said that erm, unless you get the vaccinations, you can't come back to that line of work, but yeah.

I: Okay, so did that then change your work aspirations?

H: Yeah, so I looked for another field of work, to be honest, so yeah.

I: So, it has had quite a significant impact on your kind of career aspirations in that sense, hasn't it?

H: Yeah.

I: Okay, so in terms of kind of... I'm gonna come back to the kind of vaccine issue when I ask the next set of questions, erm, but the other kind of question was about just the kind of economic impacts in your household, so some of the financial impacts in your house. So, for example, you quit work, okay, you had to quit work to help look after your mum. Some people have spoken about bills and shopping and that kind of thing kind of increasing for them. What was your specific experience in terms of the financial impacts in your house as a result of the pandemic?

H: So, I had to be the primary, like, breadwinner of the household, so it's just me and brother at the moment and it has been for like two years now. Erm, so I have had to erm, I've had to apply to be on Universal Credit, but I've been on, but I think for about erm, about seven years now I've been on Carer's Allowance because I've been caring for my brother and that's £67 a week, and they have said that's the maximum you can get erm, for caring for someone. Because of that, erm,

because I was getting Universal Credit in addition to that, that was £210 a month, but as I was getting the Carer's Allowance they would cut that Carer's Allowance that I was getting from the Universal Credit.

I: Okay.

H: In terms of that, I still wasn't getting enough in terms of paying the rent, erm, the gas and electric and the water bill, even the Broadband bill, erm, TV licensing, things like that, I've had to erm, make instalments. And even then, erm, with the rent, I did speak to the landlord and they said that erm, because your brother is living with you, even though he doesn't have mental capacity, his benefit that he's getting, half of that needs to go towards the rent and the other bills because he's staying with you.

I: Okay.

H: So, it did have like a massive impact because I couldn't work either because the day centre was closed, the respite care was closed, and erm, I had to be home 24/7 in order to look after him, yeah, so I'd say it had a massive impact financially.

I: Yeah, do you think that the government should have given people more support, kind of financial support, for people who were suffering those kinds of difficulties? Do you think they could have done more to help?

H: Oh, definitely, yes. Even though it was the pandemic and these places like the day centre and respite care, and even having additional care, erm even though there was a pandemic and erm, there should have been more help in terms of erm, the care that was being provided because erm... I was actually, I thought I was actually going insane at one point because I was at home 24/7, erm, I'd just lost my mum and I was trying to care for someone as well. And then, being financially unable to pay the bills, even though half of his benefits were going towards the bills, it still wasn't enough. So, £67 a week is not enough erm, in order to be caring for someone and then, for the Universal Credit to be deducted just because you're getting Carer's Allowance just doesn't seem fair even though you have to care for someone 24/7, erm for about one and a half years.

I: Yeah, okay, right, so the next set of questions I'm gonna ask are around NHS responses and the vaccines as well, okay. So, I'm gonna go back to your mum's death again, okay, how do you feel the NHS responded and dealt with that? So, I suppose your initial point of contact was probably with the paramedics?

H: Yeah.

I: So, how did you feel they handled the situation?

H: Erm, to be honest, I don't think they did, because they said they did everything they could, because all they did was... cause I was here when they were here, cause all they seemed to do, they just did CPR and give adrenaline.

I: Yeah.

H: But that's all they did, they didn't do anything other than that, so I don't think they were that much help, to be honest.

I: What about on an emotional level? Were they sensitive in how they spoke to you in terms of how they treated you during that situation? Do you think they were sensitive?

H: Yeah, I'd say they were.

I: Yeah, so did you use any other kind of emergency services during the pandemic? So, did you use 111, for example, or 999 services?

H: Yeah, I did use 999, yeah.

I: Okay, do you think that they were adequate in terms of the response they gave, do you think they were useful? Cause you did say that, for example, the ambulance was despatched and it kind of arrived within a couple of minutes.

H: Yeah, erm, because I know that erm, they would come within a few minutes, as soon as you said that a person's not breathing.

I: Yeah, yeah.

H: So, yeah, they came within one or two minutes, so yeah, very responsive.

I: Do you think that there's anything else that the NHS could have done in that situation better, in terms of how they handled the whole situation? So, do you think that things could have been improved or better?

H: Erm, I'm not too sure how to answer that, to be honest, because it was during the pandemic so I don't know what else could have been done or should have been done, so I'm not sure.

I: Okay, no, that's completely fine, okay. So, the next question I wanted to ask was around the vaccines, okay. So, you did mention that you worked as a carer at the beginning of the pandemic or just up to that point where the first lockdown had started, and that you gave up that job initially to look after your mum. And when you did try to go back into it, they had the requirement in place that you had to be double vaxed. So, what are your views on the vaccines that we have available against COVID-19?

H: Erm, personally, from what I hear from my friends that have had the vaccinations, they didn't have COVID before the vaccinations were available, but when they had the vaccines, erm, they actually got COVID after they had the vaccinations. Erm, so in my head, I'm just thinking, "What's the point in having the vaccinations if you can still get COVID." Yeah, that's all I can say, to be honest, to that.

I: Yeah, yeah, no, that's fair. What do you think the attitudes have been like in the wider Muslim community? So, do you think, for example, people share a similar attitude or do you think it's mixed? Do you know anyone, for example, in the community who is more pro-vaccine or do you think it's more the case that people are more in line with your views on the vaccine in your community?

H: I'd say it's mixed because with some of my friends, they say erm, "Oh, you should get it done because it could be used as a barrier because you may not get it." And there are some who say, "If you're meant to have COVID then you'll get it" kind of thing, so I'd say it's mixed, to be honest, yeah.

I: What do you think impacts on people's attitudes towards the vaccine? So, if you think of, for example, some of the information that we get in the media or on social media about the vaccines, do you think that has an impact on whether people choose to take the vaccines or not?

H: Yeah, I'd say so, yeah.

I: Yeah?

H: Yeah. I think they listen to the media more, well, social media in terms of their opinion and other people seem to agree, rather than their own opinion.

I: Yeah, what about for yourself, would you say that there was anything that you came across in social media or the media more generally that had an impact on your kind of attitude towards the vaccine?

H: Erm, no.

I: No? Would you say that yours was more impacted by the experience of other people who'd had the vaccine and then caught COVID after it?

H: Yeah, yeah.

I: Okay, that's fine. Okay, now the final kind of set of questions that I'm gonna get to now. So, this is around any kind of tensions and hostility towards the Muslim community and other communities as well during the pandemic. Do you think that the Muslim community has faced any kind of tension or hostility as a result of the pandemic?. Do you feel that there was any kind of tension or hostility there towards the Muslim community as a result of that?

H: No, not that I would have known.

I: So, are you aware, for example, of any hate incidents against any Muslims or anyone in your community as a result of the pandemic?

H: No.

I: No, okay, right. And then, the final set of questions I'm gonna ask you about the needs of the Muslim community. So, looking forward, in terms of what could have been done better or what should be done in the future with a similar kind of situation to this. So, in an ideal world, what would you like to see the government do to respond to situations like this in the future?

H: Erm, to be honest, I don't think they know what they're doing themselves.

I: Yeah.

H: Yeah, so I don't know what to say to that.

I: What about if we kind of hone-in on the financial element of it, for example, do you think they could have done more there, for example? Do you think the government could have intervened a little bit more there? Do you think the government could have offered more support in those ways, financially for example, to people facing difficulty during the pandemic?

H: Of course, yeah, 100%.

I: Yeah, what about towards ethnic minority communities, particular those kinds of communities, Muslim communities, for example, have faced quite a bad press traditionally in mainstream media particularly, certain newspapers are quite responsible for driving some of that hate as well towards Muslim communities. Do you think anything could be done there to improve that sort of situation?

H: Yeah, because erm, I feel like the Muslim community have been supportive during the pandemic because they were the ones who were going out and helping erm, the community in terms of shopping and helping the vulnerable and the elderly. So, yeah, they could have done a lot, the government could have, but they just chose not to.

I: Yeah, okay, right, I think you have answered all of the questions that I had for you, okay, so I'm just gonna stop the recording now, if that's okay.

H: That's fine, yeah.

Interview 22

Date: 13/07/2022

Duration: 34:00

Participant characteristics: female, community member

Key:

H = Interviewer

J = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

H: Right, so going back to the beginning of the pandemic, so if you think back to, erm, March 2020, when we had that first lockdown...

J: Hmm.

H: ...what did you kind of initially feel at that point and what do you think were the main impacts on you, personally, to that first lockdown?

J: Well, first I thought like was only going to be like one month or a couple of weeks, like I didn't even think it was going to be like a year/two year thing.

H: Yeah.

J: So like, when I found out like my university was like closed down and had to work from home, at first I was like find with it, because I was like...you know, obviously, not wanted to get up in the morning and go, just stay in your bed. So I was fine with it at first; everything was fine. And then I think, when it came to like learning and actually doing my assignments and I couldn't like actually see my teachers and stuff, then I started to feel like, okay, it's a bit difficult now.

H: Yeah.

J: Because, obviously, it's like emails and sometimes they don't reply because, obviously, there's a lot of people emailing them, so it was like I had to learn myself, which is actually quite hard and like, being on like Zoom and like reading...like just listening to the teacher, it's just not the same as being inside the classroom. So, first of all, I was fine with it, like I was actually happy. I'm like, yeah, you can all stay home, we don't need to go nowhere and then, I think, after being when my assignments used to come, I was like, okay...

H: Yeah.

J: you need to be there. Then you just started to feel like, oh, you can't go out anywhere. And I'd always go to the shops, but then it's like it used to be one or two people, so it just used to be me and my mum, let's go to the shops and that. But then I didn't feel that bad, a little bit numb, like you know how people really felt like really like bad and their mental health was really bad, I think I was fine.

H: Yeah.

J: I think that's because I have a big family, so I didn't feel it as much. And I was just, it was just one of them ones, I think. It was alright but then after a bit, I was like sick and tired of it.

H: Yeah.

J: Couldn't go out round your friends or just...for me, I don't think I even experienced university. Like, like if I was to tell someone now, I'd be like, I would, if I knew this was going to happen, I wouldn't have gone to university, because you don't experience it properly how other people would.

H: Was it your first year at that point, then, can I ask?

J: First year, yeah. So it was all coming to the end.

H: *[Over-speaking]* at end...

J: First year, and then my whole second year was just gone.

H: ...yeah.

J: So it just didn't feel like uni and now its my third and it's just like...it didn't feel like university and people...I heard people say, oh, university is actually a good experience, you can make new friends. Like, obviously, I made friends, but it was just like...

H: *[Over-speaking]* not had the same experience...

J: No.

H: ...that you probably would have got, if we didn't have the pandemic.

J: Yeah, like I've seen people like learning everything, but also have fun.

H: Yeah.

J: And, obviously, my second year of uni was all gone, and it was my first year and my third year is just like, it's one of them months...

H: Yeah.

J: ...my final year, just stress and stuff.

H: So in that kind of first year, you've said a lot about the whole...you know, everything kind of switching online or the teaching...

J: Yeah.

H: ...and the learning side of everything, at university. Did you get any kind of additional support from staff members at university, at that point? Was there any support there for students, do you feel?

J: Hmm.

H: Or do you think they could have done things a bit better, at that point?

J: I mean, there was...they've done...they had, like assignment support session online, which you can have a one-to-one and stuff.

H: Yeah.

J: But I don't know, I...obviously, there's nothing else they could do, because we couldn't really go in I guess, we couldn't go to the library, we couldn't do stuff like that, so obviously they were trying their hardest as well, but, to me, I'm like...I was trying to get it out the way and it did

come to a point where I didn't even proof read my work, I just wanted to submit it. That's how bad and I was like...I was like, forget it, I'm done. Like, in that one year, the second year, I actually lost my motivation. Like, I did get my work done on time and everything, but it was one of them ones I didn't put 100% into it...

H: Yeah.

J: ...and a lot of other students were the same.

H: Yeah.

J: But I did submit it. I got...obviously, I passed it, but I know I could have done better.

H: Yeah.

J: But it is what it is.

H: How was your concentration and stuff at home, at that point?

J: Crap.

H: Yeah.

J: Like, because it's very easy to get distracted because I don't like going into my room, because I'm up in the attic, so I don't like sitting there, so I prefer to sit downstairs in the front room, but then it's like it's easy for me to get up and go inside the living room while family's there or I need to go and eat now, and then we'd go and eat. Now, even though I had online sessions, I'll be honest with you, they were one for like nine o'clock and I didn't wake up. But the one good thing was that they were recorded, so I could go back and make notes. But that was all I could do. But, distraction-wise, ooh, it just, wasn't it?

H: Yeah.

J: Because I was sitting there and just couldn't be bothered carrying on. I used to take the laptop off.

H: Do you have...you mentioned that you have a big family...

J: Yeah.

H: ...how many of you there are?

J: Well, there's...well, how many in my house now? Because, obviously, my two sisters have moved out...

H: Yeah.

J: ...but I know, might have broke the law yeah, but they used to come down...

H: Yeah.

J: ...but I was like...this was at the start, they used to come down, obviously, just my sisters and their kids and everything, but in my house it's like me and I've got my two sisters, I've got my two brothers, no three brothers and I've got my sister in law and I've got her son, my mum and dad, so then there was like...

H: That's a big family.

J: ... it is a big family. My sisters come, they have like four kids and they're two boys now, you see how big that is.

H: **Yeah, it is, yeah.**

J: So...

H: **I mean, I know you're saying that it was distracting, but at the same time, do you feel like that helped you, as well, having a big family, at that point?**

J: Yeah, because I feel like, if they didn't, I wouldn't...like I wouldn't know what to do. Like, obviously, getting at the house, because I was like taking my mum shopping, even though it was like two people at a time or one person at a time...don't know why it was back then, but I used to take her shopping and I used to feel like...but then all that stuff that you were saying, like are they going to have like soldiers outside your house and everything...

H: **Yeah.**

J: ...I think that kind of did scare people a bit. I was like, what the hell is happening? But when you realised that this was a long-term thing, I was like, my goodness.

H: **Yeah.**

J: I knew it was going to affect a lot of people.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Like me, you know, thank God, financially I was fine. I wasn't struggling...

H: **Yeah.**

J: ...so I was kind of alright with it. And then I was working, then I started to work as a carer.

H: **Okay...during the pandemic?**

J: After.

H: **Okay.**

J: After a bit, I used to work as a carer. So then that was why I obviously had to put full protection on and everything.

H: **Was this in a care home?**

J: No, door-to-door.

H: **Oh, door-to-door**

J: Yeah.

H: **Yeah, okay.**

J: So then I did that afterwards. That was when like the measures were a bit down...

H: **Okay.**

J: ...it wasn't like as bad.

H: Yeah.

J: But, yeah, it was alright then.

H: Okay. So you were saying that you feel that it didn't impact your wellbeing as much; so, mental health-wise, do you think it had any kind of impact?

J: No.

H: No?

J: I wouldn't say, no.

H: No.

J: I wouldn't say like I was depressed or anything like that.

H: Yeah.

J: I don't know.

H: It was more the studying side?

J: *[Over-speaking]* it was just the studying, yeah, because I knew I could have done better, but then because of like, just concentration and just understanding the work and just talking to your teachers, I was like...it's just one of them ones.

H: Has it kind of...did that go back to normal after the second...so, now, for example, if you're in your third year, has it gone back to normal...the teaching, is it face-to-face a little bit again?

J: Erm, it is face-to-face, from like this last semester, it's only on the Monday.

H: Okay.

J: So only doing it on Monday.

H: Okay.

J: And it was like from nine 'til eleven and then I have to wait all the way to two 'til five and, to be honest, that was not good, because we had that long break. It's like, what do you do?

H: Three hours, yeah.

J: Is it four hours from eleven to...I was like, what do you do? But that last lesson was just not it, like a lot of people do not understand that lesson. Obviously, because of the teacher, she studies college students, so it was last minute for her, so I don't blame her, but it just...now, it still doesn't feel like uni. Like, half the time, I don't even go to that last session, because from eleven o'clock I can't wait. So I do my own stuff at home or whatever, like just one of them ones.

H: So you feel it's tainted your whole kind of university experience?

J: Yeah, it's not the same.

H: Yeah.

J: Like, I can't be bothered going into university. I'm not saying I don't like studying, I like studying, but it's just one of them ones, like going all the way there for...yeah, so yeah.

H: Yeah, okay. So what do you think have been the kind of direct impacts of the Covid, for yourself and for family? So, if...I know we spoke a little bit about it already, so for your family do you think there were any impacts on them, in terms of kind of the lockdowns and the pandemic, as a whole?

J: Erm, not really, because obviously my mum wasn't working, so she's home.

H: Yeah.

J: Erm, my dad, he has his own like takeaway...

H: Yeah.

J: ...which he was still...no, at first, I think, when it was closed down...

H: Yeah.

J: ...but then they said that food shops can be open after a bit. So he was fine with that...

H: Okay.

J: ...online with that, as well.

H: It was takeaway only I think, wasn't it, at that point?

J: Yeah, only take... yeah and that's what...so they were already going in, so financially or even like that, everything was the same.

H: Yeah, okay, that's fine. What about health-wise, was anyone in your family, erm, did anyone contract Covid in your family...wider family?

J: When it first came out, no-one had it.

H: Yeah.

J: It was just like, even until recently, like this year and last year...

H: Yeah.

J: ...but just last year, my sister had it, but she was like alright with it. My dad had it...yeah, and we just had like the minor symptoms, like we lost our smell and taste.

H: Yeah.

J: But no one at the start or anything had it bad, as in like, going into hospital; no-one had it like that in my family.

H: Okay. Were you aware of anyone in your family or wider family or extended family that was hospitalised or past away, as a result of Covid?

J: No, no...not because of Covid, no.

H: No.

J: But during Covid I had my two nephews were born...

H: Oh, okay.

J: ...during Covid, so it was like...

H: **Was that experience different then, when they were born?**

J: ...yeah, because it was like, we couldn't go to the hospital, so I was like, okay, that's fine.

H: **Yeah.**

J: It was just my sister and only one person, I think, was allowed with her.

H: **Yeah.**

J: That was it, and my sister-in-law. But I think they were allowed to come home straightaway, the next day, whatever, but it was one of them ones like a risk, in a way. So my mum wouldn't let us really go near the babies.

H: **Ah.**

J: Only one-by-one. So...but it was...I think that made it more better, like we didn't think about Covid because the babies, they both were born and was just all about them, so it was one of them ones.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Didn't really...it wasn't that bad.

H: **Yeah.**

J: I think, if we never had that kind of happiness, then it would have been like dead.

H: **Yeah.**

J: But we all just were focusing on the babies...

H: **On the babies.**

J: ...and two babies.

H: **Yeah.**

J: The same month, one and a half months apart...

H: **[Over-speaking] so one was your brother's baby and one's your sister's...**

J: Yes.

H: **...is that correct?**

J: Yeah.

H: **Okay, alright, that's fine. Okay. Okay, did the pandemic impact on your religious practice in any way? So, if you remember, during the first lockdown – this is back in March 2020 – we had Ramadan a couple of months later and then we had Eid celebrations. Did it impact on that in any way?**

J: In a good way, actually.

H: Yeah.

J: Because I think the Ramadan, in that first lockdown, it will never be that again. It was so nice, because it was one of them ones where you go home; and you're home with family and there's nothing distracting you from praying or reading the Quran or anything. There's nothing...like that's all you were going to do all day and it was just so nice that, just being able to wake up and not worrying about, oh, I need to go out or am I going to miss my prayers. It was just really nice. But one thing what we didn't...really was, how lockdown kind of opened and then was it like one day before Eid, where Boris had stated that, you know...

H: Yeah.

J: ...you can't have...only have six people in your house. That annoyed me, because I knew it was because of Eid was coming the next day. And I think that wasn't nice. Even for big Eid, they did the same thing again.

H: Yeah.

J: Where they said only six people were allowed.

H: That was a few months later, wasn't it?

J: Three months after.

H: Yeah.

J: It was like, but when it came to like other celebrations they were open.

H: Yeah.

J: So we couldn't really celebrate, as much...because it was nephew's birthday and this was when everything was a bit low, but they did say the last few days before that, I think it was like six people only allowed in the house, but we had a little bit more and the police had come.

H: No!

J: Yeah, like three times. I don't know who obviously snitched, but they's like, 'You can't really celebrate.' You know...

H: What happened when the police turned up?

J: They just said like, 'We heard that you have like more people in your house and how you have music on,' which we didn't have music on. And they were just saying...they just gave a warning. That was it, but I'm just saying that we couldn't even celebrate properly. You know, Eid, it was like sneakily doing stuff.

H: Yeah.

J: I know we shouldn't have, but it's Eid and we had to celebrate.

H: Do you think that...I mean, just to pick up on that, there was another set of questions I had that were kind of related to that. Do you think there was any kind of hostility or tension towards Muslim communities, particularly, during those periods?

J: Yeah.

H: Yeah?

J: A hundred percent.

H: **Yeah.**

J: It was never to do with Christmas. Christmas, it was all opened in December. As soon as they came to Eid, because I remember it was, literally, one day before Eid – I mean, Boris stated it and it's like, you can just tell, is it all because we can't celebrate our celebrations? It was only this year or was it just last year – was it either last year or this year – it was celebrated properly? I think it was last year.

H: **Last year.**

J: Just last year.

H: **Yeah.**

J: That's Eid...oh, I actually really thought he would do it again.

H: **Hmm.**

J: But the first year, he opened it and then in the summer, as soon as Eid came here too, he made some extra remarks, I was like, okay, yeah... Which is a bit silly, you know?

H: **Do you think there was any...from the media side of things, do you think there was any kind of blame going on, with certain communities, around the pandemic and the restrictions? So you said, for example, in your family, somebody had called the police on you.**

J: Hmm.

H: **Do you think that was someone in your neighbourhood? Do you think it was someone who wasn't a Muslim?**

J: *[Over-speaking]* that's why I don't understand, because you know two days before the birthday it was Eid – some more Eid.

H: **Yeah.**

J: And we had not that many people on Eid. We had a few more, but nobody had called the police on Eid.

H: **Hmm.**

J: So then I'm thinking our neighbours would never do that, anyways.

H: **Hmm.**

J: And as soon as the birthday party happened, somebody called. Now, obviously, I'm not saying that's to do with the neighbourhood, that could be my sister-in-law's family, that can be someone from her...it can be anyone, but it was just weird how, you know. It wouldn't be our neighbourhood.

H: **Hmm.**

J: Honestly, we would never know, because it's anonymous, but...

H: **Are you all Muslim in your neighbourhood, like in the?**

J: *[Over-speaking]* next door, we have two...a couple, they're white.

H: **Yeah.**

J: And then all around there's Pakistanis or Bengalis...

H: **Yeah.**

J: ...or Bhutans. That's it...

H: **Yeah.**

J: ...no-one really called first time round. I don't know if they didn't call the police on Eid, as they knew that it was a celebration and maybe they thought, oh, maybe you're going a bit OTT, having a birthday party. Maybe that's why, but, honestly, we will never know.

H: **Yeah.**

J: But even on social media, I mean, the blame wasn't to us. It was about China, wasn't it?

H: **Hmm, you feel it was more there?**

J: Yeah.

H: **Yeah.**

J: It was...which is a bit sad, really, because you never know how it...well, there was a lot of stuff about how it came about, so it's like, when people would see a Chinese person, they'll start covering their faces. Like, I've seen it, you realise, and I find that really bad.

H: **Hmm.**

J: It's not nice.

H: **Yeah.**

J: I think their mental health was way more affected, I think.

H: **Yeah, because they were kind of blamed?**

J: Yeah, and they couldn't go out, they couldn't do...and they were the most protected, like they would always have their mask on.

H: **Hmm.**

J: I don't know where it came from.

H: **Did you manage to stay connected with other Muslims; so outside of your family, for example, do you have friends?**

J: Yeah.

H: **Seeing cousins and stuff?**

J: Yeah, yeah.

H: **Did you manage to stay connected then with them and everyone, during the lockdown periods?**

J: Well...

H: Or was it impacted; your relationships with people?

J: ...no, it was fine. Like we would always speak and that every time. Like, obviously, not seeing my friends in ages, we were always like speaking but obviously just couldn't see each other.

H: Yeah.

J: It just wasn't...I don't remember how long after we'd seen each other, it must have been a couple of months.

H: Are you someone that does go out a lot with friends and things like that?

J: No.

H: No.

J: No, I'm not, like I don't go out all the time.

H: Yeah.

J: I make plans, like here and there.

H: Yeah.

J: But, obviously, because of uni and stuff, I was like, don't want to make plans.

H: You have your assignments to do?

J: Yeah, it was like you don't want to make that many plans.

H: Yeah.

J: I've just never been like that. I think I go out more with my family than I do with my friends.

H: Yeah.

J: So, obviously, we couldn't go out with family. You know, and when it was my birthday in December, which was in the lockdown, it was fine. We were just at home.

H: Yeah.

J: I was like, it doesn't matter. I don't really need to go out all the time, you can even do something at home.

H: Yeah.

J: But, yeah, my friends, they were fine.

H: Yeah, okay. So I'm going to focus now on, erm, community and religious organisations. So do you, erm, attend a mosque?

J: Yeah, I did used to.

H: Which one? Can I ask which ones?

J: Er, XXXX XXXX [a large Mosque in Alum Rock], erm, and XXXX Road [a large Mosque in Washwood Heath].

H: **Is it...is it XXXX XXXX?**

J: Erm, oh god, I'm not sure.

H: **We'll call it XXXX Road Mosque then.**

J: XXXX Road Mosque, yeah.

H: **Yeah, okay.**

J: And the other one at XXXX Road, as well.

H: **Okay.**

J: Yeah.

H: **Okay. So would you go there for prayers or classes?**

J: Erm, I used to go. It's been like two to three years now, since I haven't been.

H: **Okay.**

J: Erm...

H: **Did you go during the pandemic?**

J: No.

H: **No.**

J: They're not open.

H: **They were closed.**

J: See, cause they were closed and my sister; so she goes there, she did used to read online.

H: **Okay.**

J: So that had changed.

H: **Yeah.**

J: But I'm sure, like, when everything was slowly, slowly opening, which I find really bizarre, the Mosque teachers didn't open their Mosques.

H: **They were still teaching online?**

J: Yeah.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Which I find really...

H: **Before that, was your sister taught face-to-face?**

J: ...yeah, she would do some in house stuff.

H: **Okay.**

J: But my nieces, they used to go to a mosque, but you know when slowly, slowly things were opening, some mosques were still closed.

H: **Yeah.**

J: I don't know why.

H: **Hmm.**

J: I mean, they could have opened it. You know what I mean?

H: **Yeah.**

J: It's a mosque...

H: **Yeah.**

J: ...but online teaching is no go. The kids don't really listen, they mess about...

H: **Yeah.**

J: ...they don't focus.

H: **Yeah.**

J: It's just one of them ones.

H: **Erm, do you know whether those mosques or any other mosques in your local area offered any kind of forms of support for people in the community? So food packages, delivering medicine, food packs, those kinds of things; are you aware?**

J: No, you know.

H: **No.**

J: I haven't heard anything about that.

H: **Hmm.**

J: Not in my...not in the mosques I know.

H: **Yeah.**

J: I don't think so. I don't think they did anything, really.

H: **Do you think they could have done anything like that?**

J: Yeah, of course, they should have.

H: **Yeah.**

J: They should have done like food banks and all that...I think they should have. They should have had like food out, maybe some people were struggling in the local community, but...

H: Which parts of the community do you think struggled more?

J: Hmm...

H: In Muslim communities, who would you say it impacted more on? Do you think elderly people or...?

J: Oh, I think...I think, yeah. I think every people, but not too old, I think the people that honestly can't speak English...

H: Yeah

J: ...and can't really work.

H: Yeah.

J: I think maybe it affected them more, because...especially, if you're alone...

H: Hmm.

J: ...so if they were alone and didn't have no-one, they don't know who to phone or who to go to for help or services and stuff.

H: Yeah.

J: So I think the big local mosques should have done stuff or put out stuff that could help.

H: Yeah.

J: But mosques were closed. They weren't even open. I'm sure, even when funerals happened, they weren't allowed to go into the mosque and sit there or anything.

H: Yeah.

J: They were just straight to the graveyard, which is a bit sad.

H: Yeah. Do you know of anyone personally that passed away during that point or who'd had a funeral?

J: Erm, no. One of my...someone close who passed away, I think that was after the pandemic. Yeah, that was after, because there was a lot of people in the mosque that went out.

H: Yeah.

J: But, before that, it was just none.

H: Okay. Right, so how do you think that the government responded during the pandemic? So, if you think about, kind of, you said Boris Johnson.

J: Honestly, that was so confusing.

H: Yeah.

J: I don't even know what the government, like what he was talking about, what he wanted to do. I think he was just so confused, because it wasn't making sense. It was like lockdown, then he opened it in the summer.

H: Yeah.

J: It's fully opened, then it was lockdown again.

H: Yeah.

J: So it's like people just like got used to him and they're out now, that's it, you know.

H: Yeah.

J: I think he was just playing with people's minds, really.

H: Yeah.

J: Like, always looking at the news; what's going to happen now? What's going to happen now, what's he going to say now? That's how it was every single day.

H: Yeah.

J: Buy I think the main thing was just like not being able to spend time with your family.

H: Yeah.

J: Like, even like people like who live alone...

H: Yeah.

J: ...you cannot be able to visit them, like the elderly people.

H: Yeah.

J: I found that was, that was really sad.

H: Yeah; yeah, frustrating for them.

J: Yeah.

H: What do you think that the government could have done better? So something like this, let's imagine that we had another crisis like this again in the future, what do you think that they should do, really, in situations like this in future, to improve the situation for people, especially vulnerable people or Muslim communities? Is there anything the government could do or do you think that mosques and community organisations should step up?

J: I think mosques should, yeah.

H: Yeah.

J: Because I was actually quite surprised at why the mosques were still closed.

H: Yeah.

J: I know, at first, we know in the restrictions people were a bit off.

H: Yeah.

J: Some of the mosques were still closed.

H: Yeah.

J: I'm a bit confused why...I don't know. But they should have done more. I think they could help more, because I haven't heard one thing about what the mosques have done.

H: Yeah.

J: So I think they need to do more, if anything like this was to happen and, even financially. But I'm sure the government did help with financial...remember, they were giving grants.

H: Yeah, and they did furlough and helped local businesses...

J: *[Over-speaking]* furlough...yeah, see. I mean, that was good, especially when that, that thing that happened, that 50% meant that everyone could eat...

H: oh the dining...

J: ...that dining thing.

H: Yeah, yeah.

J: I mean, see, that's the thing I didn't understand, because then they're saying, oh, we have to have a lockdown again; so then why did you do that, when you know people are going to go running.

H: Yeah.

J: It was packed.

H: Yeah.

J: Every single restaurant.

H: Hmm.

J: But it's like you did it for yourself...

H: Yeah.

J: ...and then they were saying, oh, another lockdown. I think what they should have done was a full strict lockdown for six months.

H: Yeah.

J: They didn't do it, they did it for one or two months, then they let it go. Then they did it again. I think, if they had done it stricter from the starting, it would have been fine.

H: Yeah. Do you think it would have resulted in less deaths and...?

J: If I be totally honest...

H: Yeah.

J: ...with me, yeah...

H: Yeah.

J: ...I know that's my opinion, but at first I was like, okay, it's Covid. After a bit, I actually stopped believing it.

H: **Yeah.**

J: I stopped believing in it, because I was like...I don't know what it was, but it wasn't getting to me, like I wasn't scared.

H: **Yeah.**

J: And I don't know why. At first, I thought it was like a government scheme thing...I don't know why. I wasn't believing it, because after a bit I just realised, like the symptoms that you get are symptoms where it's like a flu symptoms.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Or like a headache or flu. Obviously, when the...because what I thought unbelievable is every day they were like, six thousand people have died today. And I was like, how is that? D'you know what I mean?

H: **Yeah.**

J: Because, me, personally, I was like I'm always going to thank god but, if that was the case, I didn't want to see anyone that was close to me had passed away of it.

H: **Yeah.**

J: So I, for me, I don't know what it was, but I, I don't know, I just stopped believing it all the time. And as my mum was really into it and I was like, 'Mum, what can you do.'

H: **Yeah.**

J: But then, now, have you noticed that's it and nobody even speaks about it.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Well, isn't it the same thing? There's no cure to it, if it was a big thing. I don't know, just wasn't getting to me...

H: **Yeah.**

J: ...this whole pandemic or, even the Covid on it's own. Because, now, they're saying that, if you have Covid it's fine, you can still go out.

H: **Yeah.**

J: I mean, okay, so realistically it's a flu. But, yeah.

H: **How did you feel about the vaccine that they rolled out?**

J: Er, no. Big no.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Big no.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Big no. I would never. I only had one, only because my...because I was working as a carer.

H: **Okay.**

J: And they kept saying like, you need to have your vaccines and, obviously, I thought if I didn't have my vaccine they obviously will, you know, sack me. So I only got one done and then that's it, nobody's asked me after that.

H: **Yeah.**

J: And I will never, ever believe in that; these vaccines.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Never believe in it; never.

H: **Do you think that's kind of the general attitude with people in the community? Do you think there's a lot of suspicion around the vaccine?**

J: Yeah.

H: **Yeah.**

J: But I think the vaccine, especially the older lot, they believe anything.

H: **Older people in the Muslim community?**

J: Yeah. They believe anything and that's why they would go running for it.

H: **Did you parents, for example, have it?**

J: Yeah, my parents and I did tell them, 'Listen, you don't need it. You're fine. You don't know what it is. You don't know what's going inside your body.' You know, but obviously the older lot, they just believe everything and they would go and do it. But, us, the younger lot, we understand more. I would never believe that.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Obviously, if worse comes to worse, you want to fly out, you have to have it, there's no way about it you have to get it done. But I will never get it done, because I wasn't even believing in it.

H: **Yeah.**

J: But then a lot of people got it done and people got it done, but are still getting Covid.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Wasn't it? I don't understand that.

H: **Yeah, okay. Alright, so do you think that there's anything else that could be improved, in situations like this; so during pandemic type crises? Do you think that there's anything that could be done by the government?**

J: Yeah, I mean, do it in a proper way.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Like, a strict lockdown; not like two weeks, okay, it's time to open up again and then you're complaining and saying, well, no we need to go back into it.

H: **Yeah.**

J: And, plus, I think the whole, erm, doing a lockdown just before Eid did play a factor in obviously race and...you know what I mean?

H: **Yeah.**

J: Didn't help for Muslims and that.

H: **Yeah.**

J: I don't think...they weren't – what's it called – they weren't considering our feelings or our celebrations, at all. Because for Easter it was all open.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Christmas it was all open, but then when Eid...and New Years, as well. It was all open. Because people, obviously, will go to the pubs and celebrate, but for Eid it was just like...it was only like to last year and to this year we were having proper Eid's now.

H: **Yeah.**

J: So, yeah, I'm hoping it doesn't happen again, though.

H: **Yeah, fingers crossed.**

J: No, this was too much.

H: **What about – and this is the last set of questions – you said you were a carer, at that point.**

J: Yeah.

H: **At what point then, during that period, did you start working as a door-to-door carer?**

J: It wasn't when it was proper lockdown.

H: **Okay.**

J: I wasn't working then.

H: **Okay.**

J: It was when like the third restrictions had been gone, but it was still there.

H: **So, probably, last year sometime?**

J: Yeah. Actually, my first year...

H: **Yeah, yeah.**

J: ...or it was last year, summertime.

H: **How long did you do that for?**

J: Until now, I'm still doing it...

H: **Oh, you're still doing it?**

J: ...yeah, just at the weekends, though...

H: **Okay.**

J: ...until like now I'm finishing I'm going to find a full-time job and then I'm going to leave it. But, obviously, with the carer they were like, make sure you put full PPE on; so like gloves, mask, all of that and like, obviously, because we were with elderly people. So this is one of them ones, just had to do it.

H: **Yeah.**

J: You know, the masks, I couldn't breath in it.

H: **Yeah.**

J: It was really difficult.

H: **Yeah.**

J: But, for the elderly people, some were scared, so I had to do it for them.

H: **So you started doing that last year, right?**

J: Yeah, last year in summer.

H: **Okay. Did you see any of those impacts on the elderly people that you were caring for, so were they, for example, scared of catching Covid?**

J: Yeah, yeah, they were terrified.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Erm, some people did say they had...they did say they had Covid and it came to one part where, erm, we didn't need to spend full-time going to a job to help, because a lot of people were getting Covid. This was not long ago, it was last year. But they were saying like, 'Just go and do your job, get out, don't spend your time there...'

H: **Yeah.**

J: You know, '...because it's a bit of a risk.' – well, I won't believe it, anyways, but – '...they are a risk and we are a risk.' So, you know.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Which was...that was good. I think that our workplace were very respectful.

H: **Yeah.**

J: And was thinking about us, as well.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Not just the clients, but even the carers.

H: Yeah.

J: So that was a good thing.

H: So, erm, the kinds of clients that you care for, what kind of community do they come from? Are they predominantly...

J: White.

H: ...white.

J: Yeah, tend to be white.

H: Yeah, okay, right. Erm, how do you feel the NHS responded, during the pandemic? So 999, GP services, for example, they were impacted.

J: Bad.

H: Yeah.

J: I don't think...see, because it was over a year when somebody hadn't...like we hadn't even gone to see a doctor.

H: Yeah.

J: They weren't even giving us appointments. They weren't...and it was like, everything that you said, it could be anything, like maybe a leg pain and it's like, that's nothing to do with Covid...

H: Yeah.

J: ...that could have been something else.

H: Yeah.

J: And people weren't even able to speak to a doctor about it.

H: Yeah.

J: Hospitals, no.

H: Yeah.

J: No. That's why some people a lot of people struggling because I think, obviously, if you had like a different illness, it was like it wasn't cared for as much as Covid.

H: Yeah.

J: That's all they cared about, Covid.

H: Yeah, hmm.

J: So I think the NHS was terrible.

H: Yeah.

J: I don't blame them. I'm not saying I blame them, but just terrible though.

H: Yeah.

J: Because, even for babies, erm, you know, for my nephews, they didn't even do the check-up.

H: **Oh!**

J: The...as soon as you gave birth.

H: **Yeah.**

J: I mean, the new born babies.

H: **Yeah.**

J: You still have to care about them.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Even though other check-ups that they give after that...

H: **The health visitor.**

J: ...the health visitor, they didn't come.

H: **Oh.**

J: They had to go out to them. When they were really ill, my, er, nephew had Colic in belly. He was really bad. They had to sit in the car and it'd be like little huts, and they had to go on there to just come and check in the car. I'm like, they're still kids at the end of the day.

H: **Yeah.**

J: They're newborns and you still have to check, even...and like the actual mums, nobody checked on them, I think.

H: **No.**

J: Just terrible.

H: **Okay. Erm, what do you think that the most kind of significant gaps were then, in terms of the NHS' response? What do you think they could have done better? Do you think they should have resumed services as normal?**

J: Yeah. I think they should have. Okay, they're saying not to come in, because people can catch, whatever, but then even like the phone calls was just terrible, you know.

H: **Yeah.**

J: But I think what they could have done was, I think...and, obviously, nobody can plan for it, but I'd say, when they new this was going to happen, maybe they should have planned for, planned more better.

H: **Yeah.**

J: I don't think stuff were planned.

H: **Yeah.**

J: And enough NHS staffs were like losing their believing and stuff; I heard.

H: **Yeah.**

J: The hospital staff and there was nurse staff and stuff. But, honestly, a lot of stuff that was going through media of nurses that had come out and had actually told more about the Covid and how they are in the hospitals. I think that'd really open people's eyes up a bit more.

H: **Yeah.**

J: I don't know. Someone was saying that Covid's not real as it seems.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Maybe, there's mixed you know, you'll never know, until you're in it yourself.

H: **Yeah, yeah.**

J: So I think, because I wasn't in it myself. I mean, my sister had it. She did say like, 'It isn't the same as the flu.' Which I understand that it could be different, but I think like...I think it's a little bit exaggerated on the deaths...

H: **Yeah.**

J: ...which scared people.

H: **Yeah.**

J: And I feel like that's what they should have done. They should have been more supportive and give them ways, instead of, 'Oh, this many people died today.' All over the news, you know, a lot of people just kept looking at the deaths.

H: **Yeah.**

J: That's why it scared a lot of people.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Especially, like the older lot.

H: **Yeah.**

J: Because I'm a carer to the older lot, don't have that enough knowledge or understanding of like...do you know what I mean?

H: **Yeah.**

J: Whereas, we do.

H: **Where do you...okay, so for you, for example, where do you get most of your information from? So, if you want to find something out...?**

J: It's social media.

H: **Social media?**

J: Yeah.

H: What, but what about like your parents' generation, for example?

J: Probably, like the TV.

H: Yeah.

J: Like put on the news.

H: Yeah.

J: Like they don't really watch the English news they watch the Pakistan news, I don't know why, but they would hear it from other people. So like, if they were ring someone...

H: Okay.

J: ...and then the other person would fill them stuff in.

H: Yeah.

J: Like my mum would come out with this weird stuff, I'd go, 'Mum, what are you talking about?' She goes, 'Oh, this person told me.' I go, 'You both don't know what you're talking about.' She was just saying stuff like, 'Oh, this has been happening and this is going to happen.'

H: Yeah.

J: I go, 'Mum, nothing's going to happen.' You know what I mean, they make their own stuff up. They don't have knowledge of these stuff, that's why.

H: Yeah.

J: I think it kind of affected them more, to be honest.

H: Yeah, yeah. They didn't really...

J: No, they don't know.

H: Okay, right. I think that is, actually, the end of our questions.

Interview 23

Date: 12/07/2022

Duration: 16:28

Participant characteristics: female, community member

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: [Coughing] Okay. So, erm, the first set of questions I'm gonna ask you are related to, erm, kind of the beginning of the pandemic.

R: Yeah.

I: So if you think back to kind of March 2020 when we had that first lockdown, erm, what would you say were the kind of main impacts on you...?

R: Erm...

I: ...at that point?

R: I felt relieved 'cause, obviously, I had to rest, erm...[laughing]

I: Yeah [laughing].

R: ...do you know what I mean?

I: Yeah.

R: And get paid for free

I: Yeah.

R: But, erm, other than that, like, it was boring...

I: Yeah.

R: ...and there was not much to do. Everyone was locked in I was like, "Oh..."

I: Were you, erm, working or studying at that point?

R: I was working at that point, yes.

I: Okay. Can I ask what you...you were doing at that point for a living?

R: Erm, I used to work as, erm, like, a waitress at that time.

I: Okay.

R: Yeah.

I: And then obviously a lot of the hospitality, er, businesses were closed at that...

R: *[Overspeaking]* Yeah, they were.

I: **...point so were you furloughed...**

R: Yeah... we were furloughed at that point.

I: **Oh good, right. So you said that you felt initially kind of happy that you'd had that bit of time off...**

R: Yeah.

I: **...work. Erm, the...were there any other...other kind of positive that you felt that came out of that first period for yourself?**

R: Not really. No.

I: **Erm, do you, er, live with a family?**

R: Yeah, I live with my mum and dad.

I: **Okay. Er, do you have siblings?**

R: Just one. One brother.

I: **Erm, what do you think the impact was like on...on you as a family? Would you say it's positive, would you say it's negative?**

R: It was a bit of both because everyone was getting fed up of each other...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...and, like, was...it was, like...you had to see each other's *[laughing]* faces every day and then you had to just sort of get out and go, but there was no time to go out because no-one was allowed out at the time.

I: **Yeah. We did have, erm...you probably remember this, kind of a year later in January of 2021 we had another lockdown which was...I think it was a little bit longer...about three months long.**

R: Yeah.

I: **Erm, at that point what was going on for you? Did it impact you at that point? Were you studying at that point as well?**

R: Er, I wasn't studying at that point, no. But we did get covid at that time and then, like, honestly it affected us all less as a whole 'cause, obviously, my dad's not well. So then it was harder for us to go out 'cause we were more wary of, like...'cause in the circle of family we didn't really take it as serious as everyone, 'cause even though we was all locked it...but we didn't take it as seriously that we'd get covid because nobody else had covid.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So then...yeah. The second one affected us more than the...the first one.

I: **So when you say that, erm, you all got covid...'cause you said your father caught covid.**

R: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I: Yeah. And...

R: But he doesn't go out though so I don't know how he got it or...I think we was probably the cause 'cause, obviously, we used to go shopping and stuff like that.

I: Yeah.

R: So I think that was the case.

I: How kind of severe were your cases of covid in your...in your immediate family?

R: Erm...

I: Was anyone hospitalised?

R: *[Overspeaking]* No, no-one was hospitalised. It was just, erm, home remedies and stuff like that, then we all got better

I: Yeah. Did you catch it as well?

R: Yeah, yeah. We all...yeah...

I: Yeah.

R: ...we all caught it.

I: And that was during the second lockdown...

R: *[Overspeaking]* Second lockdown.

I: ...period.

R: Yeah.

I: Okay. Erm, how was it during that period? So, erm, obviously, you...you'd caught covid at that point. Would you say that that lockdown you felt it a little bit more than the previous one?

R: Erm, yeah. I would...

I: Yeah.

R: ...say that, yeah.

I: Yeah. Erm, what do you think were the most difficult impacts of...of covid for you? Erm, what would you say was most difficult for you personally?

R: Erm, it affected my mental health because, like, you know...with me, I go to the gym a lot and 'cause everything was closed there was no way of just, like, getting out and...sometimes you don't realise that a gym helps so much, but it...it actually helps the mental health a lot.

I: Yeah.

R: So then I felt I was more depressed and then...even though I didn't show it, I was more or less on a depressed side.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah.

I: Did you have any kind of source of support for that? Did you seek out any kind of support?

R: No, not really.

I: How did you feel kind of afterwards then? So after the kind of lockdown period had ended and the gyms had opened.

R: Yeah.

I: Did you kind of resume life as normal again at that point?

R: Yeah, I did.

I: Yeah. And then would you say that it's had any long lasting impacts on you, all of that kind of period?

R: I wouldn't say so, no.

I: No.

R: No.

I: Okay. Erm, what, erm...and again, this one is a completely personal question. Were there any kind of financial impacts for you as a result of the pandemic?

R: I would say no.

I: No. You said you were furloughed...

R: Yeah.

I: ...so you didn't really...

R: Wasn't really...'cause I don't pay for the bills or anything...well, I do to an extent.

I: Yeah.

R: But I don't do as much in the house...

I: Yeah.

R: ...but I kind of initially do...but, yeah. I wouldn't say it affected me. I feel like it might've affecting my parents a lot more but, no.

I: Just to kind of pick up on that point that you said as well. Kind of your role within the family, did your responsibilities increase within the household as a result of the lockdown?

R: Erm. Because we're a family of four...

I: Yeah.

R: ...erm, it didn't...it...it didn't really affect us as much because everyone as they pleased

I: Yeah.

R: I would say no, it didn't.

I: Would you...is your siblings grown up or...?

R: Yeah. You know he's older, he's older...

I: Oh, okay.

R: ...yeah.

I: Okay, alright. Okay. Did your family, erm, or anyone in your kind of social circle, erm, kind of contract covid in a way that resulted in hospitalisation or do you know of anyone that passed away?

R: Erm, yeah. I know there are people who passed away but not anyone in my own, like, circle or...there was a lot of people passed away during covid.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah.

I: Are you aware of what the, erm, kind of rituals were around burials at that point?

R: Yeah. There was no ghusl and stuff like that with the Muslim communities and stuff like that. So...

I: Can I ask...er, can you clarify what that [ghusl] means?

R: Erm, like, as Muslims, like, when you...you pass away, the body is meant to be washed...

I: Washed.

R: ...and stuff like that and because of covid nobody was touching the bodies and then they'll just bury them like that.

I: Yeah. Okay. But you don't know anyone, erm, personally that kind of...?

R: No.

I: No. Okay. Erm, in terms of your, erm, faith, erm, would you say that your faith helped you kind of get through any of those periods?

R: Yeah, I would say so.

I: Yeah. So would you say that your practise kind of increased at that point or...?

R: Yeah.

I: ...changed in any way?

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

R: I would say so.

I: Yeah.

R: I would say that is, erm...it just made me feel a bit better in myself also...being depressed, in a way yes, but praying and stuff just makes me feel better.

I: Yeah. Erm, are you, erm, someone that regularly attends a mosque?

R: Hmm, I wouldn't say so. No.

I: No. No.

R: No.

I: Okay. 'Cause one of the things that we really wanted to explore as well in...in the research was, erm, whether Muslim women particularly, erm...kind of traditionally Muslim women haven't really attended mosques, they've been places for men traditionally.

R: Yeah.

I: Erm, but increasingly we have got mosques...especially, erm, the kind of high profile ones...so XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] for example in Bordesley Green, XXXX XXXX mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] that do have kind of, er, provisions for...for women as well...female worshippers. Erm, so would...do you know of anything in your local area that kind of caters for...for Muslim women particularly?

R: Hmm, I'm not too sure.

I: No.

R: No.

I: Okay. Erm, if you were aware that there was a mosque in your local area that catered for women, would you...do you think you'd visit and use those facilities?

R: Yeah, of course.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah.

I: So in the same way that you use the centre for example...

R: Yeah.

I: ...if they had something similar there, kind of, you know...

R: *[Overspeaking]* Yeah.

I: ...kind of way, you would?

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

R: I think I would, yeah. During Ramadan I used to, like, go and pray there, and stuff like that

I: Oh yeah.

R: *[Overspeaking]* there.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Yeah.

I: **In the mosque?**

R: In the mosque.

I: **Yeah. Can I ask which one's your local?**

R: XXXX XXXX [a large Mosque in Washwood Heath].

I: **Okay.**

R: Yeah.

I: **Erm, and that is in Washwood?**

R: Washwood Heath, XXXX XXXX Road.

I: **Yeah, quite a big Mosque isn't it?**

R: *[Overspeaking]* Yeah, yeah. It's quite big.

I: **Yeah. Okay. So they have facilities for women I assume.**

R: Yeah.

I: **Prayer...**

R: Yeah, yeah.

I: **...facilities. Okay.**

R: I think every mosque has it but not many people utilise it as much as you...we could initially use it.

I: **Yeah. Do you think that's more to do with the lack of awareness? The women that we...there's an assumption with Muslim women that...because they've always been kind of places for men.**

R: Yeah, I think so.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I would think that as well.

I: **Yeah. Do you know whether XXXX XXXX [large mosque in Washwood Heath] or any other mosque in the area provided any, erm, support for people during the pandemic or during the lockdown?**

R: I think there was food banks going on.

I: **Yeah.**

R: That...that obviously provided people who, like, can't support their families and...'cause obviously some people are...weren't employed at the time...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...when they lost their jobs and stuff like that. So I think they were supported in that to an extent but I'm not...I'm not...I'm not fully sure on that I don't think.

I: **Okay. Erm, do you think that, erm, if you were aware for example that a mosque was offering social services...so like you said, food banks or any other kind of support, that you would have used it as a family? Was it something that you would have personally have accessed?**

R: I don't think so, no.

I: **No. Do you think it would be helpful though to...to have those things in...**

R: Yeah.

I: **...in place?**

R: Yeah, I think it would be.

I: **Yeah. Kind of...**

R: *[Overspeaking]* Even though we don't...like, we don't...we don't suffer like that in like other families, but I know there are people out there that obviously they do suffer and it's hard for them to put food on the table.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So I think it would be beneficial to be aware of where you can go for support with the stuff like that.

I: **Yeah. Erm, what parts of the Muslim community do you think were probably impacted the most by the pandemic and the lockdowns?**

R: What do you mean?

I: **Erm, so do you think there's an age group for example that were probably more impacted than others?**

R: I think the elderly and the kids were more impacted...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...by the thingie...the lockdown 'cause...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...'cause they're not moving and stuff like that, they've...they're lazy and...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...not able to go a walk. Like my next door neighbours because of, like, you know, sort of...like, the lockdown. They become lazy like because they're also used to sitting at home for two years they barely go out now.

I: Yeah.

R: So it's just...it's hard on the kids because now they're growing up they won't be able to walk as much as we did as kids.

I: Yeah.

R: So yeah.

I: Yeah. It's older people and...and children...

R: Yeah, I would say.

I: ...feel it a bit more. Erm, do you think that there's anything that the Government could have done to kind of handle the situation a little bit better? Do you think there's any kind of initial forms of support they...they could have offered?

R: Erm, yeah. Even though we was furloughed, I'd be like people who are...like, you know, people who have had mental health issues and stuff like that...

I: Yeah.

R: ...I'd be, like, they should've, like, got some more...more types of support because obviously they're in the house, you're just full of your own thoughts.

I: Yeah.

R: So I think they... could've helped out a lot more than that.

I: Yeah.

R: Nothing.

I: Yeah. Erm, what about the NHS? So at any point during the pandemics did you have to use the NHS? So your GP or 111, 999, did you use...?

R: No.

I: ...any of those services?

R: No, we didn't use those services.

I: When you contracted covid, how did you manage that as a family?

R: Erm, just do home remedies.

I: Yeah.

R: And then that was it really. Just...it's just try...trying to eat and stuff like that. That was it really. We didn't really contact anybody about that. Me mum did. She had an appointment with the GP and then she said we had covid and then she told them the signs and she said she had covid, just do some home remedies and isolate yourself.

I: Do think the NHS were supportive during that period? Would you say that they were helpful...?

R: *[Overspeaking]* I would say...

I: ...to you?

R: ...no.

I: **Yeah.**

R: 'Cause everyone was too concerned about them...even though they're doing their job, they...they was concerned about themselves so, I believe.

I: **Yeah.**

R: 'Cause a lot of people were losing their lives at that time and working in the NHS was a big...big thing.

I: **Yeah, yeah. Okay. So, erm, the last set of questions I wanted to ask you were around, erm, vaccines. Okay? So what did you think of the vaccine campaign that was rolled out during the...the pandemic period?**

R: Erm, I personally think it was...I dunno. I think...

I: **Do you mind me asking did you have any vaccines?**

R: *[Overspeaking]* I had two. Yeah, I had two...

I: **Yeah.**

R: I had two 'cause, erm, we were told that sometimes in case that they ask whether you've had a vaccine or not and, obviously, if you don't then they might not take you on. But you...

I: ***[Overspeaking]* Your in health and social care.**

R: *[Overspeaking]* Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So initially I did...I took a bit of a stand but other than that, I do really believe it...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...if I'm honest with you because there's some illnesses out there and how you got a cure for something in such a small amount of time and then you've got, like, the illnesses that have been happening for years and then you don't...no, you don't have a cure that so how...how's the cure for this?

I: **Yeah.**

R: It...it didn't make no sense.

I: **Yeah.**

R: But I only had it because of placement and like uni and stuff like that.

I: **If you didn't have to have it do you think you would've probably exercised the choice and just said...**

R: *[Overspeaking]* I would've said...

I: **No.**

R: ...no. Yeah.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I wouldn't've not taken it out.

I: **What do you think the kind of, erm, community's attitude has been towards the vaccine? So do you think there is a lot of hesitancy around the vaccine and a lot of suspicion around it?**

R: Within the...within my family, yeah, but I don't know about the community. I don't even speak to many people like that.

I: **So in your family what was the general kind of feel?**

R: That *[cough]* the vaccine was a load of crap.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Wasn't...wasn't really...not everyone's cuppa tea.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So some people took it 'cause they were scared.

I: **Yeah.**

R: But I only took it because I had to take it.

I: **Yeah. Okay. Erm, and this centre obviously...the XXXX centre [centre focused on skilling for women], erm, are you aware of...of whether or not they, erm, offered any forms of support or care during the pandemic period?**

R: I'm not too sure if I'm honest with you. I didn't...I didn't access this, coming here. I wasn't aware of it if I'm honest, but I just had to look it up for personal and other things.

I: **So this centre, erm, XXXX [centre manager] just told me that they, erm, have, erm, kind of facilities here to help wellbeing. Erm, is that something that you would've accessed for your own mental health for example at that point if you knew that it existed?**

R: Erm, no, I don't think I would've.

I: **No. Is there any particular reason?**

R: Erm, just don't like speaking to people about my own problems.

I: **Yeah, yeah. It's something you'd rather deal with yourself.**

R: *[Overspeaking]* I'd rather deal with it myself.

I: **Yeah.**

R: Yeah.

I: **Yeah. It...and that's completely reasonable because it's not everyone's cuppa tea...**

R: Yeah.

I: **...having counselling and...**

R: *[Overspeaking]* No, it's true.

I: **...talking.**

R: Yeah.

I: **Erm, you were saying that you're not very well connected with other people in the community. Erm, do have any Muslim friends etc. in...?**

R: Yeah.

I: **...in the community? Erm, do you know what the kind of impacts were on...on them or in your friends' circle? Did everyone feel like you did at those points or...?**

R: I think they were a lot calmer than I was.

I: **Yeah.**

R: I mean, I had to be more cautious because of my dad, but...

I: **Because he's older.**

R: No, 'cause he's not well. He's always had, like, problems and gets ill quickly.

I: **Okay.**

R: So that's why I'm...that was more my concern, but they were more calm. Even though they stayed at home, we sort of all stayed connected but...

I: **Yeah.**

R: ...they were just a lot of more freer than I was I guess.

I: **Yeah. Yeah, yeah. But...**

R: Yeah.

I: **'Cause your concern was obviously...**

R: *[Overspeaking]* Yeah, my dad. Yeah.

I: **...your dad's wellbeing. Yeah, yeah. Okay.**

R: 'Cause we didn't take covid seriously until we all got it.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So then when we did get it, we definitely took it, like, more cautiously and that's when it was like, "Oh no." because if something happens to him its on us, because he didn't go out so who...the only people that were going out were us.

I: **Yeah.**

R: So yeah, that was it really.

I: You were concerned for your dad's health.

R: Yeah.

I: Yeah, okay. Right. Was there anything else that you wanted to add to that?

R: Erm, no. Sorry.

[End of transcript]

Interview 24

Date: 16/08/2022

Duration: 41:06

Participant characteristics: female, community member

Key:

H – Interviewer

H – Respondent

H: Okay, the recording has now started...

H: Okay.

H: ...of this interview.

H: Okay.

H: Okay, great. All right, I'm gonna get straight into the questions with you. Um, I will get you to fill in, um, an informed consent sheet as well, um, just at the end of this interview as well, if that's okay.

H: Yeah, that's fine.

H: Okay. Right. So, I've already told you, um, about what the study entails and what the aims and objectives are as well of this research project. So, we're looking to document the experiences, um, of British Muslims, um, living in and around Birmingham and the specific impacts that COVID 19 has had on people. Okay.

H: Yeah.

H: So, I'm gonna ask you a series of questions. Okay. So, these, all of them revolve around COVID 19 and the subsequent lockdowns as well from 2020 onwards. If there's any point, um, at which you wanna stop the interview, then just, just let me know and I'll, I'll, I'll stop the interview and the recording. Okay?

H: Okay.

H: All right. Okay. So, um, going back to the beginning of the pandemic, so if you think back to March, 2020, when, um, the pandemic first kind of hit the UK, um, and then we had a lockdown towards the end of March. Okay. I want you to think about what some of the impacts, um, have been for you specifically of, um, COVID 19. So, what were the kind of first impacts for you that you felt in March of 2020?

H: Uh, I think it was more of the fear of the unknown, being scared of everything that the media was talking about, that it was very, um, fatal; and you couldn't go out. You know, wash, disinfecting your vegetables from the shops every time, um, someone comes in and...

H: Yeah.

H: ...um, taking out your outdoor clothing, you just didn't know what would happen. Um, we also lost a relative close to the start as well.

H: Yeah.

H: Which did impact us mentally. Um, yeah. It's just the fear of death really and not knowing what's gonna happen.

H: Yeah. And of those experiences that you had, which one would you say had the most impact for you?

H: Probably the, um, the death in the family. So, it was my husband's aunt.

H: Yeah.

H: And it was put down as COVID and it was very suddenly and, on the news, it was just constant, you know, more deaths every day.

H: Yeah.

H: People don't know what's gonna happen and yeah, just scared, scared, really.

H: Yeah. A lot of fear around it. Yeah. So, in terms of kind of your own, um, wellbeing, how do you think that the pandemic affected you? So, did you experience, for example, any uncertainty, anxiety? Would you say that there were any kind of negative impacts on your wellbeing as a result of the pandemic?

H: Uh, yeah, definitely negatively impacted my mental health and wellbeing. I mean, I'm in an apartment. I had my son at home and my husband working.

H: Yeah.

H: So, we were trapped in one room really to entertain a child. I couldn't take him out; we've got no outdoor space.

H: Yeah.

H: And it was just constant on the go.

H: Yeah.

H: To do, and it was just really out of the ordinary.

H: Yeah.

H: Couldn't work 'cause I had those two at home.

H: Yeah.

H: And yeah, I think even for my son, I mean, he's the only child as well, so just difficult.

H: And especially as you said, because you live in an apartment, I mean, I know we've read a, kind of, a lot about the impacts on people who live in high rise flats, for example, or apartments where they don't have access to like a garden. Do you think that would've made a little bit of a difference in terms of kind of entertaining your son or giving you a little bit of respite, if you did have that outdoor space?

H: I think it would've definitely. And it was quite hot as well some of the days. And in a flat it's even hotter than a house. And we could only open a window 'cause we could only be in that one room.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, there was even that fear of being in the hallway 'cause everyone shares the hallways and communal areas. We couldn't go outside for some of the lockdown, and entertaining a three-year-old at the time it was, you know, what can you do in one room? He bored of all his toys. He wasn't really interested in TV. If he just had a bit of space he could run around and you know, explore even a bit or get fresh air 'cause mentally it impacts you as well just getting that bit of air.

H: Yeah. And how long would you say that you kind of felt like that and, and did that kind of feeling change as time went on? Did you think it was something that was kind of ongoing for the rest of that year? Or did it get a little bit better for you as, as we came out of that first lockdown?

H: I'd say it was ongoing because especially for my son, he was very – I didn't really know what to tell him and he couldn't understand at that age. And he was constantly in and out of nursery and that was his first interaction with other people as well. Like he never adjusted in nursery 'cause he could never settle. As soon as school opened, it had to close and he only went half a day. So, he was going through all those changes and the pandemic changes, and then I'm trying to adjust with my husband at home working and he would get mentally, um, stressed as well because he's not used to the changes and it was just a lot going on.

H: Yeah. Yeah.

H: Um, I think there was a point, there was a few months where things looked like they were starting to go back in – back normal.

H: Yeah.

H: And then we had another lockdown, didn't we?

H: Yes. In the winter of that same year.

H: During that time period, he was still working from home so there was still all those, um, adjustments that needed to be made.

H: Yeah.

H: And on media as well we just didn't know what was going on.

H: Yeah. Okay. Right. So, um, going back to, um, kind, you said that a family member had passed away, your husband's aunt had passed away. Um, what kind of

impacts did that have on you as a family, um, when that particular family member passed away?

H: Um, it was just really difficult because, um, all the procedures that are normally done when someone dies, we couldn't do, we couldn't see her. We couldn't be there for family.

H: Yeah.

H: You know, with mother, we didn't know how she was feeling and we couldn't go to the house.

H: Yeah.

H: We just – especially, um, in terms of religion as well, we couldn't do the burial ceremony, which normally, um, it brings everyone together and you sort of cope better when you're with family at that point, especially for my husband, he just, he had to work through it as well.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, it was just really strange. It was out of the ordinary.

H: Did it have an impact as well on kind of funeral, uh, funeral arrangements and um, you know, some of the, uh, rituals that, you know, Islamically we have around death and burial, for example. Did it have an impact on all of those kinds of arrangements? Are you aware?

H: Yeah, definitely. So, we couldn't have, we couldn't go to the funeral. Um, also in terms of the burial, we shouldn't really be burying in a coffin. It should just be straight in the ground, but obviously with COVID restrict, um, restrictions, I think she had to be put in a body bag and they had to wait for that bag. Um, couldn't touch the body. Had to seal it. The coffin shut, no one could see her.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, no, again, no one at the funeral. No prayer.

H: Yeah. Oh gosh. Yeah. That must have been difficult obviously. Um, and how do you – kind of did your faith factor into how you dealt with that experience?

H: Um, no, but 'cause we are told to obey the laws of the country...

H: Yeah.

H: ...as part of the religion. So, at times adjustments do have to be made.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, no, I mean it, it was a hard way to see her go because it was so sudden and she was very sick and she left behind some children as well, and we couldn't help in any way 'cause the only thing we could do was leave food at the door.

H: Yeah.

H: And yeah, it's just very, we just don't know what to do really in that situation.

H: Yeah.

H: We don't know what's safe to do either.

H: Yeah. Yeah, 'cause you're obviously trying to balance, you know, um, not getting COVID yourself and you know, you have a child to think about as well. Um, and then trying to be there for family, was it hard to do that?

H: Yeah, definitely.

H: Okay. Um, did you contract COVID yourself or anyone in your kind of immediate family?

H: Um, I haven't, no. My father did, um, quite a few members of my husband's family as well. So, his parents got it, his sister, brothers, um, nieces, nephews who we see regularly. So, it's been in the family.

H: Yeah.

H: But no one contracted it myself.

H: Did you ever feel any anxiety about contracting COVID?

H: Yes, definitely.

H: Yeah.

H: Especially from schools as well. As I said, my son's really young and he's always been with me. So, when you start nursery, you're going to catch everything anyway, especially when he's been really concealed. Um, so there was a fear of that and then my husband having to go and commute at times outside and get there, even getting the shopping from the local shop was scary 'cause every – there was just all these fears around getting it from touching a shelf or something.

H: Yeah.

H: And we just didn't know where, like how easily it spread.

H: What about now? In 2020, we'd probably say that, you know, we were at the height of the pandemic then and definitely that fear and anxiety as well was probably at an all-time high. Um, especially when we had those kind of first two lockdowns. So, we had the one initially at the beginning, during spring and summer, and then later on in the winter we had another kind of mini lockdown. And then if you recall in January of 2021, we had another three-month lockdown. How did you find that particular lockdown that we had? So, in January, 2021, 'cause you mentioned that you have a son, um, had he started school at that point?

H: Um, yes. I think he has. I'm not sure if schools were opened during that lockdown or not.

H: No. So, they, they were closed. Um, and what they did instead was issued the directive of, um, parents being responsible for home learning.

H: Yeah. That's it.

H: Yeah. Did that apply to you with your child or was he at nursery at that point?

H: No, we didn't really have any home learning 'cause he was only three.

H: Okay. Okay. So, did you have any other additional responsibilities as a result of the pandemic and um, the lockdowns? Was there anything that you had to kind of do more rather around the house, for example? Did you have any additional responsibilities in terms of caring, et cetera?

H: Yeah. I mean, I couldn't work during that point, so I was constantly looking after my child and then cooking a lot more because they're both home.

H: Yeah.

H: And obviously cleaning after a young child is constant.

H: Yeah.

H: That was that bit. It's a lot more than what it would've been done if that he had been at work and school.

H: Yeah.

H: And also, being in charge of his learning as well and not having any support from the school 'cause they didn't give anything. So, I'm having to make up my own, you know, lessons and learning and trying to get him to have some sort of education really, which we missed out on for a whole year.

H: Yeah. Yeah. That definitely had an impact on a lot of people as well. I think that their children were, um, kind of missing out on that conventional education in schools and nurseries.

H: Yeah.

H: Okay. So, in terms of your working life, so you did touch on that briefly just now. Um, how was your working life or your career impacted, um, by the pandemic?

H: Um, I was hoping to go back into work, but it was just out of the question 'cause I had no time in the day to work really?

H: Yeah.

H: A child at home all day.

H: Can I ask, um, what you do for a living?

H: Um, at the moment I'm a teaching assistant.

H: Okay.

H: Yeah.

H: So, if, I mean with teaching specifically, I know, especially in primary and secondary school settings, um, during the pandemic, do you think that your career would've changed anyhow? Because obviously teachers weren't actually in schools for the majority of the time. Um, so do you think that you kind of benefited from not being there, especially given that you've said that you did have a lot of anxiety as well around catching, um, COVID?

H: Uh, if I had gone back into school, yeah, I probably would've been quite anxious about it.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, but again, if I had the time and the day I would've gone back to work.

H: Yeah.

H: But yeah, there was that fear surrounding it as well.

H: Okay. Right. So, you've already mentioned as well about your role in the family changing slightly as well as a result of, um, changes to your working life and obviously trying, you know, having to put your career kind of on the back burner so you could be there for your son. Um, and uh, your partner was working from home as well. So, did it have an impact on your kind of long-term vision for work?

H: Yeah. Just not being, um, able to know whether everything will be normal the next day. I was definitely looking at more remote roles rather than going into schools.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, the fear, the fear surrounding the catching COVID as well, especially during the start probably the first two years really. Yeah, I was looking more remote roles just so I – no matter what happens, I can still work from home.

H: Yeah.

H: And I think if there were a lot more remote jobs as well. Even now I'd prefer to do remote work.

H: Yeah. Do you think that people's attitudes shifted as a result of the pandemic? So initially a lot of people felt stressed about working from home. Um, do you think that it's had a kind of long-term impact or permanent change in terms of, you know, shifting people's preference now to a more kind of hybrid form of working or remote working?

H: I think it has definitely. At the start people were stressed and thinking, oh, how are we gonna manage working from home? But now that they've done it for quite a while, and we've sort of proven that a lot of jobs can be done from home, we don't need to go and waste time commuting.

H: Yeah.

H: And like for my husband, he's now commuting quite far and it just seems like a waste of time. He's getting really tired from it because he's used to working from home.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, and the work output as well. He, um, did a lot more, um, work when there's no distractions, um, from all your colleagues and everything.

H: Yeah.

H: And you save a lot of money as well on lunches.

H: Yeah. Yeah.

H: But yeah, there's um, definitely a lot more of remote work. It wasn't really in the question before COVID.

H: No.

H: I can't really think what jobs you could have done from home other than; even tutoring you do in person, but now even teaching jobs and all courses, they're all done online, university courses as well. I think there's a lot more distance learning and that flexibility.

H: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Right. So, in terms of, um, economic impacts in your household, um, were there any specific, I mean, again, you don't have to answer this one; it's completely up to you, but were, did you go through any kind of financial impacts or hardships as a result of the pandemic?

H: Uh, yes and no. Yeah. No, because well, yes, because I couldn't work. I couldn't help financially.

H: Yeah.

H: And I couldn't find a job that was remote at the time.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, but no, in terms of we were saving a lot of money, um, not going out and doing all the leisure activities or um, you know, commuting to go anywhere. We couldn't go out so we weren't really spending much.

H: Yeah. Okay. Right. So, uh, the next set of questions I'm gonna ask you are around, um, the impact on religious observance. Okay. So, um, I'm gonna start by going back again to, uh, kind of March, April, 2020. So, there was, um, I think Ramadhan was around April or May of that year, so it was during the actual initial lockdown. So, were there any kind of specific impacts on your experience of Ramadhan and Eid, the Eid festival as well that followed, um, that particular year?

H: Yeah. It just felt really isolating really. So, Ramadhan and Eid is normally a time where you spend with family and you celebrate breaking the fast at the end of the day. And all of that aspect was just gone. There was no prayer, some mosques did it outside, um, distanced and it was limited spaces. So, you had to book in and we didn't feel safe with it. So, I don't think we did even go to Eid prayer, which is normally a big, as I said celebration. Um, without that it didn't really feel like a special day really.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, not being able to see family. Yeah, it was just very strange experience.

H: **Yeah. Would you say that it had any impact on your faith in that sense, so the pandemic and, you know, the subsequent lockdowns? Would you say it had any impact on your faith? Did it strengthen it? Did it weaken it? Did – would you, or would you say it kind of remained the same? Did it, did it have any impact?**

H: Um, I wouldn't say on my faith, no, because I couldn't blame my faith for the conditions...

H: Yeah.

H: ...of that month. Um, but again, in terms of prayers, I think I would've prayed a lot more because when you do, especially the night prayer, there's a lot more prayers to do at night. And when you are, when you've got that support of your community and you're at the mosque doing it together.

H: Yeah.

H: You sort of enjoy it more and you're not as tired.

H: Yeah.

H: So, yeah, I suppose in that sense it has.

H: **Yeah. Okay. Right. So, if you, um, normally attend a mosque, so, um, are you a member, um, or a regular attendee of, of any mosque?**

H: I was before my child was born. With him, I mean, during a night prayer it's quite difficult to bring your child along to. Um, but yes, I am close to a mosque.

H: **Okay. Um, what role did the mosque play, um, during the pandemic? So, this isn't necessarily, um, just kind of for you, for example, but for the local community, are you aware of any additional kind of services for example, um, or provisions that, um, the mosques local to you, um, were kind of delivering as a result of the pandemic?**

H: Um, there never used to be prayers outside and they started doing that.

H: Okay.

H: Socially distanced prayers. Um, they tried to, you know, get a congregational prayer together in, um, within the boundaries of COVID, but, um, no, I think they struggled a bit...

H: Yeah.

H: With organizing things.

H: 'Cause I think, um, for example, some of the bigger mosques that you have, um, in and around Birmingham, they were offering, for example, things like, um, food packages, they were delivering medicine. Yeah. So, are you aware of any of those kinds of services that they were delivering or any ways that they were helping?

H: The butchers as well. So, they're connected to the butchers and, um, they were organizing these food packages to get them to people's houses, um, during Ramadan especially to, to make sure that everyone's eating and people are getting the food that they need because we couldn't go. Um, Iftar as well, I think even that was delivered.

H: Yeah.

H: They were organizing that.

H: And do you feel that kind of Islam or Muslim identity had something to do with how the community got through the pandemic? So, the role of the mosque for example, um, you know, do you think that it's the actual Islamic faith, um, that had an impact on how the community kind of got together through the pandemic and offered those services?

H: Uh, the community's always been good at getting together. Um, in some ways I think it has brought the community more closely together and connected. Um, but also for those struggling who saw the mosque as their means of like, maybe it's the only time that they felt connected by being in the actual mosque.

H: Yeah.

H: I think for them they've struggled a bit, um, not having that.

H: Mm-hmm. Okay. Okay. Right. Okay, the next set of questions I'm gonna ask you, um, are about, um, the perception of the Muslim community during the pandemic. Okay. So, did you, at any point feel, um, increasing tension or hostility towards the Muslim community from other communities during the pandemic? Thinking back to some of the kind of media headlines, um, that were circulating during that period. Um, so as a result of kind of all of those headlines and, you know, the media representation as well of, of Muslims and other minority communities, do you, do you think that there were any kind of increased tensions or hostilities towards, uh, Muslim communities during that point?

H: Yeah, definitely around the mosque as well. So, there's a mosque called XXXX XXXX Masjid [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], which is one that we tend to go to a lot.

H: Yeah.

H: And it's in an area called Small Heath, which is predominantly Muslim, and we've got many generations living in one home and it did shoot up in COVID cases. And I think that's around the same time it was coming out in the news as well that, um, it's those

people all living together with their grandparents, which was really looked down upon during the whole pandemic.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, they're even saying to move out if you can, if you've got grandparents in the house.

H: Yeah.

H: And in our culture it's really looked down upon, you know, you look after your grandparents.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, I think, yeah, there definitely was that tension 'cause some people were starting to go and get their own place and sort of looked down on the older generation, which wasn't right. And yeah, I think people were even afraid to walk through areas where there were Muslims really.

H: Yeah. Okay. What about you yourself? Did you experience any kind of hostility or hate incidents during the pandemic?

H: Um, no. I wouldn't say any personal experience.

H: Yeah. Do you know of anyone that did experience any, um, kind of hate incidents during that period? I mean, that can include, for example, comments, you know, anything that could perceive to be racist, um, physical attacks, that kind of thing.

H: Nothing that comes to mind.

H: Okay. What about the representations of Muslims in the media? So, we have kind of touched on this already, um, in terms of how these communities were kind of construed, um, during the pandemic. Um, do you think that the representations of the Muslims in the media got worse during the pandemic?

H: Yes. Yeah. Um, again with the whole, the way that we live and everyone together in one home, I think people definitely look down on minorities and Muslims and um, just seeing them as being the reason why it's spreading so quick, I think.

H: Yeah. Like there was some kind of blame being thrown on them.

H: Yeah. They were just looking for something to blame. Um, everything was just out of the ordinary and I think when those headlines came out, it was just a quick one to turn to. That the Muslims to bring it from different countries and yeah, living with older generations.

H: Yeah. Okay. Right. So, I'm gonna now go back to, um, kind of talking about mosques and community organizations and the way that they responded as well to the needs of the community during the pandemic. So what interventions do you think would've benefited the Muslim community early on during the pandemic? So, what would you like to have seen, for example, as a response from your local

mosque or community centre? What do you think might have helped you through the pandemic early on in the beginning?

H: Um, I think some support really in terms of, especially for me, I was a stay-at-home mum with a young child, maybe having some virtual classes or something just for the children.

H: Yeah.

H: And support group maybe.

H: Yeah.

H: For the mothers as well, just to feel like we're not, you know, we were in the same boat 'cause it felt really isolated and we just didn't know what to do really. And at times it felt like I was the only one in that situation, even though everyone was probably in the same situation, especially when it impacts your mental health.

H: Yeah, definitely. Yeah. And what role did the kind of mosque play in your local community? So, where you live did they play an important role in terms of serving the community? So, I know we talked about, for example, they delivered food packages. Um, but what about other forms of support? Was there anything that was available?

H: There was a lot available. I didn't really take advantage of it as much as I probably should have.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, they had loads of different events, especially coming out of the lockdown as well. Um, they tried to do a lot more outside in the open spaces and people got together again to try and um, you know, get the acts of faith back to how it was. Um, yeah, they just organized a lot more. I think they had a lot more money as well to spend on events and things. Um, getting people's mental health back and um, trying, especially the funeral arrangements. I think all the mosques got together really nicely and they created this, um, big funeral organization. So, if anyone did die in the community from COVID, they would all, um, jump to bury them and it was really organized.

H: Yeah.

H: And everyone would come together.

H: Okay. So, you think that was probably a little bit more improved in as a result of the pandemic, kind of people's approach to burial and death?

H: Yeah, definitely. So, before it was sort of who do we call? Um, who's gonna organize it, but when all the mosques and Imams of different, um, areas of Birmingham did come together...

H: Yeah.

H: ...and organized it. I forgot what they're called now. Um, but it was yeah, very organized.

H: Um, okay. I wasn't aware of that. I wasn't aware of that happening. Okay. That's quite interesting that you've raised that. We'll kind of look at trying to find out what they're called afterwards. Okay.

H: Yeah. And XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] Mosque have their own one as well. And I think everyone's just helped them out.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, a bit more. So, they were just very, um, so they had their own, you know, black bags and coffins and everything ready, which we wouldn't have previously 'cause obviously the burial arrangements was just a white sheet rather than a coffin. But then the council changed, um, the rules. So, everyone had to be buried with that and I think they had their own spaces as well prepared for all the burials.

H: Yeah. Okay. Right. So, in terms of the, the government, do you think that the government, um, responded sufficiently during the pandemic to the needs of people? So, this doesn't just apply to Muslim communities. This is just kind of generally, what did you think of the government's response to the pandemic?

H: I think they were a bit confused really. It just kept changing. Um, you know, it was – there was no reason for these lockdowns. It seemed, 'cause it didn't really change the statistics at all.

H: Mm-hmm.

H: Um, I think people were quite angry at the government at times, and at other times it seemed like they were trying to help.

H: Yeah.

H: It was all quite confusing. Really. We didn't really know where they stood with it. At times it felt like we got no help at all.

H: Mm-hmm

H: And everything was done just at a click of a finger decision. Nothing was really thought about.

H: Yeah. What about the NHS? How do you feel they responded?

H: Um, the NHS were really good. I think they've done everything that they could do. I don't know if they were given the right resources. I mean, they weren't even given PPE at the start of COVID and they weren't really prepared. Um, but I think they made good of the situation they were in.

H: Yeah. Did you use any of the NHS services during that period? So that includes, for example, 111, 999, or your local GP. Um, did you use any of those services in that first year of the pandemic?

H: Um, I did call triple one a few times 'cause I was too afraid to go into A&E.

H: Yeah.

H: If there was anything at home, which I wasn't sure about rather than going to urgent care, I would call 111.

H: Yeah.

H: GP as well, it was all telephone appointments.

H: Yeah.

H: It was actually quite hard to get an appointment.

H: What do you feel about that? So, the fact that a lot of these services during the pandemic switched to kind of telephone only, um, consultations, um, you know, do you think that it was adequate then and it's adequate now?

H: Adequate in terms of, if you have COVID you would get seen, but any other issue you had was sort of put-on hold. So, people would, you know, even cancer, they couldn't get the right treatment, everything, routine surgeries and all of this, you just couldn't get it done and people were really suffering at home. And even the, um, you know, if you call the GP and you've got COVID symptoms...

H: Yeah.

H: ...it will seem to, it seemed to be all based on that really.

H: Yeah.

H: And it there's this overlap. So, if you did have any COVID symptoms, you couldn't get seen by a doctor.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, so yeah, it was quite difficult to get the help that you needed.

H: Okay. Right. So, um, the next question I'm gonna ask kind of is on the vaccine. Okay. So again, you know, if, if you aren't comfortable answering these questions, it's completely fine. So, what are your views on the available COVID vaccines? What do you think that the attitudes have been like in the wider community as well? If we start with the first question, so that's on your, your views of, of the vaccines that we have available for COVID 19. What are your views on the vaccines?

H: Um, I don't really know how effective they are, to be honest, because I think most people in the country are now vaccinated and we've still got 100,000 cases a day; so, I don't think it's really done much. I think in terms of being allowed to do things, it's had a massive impact and especially the stigma behind not getting it, it's been a bit crazy. Um, like you can't even travel to another country if you've not got a vaccine, which I think is silly.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, especially these boosters. I think we've got two boosters now. Um, I've had my two vaccines. I've not had the booster 'cause I've not seen the point of it, especially now I'm pregnant. I think there's more risk of getting it than not getting it.

H: **Yeah.**

H: A lot of people have struggled after they've had the injection as well. I know of people who can't even get out of bed.

H: **Yeah.**

H: And I don't see it being worth it really 'cause they've still contracted COVID after the vaccine.

H: **Yeah. What do you think the attitudes have been like in the wider community? So, in Muslim communities specifically, um, and other ethnic minority communities, what do you think their general attitudes have been to the vaccine?**

H: I think when the vaccine first came out, there were so many conspiracy theories and I'll be honest, I even believed in some of them, myself.

H: **Yeah.**

H: Because it just seemed, you know, you'd wanna believe that it's something that was manmade or, um, people just tried to find a reasoning behind what was going on 'cause it was so out of the ordinary. Um, yeah. I don't know. I think attitudes have changed towards it now; we've just become so used to the, we've just got used to the whole COVID situation that I don't think many people are phased anymore.

H: **Yeah. Do you think it did have an impact though on whether people chose to take the vaccine or not? So, you said about the whole, you know, some of the conspiracy theories that were kind of circulating, um, especially when the vaccine was first released, do you think that had an impact on uptake of vaccines in specific communities?**

H: Yeah, I'd say so. I think a lot of, um, Muslim communities didn't want to take the vaccine. I think we were very hesitant, especially when it, um, I think we put a lot of, um, faith in like, so if you say an Imam was against it, I think it would impact a lot of the people to not get it.

H: **Yeah.**

H: Um, we were just trying to find, I don't, I don't know really, but yeah. I know of a lot of Muslims who didn't wanna take it and maybe we thought it was something that the government was creating to, maybe – I know at the start of when the vaccines did come out, we thought they were trying to kill off the older generation or...

H: **Yeah,**

H: ...Just a, yeah, a lot of conspiracies.

H: **Okay. What about the kind of role of um, like your local mosque or the, the one that you frequent? So, they acted as a vaccine centre as well at one point. Um,**

do you think that might have had an impact as well in terms of increasing the uptake of the vaccine or helping to dispel some of those, um, kind of initial conspiracy theories? Do you think that that will have helped the situation in any way, particularly in terms of increasing uptake of the vaccine?

H: Yeah, it would have, 'cause I know there was a government, um, scheme as well to get all of the Imams and um, religious leaders together to try and promote, um, people to get their vaccines. 'Cause it was, there were a lot of cases and within the minority ethnic groups, particularly Muslims who weren't getting the vaccines. And when these messages were coming out on TV and everything from Imam saying, it's fine to take the vaccine. And like you said, the vaccine centre that opened in mosques and things. Um, I think people felt a bit more comfortable with it seeing their own people get it.

H: Yeah. Yeah. Okay, great. Okay, the last set of questions I'm gonna ask now are on the needs of the Muslim community looking forward. Okay. Uh, with regard to the pandemic. So, in an ideal world, what would you like to see the government do to respond to the needs of local communities better? What do you think the government should have done or should do if we are to face this kind of situation again, in future, particularly at a kind of localized level, what do you think they could do to meet the needs of the community a bit better?

H: I think there should be sort of questions asked on how people are doing and how they're feeling. We didn't really get that.

H: Yeah.

H: Um, and responding in such a way that if they found that a lot of people were struggling mentally, how can they help? Um, I mean, I suppose they couldn't really have done that, but that we couldn't learn from the situation and have that. I feel like the government would just a mess really at the start. They didn't really know what was going on...

H: Yeah.

H: ...like we were, but yeah. Getting surveys out and questionnaires, seeing what help was needed in the community, what their views really were, um, and responding to that.

H: Okay. And what about, uh, mosques and community organizations? Do you think that there are any ways that they could respond better, um, to any kind of future incidents that we have like this as well? Do you think there's anything that mosques and community groups could do to improve the situation for Muslim communities, for example?

H: Um, yeah. If things are to close again, I think we've established that we can actually bring people together virtually. I think that there's been this massive shift in technology where people are having to communicate more through technology and we could still do what we could do in person, but online.

H: Yeah.

H: So perhaps some of the support groups and everything that were going on in mosques could still happen, rather than it just being paused and stopped completely,

which is what happened. We can now still continue with it via Teams or whatever. And yeah, just continuing with the support of everyone coming together in a different way.

H: Yeah. Okay. Right. Is there anything else that you want to add?

H: Um, no, I don't think so.

H: Okay. Right. I'm going to, um, stop the interview now then.

Interview 25

Date: 16/08/2022

Duration: 30:37

Participant characteristics: female, community member

Key:

H – Interviewer

S – Respondent

H: Okay. Right. So, um, going back to the beginning of the pandemic. Um, what would you say that the main impacts have been on yourself, for example, in, for yourself and for your family as well?

S: Um, main impacts, I would say, um, having kids being home, um, it kind of did play a big part because they weren't allowed to go out. So, everyone's been home, everyone was quite getting to the stage of like they wanted to socialize, which there wasn't allowed, um, homeschooling, it was a bit tough. The first thing, obviously, they all had to have their own, um, laptops.

H: Yeah.

S: So, if there was more than two or three children at home, you know, parents had to get at least two laptops; some school did supply, some didn't.

H: Did you use any of those facilities that the school had available?

S: Um, to be honest, um, my son's school, one of the schools didn't supply and one did, but then by the time they said like they could have it, it was like halfway through the month or something. So, we didn't really go for that. Um, it was hard to engage children, especially the young children, like my daughter who's only was five, um, to have them sit down and do work all like say even just mornings, but I used to give them breaks like I have a – be able to play and that, but even then, it was so hard to engage them. They got bored. With, by doing literacy, probably first subject, like literacy after that they got bored.

H: Yeah.

S: They get distracted.

H: Yeah.

S: So, I found it hard with my younger child to get them engaged, to do home school learning. Um, but the older two, they were quite okay. But sometime they would get cut off half through way do the lesson so they missed out. So, it did affect them quietly in some, I would say home schooling way. Socializing.

H: Yeah.

S: Um, can't meet friends, can't go out. Um, family, can't visit family. So, everything did play a big part.

H: I know that you mentioned as well that your, um, you have quite a lot of family that live nearby.

S: Yeah.

H: Um, were you able to kind of lean on them for any kind of support or was it restricted the contact that you had with them as well?

S: It was restricted, although they lived nearby, but we still didn't get that thing to go visit them.

H: Yeah.

S: It was only probably um, through phone calls or FaceTime.

H: Yeah.

S: But I know my family who suffered from COVID, um, they needed help and support, which I was there then. I supplied them with, um, food and if they needed shopping, we were there to help each other.

H: Yeah.

S: But apart from that, we didn't really go and socialize with them or we didn't really visit them.

H: Yeah. The lack of social contact; so, you said your children, for example, it was difficult for them 'cause obviously they weren't in school. They weren't seeing their friends. How did you kind of manage that situation at home?

S: Um, to be honest, they kind of got engaged with doing first, like the home school learning and then it would be things like there would be like reading books.

H: Yeah.

S: Or, you know, how, um, watching TV movies or something. It did get by, but sometime they would wanna go out, so sometime we did go for walks.

H: Yeah.

S: Just in the local park or just locally area we'd go for walks, give them that time to go out for a break rather than being stuck home every day, doing the same things, which in a way did kind of started affect them.

H: Yeah.

S: So, we used to go for a break, like all out for a walk and things like that.

H: Yeah. Right. So, in terms of the impact on yourself, basically, you've said about how it impacted on your children with the home learning. So did your role within the family change? So, did you have more responsibilities for example?

S: Yes. It was more responsibilities because of them being home. Um, I had to follow their routine because they're online working.

H: Yeah.

S: Then they would have lunch.

H: Yeah.

S: So obviously I had to keep on top of that, but at the same time I had my younger daughter, which I had to sit with her while she did her work.

H: Yeah.

S: With the older children, you don't have to sit with them with the younger one I had to. Um, so I had to keep on top of it. I had to maintain, um, they, they – older boys, um, routine time of school as well as my younger child.

H: Yeah.

S: So yeah, I did have more responsibilities. Yeah.

H: So how did you make that kind of time for yourself or were you not able to?

S: I, I, to be honest, I wasn't able to.

H: Yeah.

S: Because I had to give them 100% and I had to maintain the time and follow their routine more.

H: Yeah.

S: So, if they finished, um, you know, one might have finished earlier than the other one online, so then, you know, um, give him a break, give him something to, so I'd leave my daughter like, um, to do her bit of work, then I'll come back and join her. Um, it did get stressful, you know near at the end with the home school did get.

H: Yeah.

S: And I think the kids got to the states that they wanted to go back to school.

H: Yeah.

S: Yeah. Everybody got restless.

H: Yeah. Um, so in terms of kind of your own wellbeing as well, did you suffer from any kind of anxiety, stress during that period, especially in that first lockdown that we had? Or you can obviously kind of think about the lockdown that we had,

um, a year later. So, if you remember in January 2021. Did you feel any kind of stress and anxiety during that time as well?

S: I did. Yeah. Second lockdown is the year. Yeah, I did. It got to the point that coping with the routine, helping with everything at home, it did get too much.

H: Yeah.

S: Um, although I probably overcome it, but at that point it was like, I would prefer the kids to go back to school. And, um, it did, you know, and the thing is I never had like time for myself.

H: No.

S: So, it did affect us all. And, um, then I was thinking of doing like myself things around the home, like to, just to get my mind off, like being stressed and things.

H: Yeah.

S: But, um, yeah, it did affect. It started to get to the point that you wanna change.

H: Yeah.

S: Because you we've been, you know yeah. Almost three months and you've been having to be doing the same thing, everyone being home, everyone's like, um, trying to keep themselves busy, but obviously it was hard to. Yeah.

H: Did you have any help in, in doing that or, I mean, I know you mentioned that your, your partner works.

S: Yes.

H: He runs a business. Um, so would you say that most of that responsibility fell on you, all of that fell on you all that responsibility managing the home?

S: No, because my partner was off work as well.

H: Okay.

S: But obviously he was a bit mentally stressed as well because of his business not being, um, open for so long, but, um, he tried to help me and support me as well.

H: Yeah.

S: Um, when he, as he can. Um, other than that, um, he felt sometimes under pressure with his business, things like that. Um, but he tried to do a bit of his part for his business, from home, but there's so much you can do.

H: Yeah.

S: You know, but, um, yeah, he did, he was there to support the children as well. Give the time to children when I couldn't, um, if I was busy, like, you know, he would be off house chore and things, he will support the children. He would be there like just to even

play real games with them, spend that time with them or, um, you know, like give that family time of having, um, conversations and things with them. So yeah, he did give that time as well.

H: Yeah. I mean, I know we've talked a lot about kind of the negative impacts. Would you say that, and this might be a difficult question for you to answer, but would you say anything positive came out of any of those experiences? Would you say there were any positives?

S: Um, one thing that I would say is positive is that as a family, we spent time a lot of time together.

H: Yeah.

S: Whereas in, when everyone's busy at work, at school, you have that limited time together.

H: Yeah.

S: So, the positive thing is that yeah, the children spend time together. Parents and children did spend a lot of time together and which is quite good because you kind of got to, um, know about each of the more plus more communication there was, whereas in school at times, you know, how children come home, they're a bit tired. They do their work. So, in that way you kind of got a bit more close with your kids and spent a lot of time. Yeah. So that would be the positive part worth saying.

H: Okay. So, you've, um, you've talked a little bit about kind of the impact that it had on, um, your husband in like his business specifically. Um, so the next set of questions, do, do focus a little bit more on that/ Um, so did you feel any as a family, uh, part of any financial hardships or any impact on the business, for example, as a result of the pandemic and the lockdowns?

S: Um, yes, we did.

H: Yeah.

S: Financially, obviously my husband was out of the business for, um, a few months actually.

H: Yeah.

S: Um, so financially we were at the like, um, maintaining our household maintenance and everything we did. And with the business, because the business it isn't up and running, so we had to, you know, think about how we can carry on with the business without not having the business open.

H: Yeah.

S: We did get financial support from the government but it wasn't much.

H: Yeah.

S: But with the little amount, obviously we tried to, um, maintain it and, um, it was a real help, but yes, definitely, financially we did, um, have a bit of issues.

H: **Yeah.**

S: But we kind of maintained it, but at that time it was stressful from my partner.

H: **Yeah. Yeah.**

S: That future of the business.

H: **Yeah. Yeah.**

S: And it was coming to the situation, he's thinking, oh, can he carry on with the business without not opening and not having it running? So, you know, it was hard. Yeah.

H: **Okay. So, um, the next set of questions are gonna focus on the, um, the health impacts of the pandemic. So, did you or anyone that, you know, personally, like someone in your family contract to COVID?**

S: Um, yeah, my son had COVID.

H: **Okay.**

S: Yeah. My son who was, um, 15 at that time. And he, um, suffered from COVID and, um, when he did have COVID obviously he was isolated in his bedroom. Um, we maintained like, as in kept our distance, but we were there every day for him. Um, obviously I would go and give him what he needed, but, um, he was quite poorly, but me and my husband obviously look after the, um, he took his medications how he should.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Obviously it was hard for him, but he coped with it, but no one else in the house had apart from my son.

H: **Yeah. How long did he have it for?**

S: Uh, week and a half. About two weeks.

H: **Yeah. Yeah. Did you feel any anxiety or worry?**

S: I, I did feel a bit worried at the, uh, beginning. Um, but then I followed all the instructions, how, you know, we should have, we should for the whole, and um, it took time for my son, like to recover, but he was quite poorly, but, um, I tried to give 100%, you know?

H: **Yeah.**

S: I always was there going to see him, um, you know, giving him a lot of fluid, um, maintaining the time with the medication.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Obviously it was only more of paracetamol and things, but obviously with like fluids. And then slowly by end of the two weeks he recovered, but no one else had it. None of my younger children or myself had at that time.

H: What about, um, people in your extended family kind of?

S: Yes. Yeah. We had it. Yeah. I've had, um, members of the family, quite a few people had it and there were quite bad, obviously they being their age and they're older.

H: Yeah.

S: So, they did suffer quite, um, seriously with COVID. And from my part, I was there to help them as in, um, if they needed medication, if they needed shopping. Um, I tried to help them that, which we did. And sometime, you know, the meals, then we would do that, take it over to them.

H: So, you were all able to offer some support?

S: Yes.

H: Um, the next question. I mean, you don't have to answer this one, but did you have any family deaths or bereavements during the, during the pandemic periods?

S: Not from my close family by no, no, we never had no deaths, apart from they just had the COVID the virus come up.

H: Are you aware of any kind of, um, funerals, um, that did take place, for example, um, in your wider or external kind of networks? And do you know what, what the kind of, some of the impacts were the pandemic on funerals and burials?

S: Mm, yes. From a, I think Muslim community, um, there was like different, uh, mosque that organized, if there was any death, obviously we, we had to be assured how they would do it. So, there was, I think funeral service, um, where they kept the bodies and how many people can attend the funeral.

H: Yeah.

S: Um, yeah. And having the body washed, things like that, um, we were, you know, informed how we would take place on that from the local mosque and, um, yeah, how long we would take and to have funeral, so yes, we were informed.

H: You didn't have any kind of personal?

S: No, we never, no. No.

H: Okay. So, the next set of questions are around the impact of the pandemic on your kind of religious practice. Okay. So, if you remember, during the first lockdown, for example, um, I think Ramadan came within two months of the first lockdown that we had in 2020. So do you wanna talk a little bit about that impact on Ramadhan?

S: I mean normally when it's Ramadan, um, we get to go to each other's house for even opening our fast families. Yeah. But it, it obviously close by family. So that Ramadan, obviously we couldn't do that.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Everyone kept themselves at home. Um, stayed home, did the fasting and, um, opened the fast at home. They didn't get to know, go to each other's house.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Um, another thing was they weren't allowed to go for the Ramadan prayer, you know?

H: **Yeah.**

S: Um, they weren't allowed to go to mosque. There was no mosque open, so everyone had to do it at home.

H: **Yeah.**

S: So, um, that kind of played a part for the men's, the boys who normally always go to the mosque to pray. And then when he was Eid obviously everyone looks forward to meeting family, friends, spending Eid together, which we weren't.

H: **Yeah.**

S: We couldn't go and celebrating Eid as a family. Everyone was like in their own house, which, um, for the kids, it was a big thing. Like they didn't look forward to it because normally Eid, so families get together, um, they have a big feast something together. Which they couldn't.

H: **Yeah.**

S: So, it was quite a bit of a downfall for that, and it did make affect the families, the kids. Couldn't celebrate how you normally do. Yeah.

H: **What about your kind of general religious practice or, um, you know, your praying routine and all of those things or your children going to your husband been gone to mosque on a Friday, for example?**

S: Yeah.

H: **Did it have an impact on those kinds of routines as well?**

S: Yes. It's kind of, it didn't feel like when, on a Fridays, obviously how, um, everyone goes to pray and that. Um, it started to seem like this is just an ordinary routine.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Because you just praying at home so you didn't feel as if, you know, um, when, you know, those days you're gonna go to the mosque to pray and you get ready, prepared. It wasn't one of those things. It was like a normal day life at home, just praying at home. So

yeah, even like for my husband and the boys, it was a bit awkward at first, because you are not allowed to go to, um, Friday prayer. So, it's like reading home it didn't seem like the same.

H: Yeah. So, would, would you say that your faith helped you in any way to kind of get through those, those periods during the lockdown? So, praying for example, and your religious observe, would you say that your faith helped you get through any of those times?

S: Um, yeah. As in maybe sometime when you felt stressed or when someone's not well, and that maybe, you know, you kind of prayed or for this virus, you know, um, you know, go away and things like that maybe you did a bit, you did a bit, 'cause at that time everyone was at home, maybe sometimes you engaged in your faith or things like that.

H: Yeah. Yeah. So, what about the kind of general impacts on the Muslim community? Do you think that there were any specific impacts that Muslim or minority communities felt that maybe the mainstream community didn't feel as much? Do you think there were any differences in how you experienced the pandemic in the lockdown?

S: Yeah, I think because I think the Asian minorities were affected more with COVID.

H: Yeah.

S: But sometime maybe they didn't get as support as they should have. 'Cause there was, I think more of, um, the Asian community that had COVID virus and, uh, some families felt as if they weren't getting any support. And obviously some family members never had like families to help them or even to, uh, look out for them or even to, to shopping for them. And I think there is some bit of lack in that that they've missed out.

H: Yeah.

S: And they did feel alone and there are, um, elders who were alone in our community who never had anyone to look out for them at that time or give them that mentally supportive. And so, it has affected them.

H: Yeah.

S: And yeah, they didn't get – I just feel as if there was less, um, help in that, uh, community.

H: Yeah. So, what about the role of kind of mosques and, and community organizations? Are you aware of any mosques or, um, community organizations that offered any help to Muslim or Asian communities in general?

S: Um, there was, there was some local mosque.

H: Yeah.

S: And I wouldn't say the local mosque, there was some mosques that were far around or something that did offer, but there are some of our, um, elderly people who didn't know because the local mosque didn't do like things like, um, community work or funeral service. They were like the bigger mosque that were a bit far, I think, those mosques did.

H: Yeah.

S: So, um, there was some people who didn't know about the facilities that were offering because the local mosques were closed and they weren't doing nothing.

H: You mean like the smaller local ones?

S: Yeah.

H: Yeah.

S: They were doing much. They never had like, um, if they had to be funeral service or things, they didn't have that.

H: Yeah.

S: Yeah. So, some people do it alone.

H: Yeah. Do you think that was what the main issues was?

S: Yeah.

H: Do you know what services were that the bigger mosques were offering?

S: Um, later on I found out, with the funeral. Um, if everyone passed away where to keep them, they were keeping at there or they had some place available. Things like that we found out later but at the beginning, we didn't ourselves.

H: Were you aware of, um, fact that, um, some mosque, so for example, XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the biggest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], um, had services available. So, for example, um, they were delivering food packages to, to people in the local community or medicine, for example. Are you aware that they were offering these services?

S: No.

H: Yeah. But some of the bigger mosques were.

S: Yeah. Like I said, like, yeah, the smaller mosques around the areas we were living, we didn't know anything.

H: Yeah.

S: And I don't think there was, well, like you said, that XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the biggest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] I didn't know.

H: Yeah. Do you think that the mosques should have communicated this better?

S: Yeah. I think really, they should have.

H: Yeah.

S: Because being a small mosque and being in the area, there are a lot of, um, our communities.

H: **Yeah.**

S: We needed that support.

H: **Yeah.**

S: And like I said, some elderly people are living alone. They didn't have that support of having food deliver to them.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Or even if they're unwell with COVID, there wasn't anyone to provide anything to them.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Yeah. They did have that.

H: **What do you think then mosques and community organizations could do better if we had something similar to this in the future, let's say, what do you think they could do to improve that next time?**

S: I think they; I think they should have more, um, closer links with the community families that are living near those mosques.

H: **Yeah.**

S: And sometime, you know, come out and see them.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Ask them what they need and provide them with like medication or a little package of foods, um, supplies, things like that. Or even come and, um, talk to them just to see how they are.

H: **Yeah.**

S: Just to give them mentally help to them.

H: **Yeah.**

S: So definitely I think they need to be more around the community and try and help more and have bit more service for the people.

H: **Yeah. Can I ask, um, is there a particular mosque that your family go to?**

S: Um, XXXX Road.

H: **Okay. Yeah. But is it the XXXX Mosque [a Mosque in Small Heath]?**

S: Yeah. XXXX.

H: Yeah. Yeah. So, were they, do you know if they were active during those periods?

S: No. As far as I know.

H: Yeah.

S: Um, they weren't really had any service for like funeral and things at that time.

H: Okay.

S: Plus, they weren't given the community like the support of, um, supplying food medication, nothing like that they were.

H: Yeah.

S: Which was a shame.

H: What about, um, the kind of the government response to the whole pandemic? So, if I start with, okay, let's start with the health service. Okay. So, the NHS, would you say that their services or their approach changed within the pandemic? And if so, do you think that had an impact as well on people?

S: Yes.

H: The NHS.

S: Yes, especially when the family members were on one and they were in hospital and the family were not allowed to go to see them.

H: Yeah.

S: It's this kind of really affected a lot of family members because one, you don't know how that family is member is in hospital. And if they're quite serious, some people didn't get to see them and some even lost their family members.

H: Yeah.

S: So that was something I think government really should have, um, given the chance to families to go and see them at least which wasn't nice because some families passed away alone having no one beside them.

H: Yeah. Yeah.

S: Yeah. So that was, yeah, governments could have done something, at least let the families come and see their family members who are really unwell and they didn't make you back. Yes. So yeah, they should have, yeah.

H: You think that was probably one of the things that they should have done. What about kind of your experience with your local GP service? So, you said, for example, your son was unwell with COVID.

S: Yeah.

H: Would you say that, um, your, your GP was good at handling that situation and offering help?

S: No, not really.

H: No.

S: No, no. Um, only thing you could speak to them over the phone, there were just basic.

H: Yeah.

S: There was no help or support.

H: Yeah.

S: And obviously at that time, no one could go, even now hospital and GPs are quite strict with having people going in.

H: Yeah.

S: So, say if you've got parents who are, or have an appointment.

H: Yeah.

S: They don't allow anyone to go with them.

H: No.

S: Which is a shame because not everyone speaks English.

H: Yeah.

S: Or the parents are elderly and they just feel bit scared when they're left alone for the appointment even.

H: Yeah.

S: So that was not helpful, not even from the GPs.

H: Yeah. Do you think that was maybe a little bit worse for Muslim communities or communities where they don't speak English?

S: Yes. Definitely. 'Cause they all – parents who don't speak English, they always have a family member with them.

H: Yeah.

S: And now it's, it's made it a bit difficult for them because they have to go in on their own.

H: Yeah.

S: You're only allowed to take them to the main reception and that's that.

H: So, would you say that, do you feel that it's had a long-lasting impact on the NHS service then the pandemic?

S: Yes, it has. Yeah.

H: Yeah.

S: Yeah. Maybe they need to improve on then. Because it's kind of affected the elder people with, by having family members to go with them.

H: So, what do you think, um, the government could do to improve the situation? Or if we have something similar to this in the future, what do you think needs to be done from, let's start with the government, for example.

S: Mm-hmm.

H: What kind of support do you think they could offer to, to, you know, minority or Muslim communities in future?

S: Maybe, um, having more support and helping the local area.

H: Yeah.

S: Um, obviously with NHS as well.

H: Yeah.

S: You know, you should allow a family to go with the family members who is not well.

H: Yeah.

S: And I think maybe governments need to look into the areas that where the communities are kind of lacking in a lot of situations.

H: Yeah.

S: And they need to give them more support, help.

H: Yeah.

S: And provide them more service of, you know, what they need.

H: Yeah.

S: So definitely in those communities, they need to more helpful.

H: Yeah.

S: And help them more.

H: Yeah. And then in terms of mosques and other religious community-based organizations, what do you think they could do in, in future to improve the situation or to, you know, to address some of the issues that we've had with this pandemic? Do you – what do you think they could do in the future?

S: Um, like I said, they should have like, you know, service where people feel that they can get help from them.

H: Yeah.

S: Not feel like, you know, they've been abandoned, they've been sitting, they've been alone. So even the mosques even the little small mosque; they should keep that time of like, you know, let people know that they're there for them, help them out or even have that thing of, you know, the mosque that they can provide like service for food and things, let them go and bring in if they can. They should have some people to give them.

H: Yeah.

S: Yeah.

H: Um, I know we were, we were kind of talking earlier as well about, um, whether you visit mosque or not for prayers or for any other reason. Um, do you think that mosques need to have a better line of communication with Muslim women specifically?

S: Yes.

H: Yeah.

S: 'Cause, um, for the women service from the mosque, I don't really have any, like, we don't know.

H: Yeah.

S: If we're allowed to go, when we are allowed and, um, as we grow up, now, they say like, ladies are allowed.

H: Yeah.

S: From when we were young, but there's no information given.

H: Yeah.

S: Like what service they have for the lady Muslims women.

H: Yeah.

S: And, um, if they're allowed to go and pray, or if not. So, in a way we need to know about these information.

H: Yeah.

S: And what mosque does allow Muslims to go and what mosque doesn't.

H: Yeah. If, if you were aware that your mosque did have, you know, a specific service for women, particularly, would you access it, do you think?

S: Yes.

H: Yes?

S: Yes. Yeah, I would.

H: Um, okay. And then the, the last set of questions I have here are around vaccines. And again, it's up to you, if you wanna answer this or not. Um, what did you think the vaccine program that was rolled out in the aftermath of the pandemic? What were your, what, what were your general views on it?

S: Uh, my general views was like, obviously so many thoughts came into my mind because you just thought, is it something safe?

H: Yes.

S: Um, no one knew, like, much about it and the way it was made was quite quick. You just didn't feel safe. Myself, I didn't feel comfortable, if I should have the, I was against it. I didn't want it. And then I had family members who were elderly and they were like, maybe we need to have it.

H: Yeah.

S: Because their age group and that. So, um, to be honest, I didn't feel safe with the vaccines. Um, but as time weighed and lot of people did give in, um, and there, well, there was some side effects. Some people said they suffered more after they had the vaccine and things. So, it just made me think like, is it safe? Is this something that will protect us? So many thoughts came in my mind. And then obviously like now a lot of people have given and then I have given in myself.

H: Yeah.

S: So, I'm like, okay, let's see how it goes.

H: So, would you say that the most people in your network, in your family for example, were willing to, to, have it?

S: Yeah. Yeah.

H: Yeah.

S: At first everyone had the discussions of like, no, 'cause of they were thinking it was made quite soon.

H: Yes.

S: Um, we don't know how it will protect us and things like that. But then at the time, as the time went, people who suffered from COVID, they were like, no, we went through the COVID and it was something like that was really hard and that, so they, what they too have.

H: Yeah.

S: More of my family, elderly people they had. So, yeah.

H: Right. That is the end of the question. Is there anything else that you wanted to add?

S: No, that's all.

Interview 26

Date: 22/08/2022

Duration: 56:46

Participant characteristics: female, organisational role/lead

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

I: Hi XXXXXXXX, are you okay?

R: Hi. All right, thank you [clears throat].

I: Thanks for agreeing to take part in this interview.

R: It's fine, it's no problem.

I: Okay. Right, so, erm, XXXXX, I'm not sure, did you get a copy of the participant information sheet, which the project is about and what the, the overarching aims and objectives are of this project? I can tell you any- I'll give you an overview of what the project is looking at. So, erm, what we're aiming to do is, erm, kind of, explore the impact of COVID-19 on Muslim minority communities across Birmingham. Erm, the aim of these interviews that we're doing is to gauge the experiences of female Muslims, particularly, living across Birmingham, which is where my role, kind of, comes in. Erm, so I'll ask you a series of questions, erm, which are based on, primarily on the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns as well that we had from 2022 onwards.

Erm, if there are any questions that you're unsure of or that you don't wish to answer, then obviously we can just move on to the next question. So, just let me know if there's something that you feel that you can't answer or don't want to answer, okay?

R: Okay.

I: Erm, I'll also give you at some point, or Damian will email you a consent form as well, just indicating that you're happy, erm, to be taking part in the research, erm, that your involvement is confidential and that your name will also be anonymised as well in any publications. Okay? So, erm, there won't be any issues with you being identified, for example, in the research, okay? Right, do you have any questions before we start?

R: Erm, did you mention about the imp- the impact on the community post-lockdown as well?

I: Yes. So, kind of both.

R: Okay.

I: Yeah, I mean, it will be a mix of questions, but when we start, I think you'll kind of get the idea.

R: Okay.

I: Yeah.

R: Yeah, that's fine.

I: So, going back to the beginning of the pandemic, what do you think have been, erm, kind of, the main impacts for you personally? So, if you think back to March 2020 when we had that first lockdown, from that point onwards, what would you say were the, kind of, the initial impacts that you felt?

R: I think that lack of contact with people. Erm, I, I moved from one job to the other through lockdown. Being interviewed online and working with the team for almost more than a year online it was difficult to build relationships with people. Erm, especially when it's online, it's, it's very difficult in terms of, er, having those personal relationships with, er, people. Usually, I don't have any of those issues, erm, but it was, it, it was at a point where I was thinking, I really would love to meet these people that I get on so well with online, and I think in that sense it was, erm, erm, quite nice to eventually see them. Erm, missing on family, erm, contact. I've also had my father who passed away from COVID as well, erm, that had a great impact on us, because we weren't able to grieve together as family. Erm, and it was just really odd that, you know, my sister came from Manchester, my brother came from London, they had to check in at a hotel, erm, and we weren't able to see each other and, erm, be there for one another. So, that had a great impact on, on us and how we grieved the whole process.

Erm, in terms of my personal, er, situation with my family, in a way, erm, before my father passed away, it was... I saw it as a blessing, because I'd lived a very busy life and still do. We have a very active social life as a family. I needed that time with, with, with them and I managed to get it as well, erm, and we managed to do quite a few things just in the house, which was quite nice.

I: Sorry to hear about your father passing away. Erm, can I ask when that was? Was it, was it in 2020?

R: Yeah.

I: Beginning of the pandemic, yeah.

R: Yeah, so it was, er, in December 2020.

I: So, how did that, kind of, impact on your wellbeing, and, you know, were there any, kind of, support mechanisms that you had in place to help? Because you said that you felt quite isolated, obviously, in terms of your grieving.

R: Yeah.

I: Erm, what, kind of, helped you through that process?

R: I think it was just with family and meeting up with each other on- online, erm, that's all we had. Erm, and I think, erm, it, it made... when, when, when we see what, what the government and the people in the government were up to while we were grieving, while we were separated, we weren't able to see our own, erm, er, loved ones, and even give them a proper send-off then they were partying and that kind of hurt. That really hurt, that we were going through all of this and this is what they were up to, and what a joke that is. Oh, you know... I think it, it, it did kind of... I think it was a case with a lot of people, we felt quite hurt. We were going through all this difficulty because we weren't able to see each other, our, you know, key figure in the family has passed away. I think it had a great impact later on that, you know, you know, what are they playing at? You know, are they really taking it seriously, or what? And it was quite upsetting to see that we were imposed with lots of restrictions, whereas they were lying through their teeth to kind of protect themselves, but in fact, they were making a mockery out of what we were going through.

I: Yeah, yeah. So, are you talking about, erm, some of the revelations that came out a few months ago where we found out that some of the politicians were still meeting in person and having parties etc.?

R: Mm.

I: But you're saying, kind of, now, when we found out that these revelations came out about politicians and, kind of, members very high up in government meeting up and having parties, that it had another impact on you at that point.

R: Yeah, it did.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: It did.

I: Erm, what were some of the other, kind of, impacts on you? So, you, erm, I will come back, if it's okay, to, erm, your, erm, father in, in, in a, erm, a few moments. But, erm, just picking up on the initial thing that you said as well about your job. So, you said that you changed job during, erm, the beginning of the pandemic.

R: Yeah.

I: So, erm, the, the job that you did previously, was it in a similar field to this one, for example, and the what was that change like for you, like you said, in the middle of the pandemic, and how did you adjust to a different way of working?

R: I think we were coming up with creative ways to, erm, er, compensate for that lack of physical contact. So, we were having online games and I remember around Christmas time, erm, we had, erm, er, activity set was, that was sent to us that we were doing at home, but everything was online. And so in a way, we were trying to make up for it, er, by doing that. And it was, er, an enjoyable day at the end of the day, but I think, erm, at the, at the end of, other end of the computer, basically. So, I think in that sense, erm, it had, erm, we were trying to make up for it but it was nice at times, but at other times you'd think, you know what, if, if we had, if we were there in person, we'd be having a cup of tea together, aside from the meeting, you would be having a chat and, erm, catching up with others, "Oh, I haven't seen you for a while," and that kind of stuff, and we weren't able to do that. But I think it was, erm, something that we made, we felt that we're not the only ones going through it. There were other people who were going through the same thing. Erm, so that was, a, a kind of, a consolation, that we're all going through it, we're all in it together, so, you know, we've just got to get through this.

I: Yes. So, your role now, is it the XXXX XXXX Forum [a multi-faith organisation] that you work for?

R: Yeah.

I: Erm, how did it impact on, erm, that organisation as well? So, if you just, kind of, take me through how it impacted on the organisation then, and, and what it's like now as well, on the XXXX XXXX Forum [a multi-faith organisation] and your work there.

R: Erm, it felt as if, erm, a lot of us were in the same boat, because whoever I was speaking to, they were saying, well, we're just trying to adjust. So, erm, we, we, we've, we, we've never experienced this before, so we're trying to, kind of, erm, er, work our way around. And I'm thinking, yes, so are others. So, everybody's in the same boat, so we need to give people a bit of that time to kind of adjust, erm, to this way of doing things. Even though it was temporarily, but the fact that ev- people are, were adamant to get on with it or to carry on as much as they could, erm, erm, I think it was quite credible in that sense. We had to run a project where we, er, initially would have met people face-to-face to build up relationships with people, and these were commu- community

dialogue, erm, programmes that we were running, erm, and with those community dialogues, you need, you know, for people to build up relationships, you, you need to have that level of informality as well. We couldn't have that informality because everything was online, erm, and you couldn't, people couldn't get to know each other outside being online. So, it was quite limited in that sense, but we were adamant that we just get on with it. This is the timeframe we've been given for this project, we've got to complete it.

So, erm, we, we went ahead with it. It had its advantages as well, because there were people who were from a, a mental health charity who felt as if they couldn't speak to, er, people, so many people at, in one go, it would affect their thinking and their processing. But it worked well for them, because when one person is speaking at a time, then they could listen, hear them, and then when they were speaking, they felt heard as well. So, in that sense, it had a, erm, positive impact on some people, while in the overall, erm, picture of what we were trying to achieve, we, we got through it, but we could have done it even better if it was face-to-face. But it would have been hard work for us who were running the project because of the travelling that would have been involved. Erm, so we weren't, you know, we were doing everything online, otherwise we would have been traveling 15 miles per pr- per session and back and forth and arranging the teas, coffees and everything else. But we weren't doing any of that, but we were just ar- sharing screen and kind of putting people in breakout rooms, which is a lot eas- easier in, in that sense, if you think about it. So, I think, erm, in that sense, I think it worked. It had its pros and cons, but we tried to make up for it as much as we could.

I: Yeah. And what about now? It, do you still, kind of, operate in the same way, or has, has it reverted back to face-to-face interaction?

R: Well, we've got a bit of both, because sometimes, in a way, I think we've got a bit lazy as well, that, if you feel that, oh, I can't come, then, erm, can you do it online instead? So, erm, I, I've had to do that a couple of times, but especially when it involves travelling quite far to London. So, sometimes when we have meetings, team meetings, erm, they'd be online, but when you're actually physically going in, it takes a whole day, whereas when it's online, it'll probably take about hours and you're over and done with. No traveling involved, you're saving on the cost of travelling as well. So, erm, but now when we're actually seeing each other, I, I, I like that face-to-face contact. I also like the, erm, travelling as well, because it just breaks up your normal routine of working from your office every day. So, erm, in fact I look forward to meeting them in person in the office. So we're, were meant to go into the office once a month, and I look forward to seeing the rest of the team and, erm, getting to know them well and, yeah.

I: Yeah. So, you like the hybrid way of working now.

R: Yeah. A bit of both, yeah. Yeah.

I: Yeah, yeah, okay. So, just, kind of, relating to the work that you do at The XXXX XXXX Forum [a multi-faith organisation], erm, how do you think it impacted on your service users and your clients? Do you think it had much of an impact? So, if you look at the, kind of, wider Muslim community and then kind of focussing on the people that use your service or that contact you, erm, do you think it, the, the pandemic had an impact on them as well? And what kind of impact do you think it had on the wider Muslim community?

R: Erm, the pandemic then and now. So, our service users are people of a, of diverse faith background, especially for the XXXX XXXX Forum [a multi-faith organisation]. Erm, so, I just feel sometimes you, you have certain events that you see people face-to-face and you're able to network with them, erm, and, and that's something that we weren't able to do as much, but when we're talking about the Muslim community in particular – so that would be in general, because when our... with the XXXX XXXX Forum [a multi-faith organisation], I work with people of different faiths anyway, but I think it's more in terms of when you're referring to the Muslim community, we weren't able to do Ramadan, pray in the mosque or even Eid prayers. Erm, we weren't a- able to do them, erm, out in the open or in the mosque or anywhere, erm, and it did get to stage where one of the days we thought, well, we don't have to go out, er, when our... post-pandemic. We don't

have to go out and pray in the, erm, mosque, in the mosque or in the open space, but let's just do some at home, do it at home. And I think my husband was a bit conscious about still being out, because, erm, of, of the risk of COVID, because it still hadn't gone, but, erm, let's do it at home. So, we did do it at home, erm, after Ramadan.

So, I think it's, you know, with- within families, you know, there's one person who gets it and then everyone else is, kind of, getting it. And I suppose because we live in, erm, extended families, it has an impact on, erm, on, on that, because obviously you're sharing the same house and you're just, kind of... But then I suppose it's not just the Muslim community, it's other communities as well. Erm, but yeah, so I think in terms of prayers and, erm, er, meeting up with people, we weren't able to invite people over and, erm, meet as socially as we would have liked.

I: Yeah, yeah, so it had an impact on the social side of things, on the way that you practice your faith as well.

R: Yeah, and it just made us realise how practical the faith is. And sometimes we are so used to doing things in a particular way, but Islam's really flexible and we need to, kind of, appreciate the flexibility and not be so rigid in the practice of it either.

I: Yeah, yeah, are you, erm, affiliated with any local mosque?

R: Erm, well, yeah, I'm more affiliated to XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate]. At one point, I just felt it didn't represent me, erm, and so I drifted away. But, erm, I'm slowly trying to get back into, erm, being a bit more involved with it as, erm... They're trying to recruit a couple of women on their, erm, board, and so they've asked me if I, I could, erm, be part of it. So, this is where I thought, okay, if you're asking me, then I will become a member, erm, but I think, erm, erm, it's, it's a matter of being a bit patient with them at the moment, erm, because it's often men, led by men, and men do it their way and you... they're so, kind of, their thinking is, it is so, kind of, limit- [laughter] limited. They don't ca- they, they, they can't... as men, I suppose they can't see from the other people's perspectives, and sometimes, when women give a different point of view it's like an eye-opener for them, or whether they, they wanna listen. I think it's all of that kind of thing that we're looking at. Erm, kind of, helping to change. So, this is where I'm trying to get more involved with the, the XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate].

I: Yeah. Is that what you mean when you that they, you feel that they don't represent you w- they don't have enough female representation in...?

R: Yeah. More the female representation, and sometimes when they make decisions, they don't think about women, because they think w- in the way men think. But you know, when you're excluding 50 per cent of the population, then you're bound to get things wrong and miss things out that are so important. So, yeah, so I'll see how it goes, but yes, I am, at the moment, affiliated to the XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate].

I: During, erm, the pandemic, are you aware of, any, kind of, help or support or services that XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] were running to help people through the pandemic?

R: I think they were. I found out later when, erm... actually, it was [the Principal Investigator] who made contact initially, and then when I spoke to the Imam, he said, yes... The, the Imam himself was involved in the, er, as a chaplain in the hospitals as well. So, I think a lot of these, erm, connections and that support were referred to the Imam, erm, and yes they were. I think they were, yeah.

I: Okay. Did you use any of those support services that they had in place?

R: No, not really.

I: No. Is there any particular reason? Is it that you felt that you didn't need it, or...?

R: Yeah, I just felt we didn't really need it. We've got a couple of doctors in the family. If we needed any kind of support, they'd just kind of let us know anyway. But I know that when my father passed away, it was the same Imam who came and said the prayers ov- erm, with us, when he passed away at the hospital.

I: Erm, kind of, just, just focussing a little bit more on that as well, erm, obviously, if you're okay to talk about it. Erm, what were, erm, the funeral arrangements like after your father passed away? So, burial and some of those rituals, the, the kind of Islamic rituals that we have around funeral and, and burials? Was that impacted by COVID-19?

R: Definitely, definitely, we couldn't have as many people, erm, join us in the prayer. Er, there was limited capacity... not capacity at the mosque, but it was more... limitations were imposed on, on that anyway in terms of the burial. We couldn't have more than 30. We had to put a list together of how many people, who's attending. So, I think for the cemetery to know that there is a limit as to how many people can come together. Erm, so yes, it was, and even for the prayer, you know, we had to write down details of, and contact details before entering the mosque for the prayers. So, erm, erm, yeah, it, it did, it did. It had an impact, and I think people were really conscious of I- large gatherings as well, which, erm, rightfully so, especially indoors, but yeah. And I think that it w- following the lim- not limita- guidelines that were put in place for us, erm, put a cap on how many people could be part of it, and because of that, not everybody felt involved. So, we had, erm, a Zoom connection where people could actually, erm, watch the funeral, you know, and watch the, erm, prayers being done and that, and that kind of stuff. So, we did extend that. And sometimes I think it was only... and Zoom itself had a capacity of 100 and there were people who were, they were more than 100 who wanted to observe and in a way electronically partake in the funeral. Erm, so we tried to compensate for it, but it wasn't the same.

I: Who, can I ask who facilitated the, the Zoom? Was that the mosque, or was that your, you as a family that...?

R: We did it as a family.

I: Okay. Okay, do you think that the mosque, kind of, did provide you with additional support, or people working within the mosque during the funeral? Did you feel supported by the mosque, or...?

R: I don't think so, because they were just following guidelines, erm, and at one point the, the burial... Sorry, not the burial, the, the, the sh- the wash that they give the body, even there, there were limitations as to how many people could... So, they were just telling us how many people were allowed for what aspect of the, erm, the funeral, and we were just following those guidelines.

I: Okay. Okay, so, erm, the next set of questions I'm gonna focus on, it, it, it does again, I suppose, relate, erm, to your, to your family and, and to your father probably particularly. Erm, so, so obviously COVID did have an impact on your family directly, erm, because you said your father was impacted by it. So, erm, he obviously had contracted it and then you said he was hospitalised. Erm, kind of, what was that like for you as a family, and then did other family members as well contract it, kind of, you wanna... if you can talk through that process with me?

R: Erm, erm, as a family, we were being very cautious about the whole thing, so we hadn't seen our dad for a while. Erm, but then my brother sent us a message, erm, to say that, erm, dad's tested positive for COVID, erm, and we were obviously really worried, erm, so we kept ringing him every day, just to check up on him. So, erm, it got to a, a stage where he was saying, well, no, no, don't, don't worry about calling me, I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm getting better, I'm getting better, and then all of a sudden my brother sent a message saying, erm, dad's not well, he's having breathing issues. So, he, erm, went to, erm, where dad, to his, to his house and erm, he said I've called the ambulance and he's been admitted into hospital. So, before we knew it, erm, he was in hospital for

24 hours and then we get a call from the, erm, er, the doctor saying, "Well, if anybody wants to come in. It's not looking good. He's on the maximum dose for, for oxygen and he's not responding well for it. So, just, you know, two people can come in and be with him." And within 24 hours he was just, you know, in hospital and he was gone.

I: I'm sorry.

R: Erm, so, yeah, so I think in that sense [clears throat], it was quite difficult. Erm, but I've forgotten your question.

I: That was the question, kind of, how it happened and what that impact, you know, the impact obviously on your family, 'cause obviously it happened very quickly for you. Erm...

R: Yeah, it was, it was quite a shock, because he's quite an active person, and, you know, he'd often ride his bike from one place to the other, and then just to see him within a space of five days, erm, just pass away, it was just a bit of a shock to the system. So, at the time when we didn't know he had COVID and that's when, erm, erm, he visited, er, my brother... I think, yeah, he, he visit- I think you could have a gathering of six people or something like that, and then he went to visit him, and then he was saying, he told my fa- my brother that, "I'm not feeling too well." He said, "Oh, just get a COVID test done." So, eh got, he went and had the test done and got found out in two days that he had it. So, but during that time that he visited my brother, my nephew bought a house, so he really wanted to see the house. Erm, so he went to see it and during that time that he was in the car with him, my nephew got, erm, COVID as well. So, erm, so he had it, erm, and I think other than that, I don't think anybody else got COVID, 'cause dad lived in a separate, erm, a different house.

I: Yeah. I'm really sorry about that. I didn't wanna focus too much on it, erm, but I just, kind of, wanted to know what the impacts were. Erm, did you feel that you were supported by the hospital staff and the NHS as a whole, going through that process. Like you said, there were limits in place in terms of the number of, of people that could visit him at that point. Erm, but did you feel, kind of, supported by hospital staff?

R: I think so. I think they, they, they did what they could under the circumstances. You can clearly tell that they were under a lot of strain and a lot of, erm, pressure, because some of the, the staff themselves were getting it, people were dying from it. So, in that sense, the fact that they allowed us and they called us saying two people can come... erm, they were trying to, they were just trying to follow the rules that... I know that when my, my father was deteriorating, my other brother wanted to come and see him, see him and we asked whether he could come, so that would have been three of us. They said, "No, the limits are only two people." Erm, so in that sense, erm, he couldn't come, but we could only communicate through WhatsApp messages at the time. But they were really considerate and even the, erm, staff and the way they informed us, they were absolutely amazing, erm, considering what they were going through themselves as well. I don't think I have anything to complain against them.

I: Yeah. Okay, so just focussing a little bit more, because obviously we're talking about the NHS, erm, so apart from, you know, erm, the experience with, with your father, erm, how do you think the NHS responded as a whole during the COVID-19 pandemic?

R: I think they were absolutely amazing. Despite having, erm, people who were, who are in the, erm, medical profession within my own family – my husband's a doctor – and knowing the kind of strains that they were going through and the, the difficulties of seeing patients, erm, and trying to work around all of this, and how the adjustment kind of had an impact on everybody, erm, but, you know, to see them... the way they supported people, erm, I think they were... I, I, I can't complain a- a- against them at all. They, they had their own, you know, consultants and doctors die from this disease, giving their life to save people. Erm, I just felt that, erm... the, erm, the government... again, it comes down to the government with the way they, they behave and even how you go out and clap for them every Thursday and then you're not even giving them a pay rise. That's, that's a shocking way of treating other people that they sacrificed their lives. They put their, their, erm, erm,

families in danger, missed out in that family life to save people, but this is how you treat them at the end of the day. I think that's, that, erm, that's, that's; the sad side to it, I suppose.

I: The government response. Yeah. You said that your husband's a doctor. So, you kind of have an insider view, I, I suppose, of what it was like for somebody who works for the NHS. What were... I mean, obviously, you know, he's your partner, so you would know this quite well – what do you feel were the, kind of, main impacts on him, you know, kind of, professionally, erm, during the pandemic?

R: Erm, I think he was seeing the worst side of things. So he was, he's one of those who's extra cautious anyway, and then he's in touch with one of his friends who's a consultant in one of the hospitals, erm, and how he would say, "Look," you know, "things are pretty bad." So, he had an in-depth knowledge and understanding of what was going on, and e- e- even in being in touch with his friends, friends saying that, erm, er, this is what's happening. We're, we're not hearing all of this, but things are really bad out there; much worse than they're made out to be. Erm, and when we tried to, er, follow the restrictions and the guidelines at home, he would be extra careful about everything. Erm, especially in my family, because I've got my, my children who were in line with his thinking and I just felt that sometimes there's discrepancies, especially in term of, erm, you know, when you're wearing a mask. You know, there's, erm, d- discrepancies in the guidelines in certain ways afterwards as well. That you can meet in a mosque, but you can't meet here, you can do this here, but you can't do this there. So, it was just, like, quite confusing for people.

So, even when my father passed away, my husband in- insisted that I do not go to the funeral, even though I was wearing a mask and I was in the full PPE, he was, he insisted I don't, and I tested negative anyway; erm, 'cause I was one of the two people who were with him when he passed away. Erm, but he was adamant I, I don't go, because I've had a prolonged contact with him, just in case I get it later on. And then the, for the family to kind of see that side and the restriction, then, erm and then he would tell the rest of the extended family, you know, you don't do this, don't, don't, this is not right. Erm, if they did, you know, follow any of the, the rules or whatever, because people were doing it in... you know, there was a limit as to how much they could kind of do, and sometimes when things you, you do one side, but in another way... it's the uncertainty, not knowing when, erm, to follow guidelines, you know, washing hands, this and that, it, it became quite confusing. So, this is when I, kind of, said to him later on that, you know what, when, when my dad was in hospital, the nurses who were looking after him, they're in prolonged contact with him. When, when I asked the nurses, "When, when you go out, do you, erm, erm, erm, go back to your families?" and some of them would say yes. And I said, "So, when you go out of the hospital, are you trying to avoid contact with other people?" And they said, it, you know, in response they were saying, "Well, not really". So, in a... and I was thinking, so, if I go home from now, do I, erm, er, er, do I, erm, isolate myself? And they didn't know what to say, because there were certain things that, you know, were being done and, you know, I said, "Look, I'm in full PPE, can I go and see my family?" They, they didn't have a proper answer, basically. Isolate yourself or what.

So, I think in that sense, it wa- it did have ,erm, lead to a couple of disagreements in the family, when my husband was trying to follow one thing and I'm thinking, well, there's lots of discrepancies in the rules here, so how far do you go?

I: Yeah. Erm, what is your view on the government's approach during the pandemic post-lockdown as well? In light of obviously what we know now about these parties etc that were going on, erm, kind of, what do you think as a whole of the government's approach?

R: Yeah. I, I, I, I, I think it was a bit of a joke, because you're imposing restrictions on other people, but you're not doing it yourself. Erm, there's other people who are kind of grassing on each other, and he goes, one of them goes all the way up north when knowing he's tested positive. So, what kind of guidelines are you giving? And I think that really rubbed people up the wrong way. So, erm, and if you are picking up... pointing the finger at such and such, what about the fingers that are being pointed at you. So, I think in that sense, it was... I, I did feel it was a bit of a joke. And even to impose the restrictions, they, it they took a time, their time I think, er, erm, to put these

restrictions in place. The could have even out ma- a- asked people to wear masks in public places, erm, er, much earlier on, and it wouldn't have spread as much as it w- it, it did in the end, erm, and I, I, it felt as if they didn't really know what they're doing. And then when they get the, erm, vaccinations, oh, they're bragging about, you know, we're the first few to get the vaccinations and we, we really did well in that. And you think, well, what about the rest? You, how they, erm, even the PPE wasn't in on time and the, er, erm, the, the order from elsewhere that were wasted that weren't up to the regulations and the standards that were expected from them, and they were clearly trying to take benefit from it for their own chums, if you like, who can, who they were, er, getting these so-called contracts in from so that they could buy equipment and things from. Erm, it was, it was shambles. Real shambles.

I: Yeah. What about the vaccine programme? What are your, kind of, views on, on the roll out of that? Do you think that was a, a success, the way that that was implemented?

R: I think so. I think the way that the NHS took hold of it, vaccinated people within the, the short space of time that they were given, erm, it, it was amazing. I think they were, erm, there was a place in Birmingham that they had, erm, put aside for extra, erm, patients during the pandemic to be treated, and, and erm, and they wasted millions of pounds on it and it didn't even get used in the end. And I think it was somewhere near the NEC, because they didn't even have any doctors there. Erm, so, which was just shocking, that you're just wasting money like anything, but yet, erm, the NHS, when it came to it, they delivered really well, considering they weren't being guided well by the government.

I: Yeah. Yeah, so you think that the NHS were the ones that were responsible for the successful rollout, as opposed to the government?

R: Yeah. Yeah.

I: Erm, this one's a little bit more personal, where the vaccine's concerned. Erm, kind of, what were your personal views on the vaccine. Do you look favourably on the vaccination programme? So, was it something, for example, that you and your family had taken the doses?

R: Yeah, we did.

I: Erm, there were a lot of, kind of, stories in not just the media, I suppose, this was something that was very popular on social media, so WhatsApp, for example. A lot of misinformation obviously being distributed, a lot of scepticism around the vaccines. Did, did you, is that something that you witnessed, this kind of scepticism within the Muslim community around vaccines?

R: Erm, yeah, I did, in the Muslim community, but, I, I, I saw that in oth- all in the other communities as well. So, it wasn't just the Muslim community. Er, but I, I think, erm, when it did co- I did encounter it, we'd just say, look, you know, we would advise them to get vaccinated, erm, and that... I know that in one or two cases when people were told, er, not to get you- themselves vaccinated, erm, one person wasn't vaccinated, she got COVID and she was saying, well, can I get it now? Erm, get the va- get myself vaccinated now? Erm, she was advised that, look, it's a bit late for you now, but sh- a couple of days later, she passed away from it as well. So, I think it was, erm, erm, there's a lot of... there was a lot of misinformation about it. Erm, but at the end of the, say you know when you have that mistrust in the government and all these people in power, then you can understand people's concerns that they have. But at the end of the day, when the, the companies are, erm, who are making this, erm, medication, the Pfizer and the other, erm... Astra Zeneca and these companies, they have trialled it, but the only co- the, the worry is, that we've not seen the long-term, long-term impact this would have on other people. Okay, we're, we're, we're rushing into getting it, but have we looked into the long- long-term impact?

So, I think in that sense, it does worry you, erm, but you've just got to trust what the, erm, the, the drugs companies are offering. So, we went along with it, erm, and we, erm, erm, all, all my

children, all my, my, all of us are fully vaccinated, even the booster jab we've had done, erm, and we'd always encourage other people. But sometimes when they do bring up the fact that, you know, they don't trust it, we respect it, but at the same time we, we would encourage them to get, get themselves vaccinated.

I: Yeah, yeah. Erm, I'm gonna kind of go a little bit backwards now with, with the next set of questions. Erm, so we talked a-

R: By the way, it will finish at ten o'clock? I've got another meeting...

I: Eleven, yes.

R: Sorry, eleven.

I: Yeah, yeah, it will. Okay, erm, we don't have that many questions left anyway, okay? Erm, so we, we did talk a little bit about, erm, the mosque, and whether they had any, kind of, support mechanisms in place. Are you aware of any, erm, kind of, community organisations – Muslim ones specifically – erm, that offered support during the pandemic to, to the wider community?

R: Oh, yeah, there were quite a few mosques.

I: Okay. Do you... kind of, which one...?

R: Yeah. There, so there was the XXXX Road Mosque [a Mosque in Balsall Heath], erm, in, er, erm, Birmingham, there's also XXXX XXXX Trust [the Islamic Trust Organisation] who offered that support. Erm, XXXX Road Mosque [Mosque in Balsall Heath] was one of the first mosques, or, erm, a religious institution that offered vaccination on its site. So, they were there, erm, the first ones to, to, to help deliver vaccinations to the community, erm, and then there were guidelines in the mosques as well. There's, there was, there's XXXX Trust [the Islamic Trust Organisation] who would constantly, kind of, update the people and because they had that online communication, erm, er, method of keeping people informed, they would update the people. And the authorities, they were in regular contact with the different faith communities as well, erm, giving them the latest guidelines on, erm, what should be implemented in places of worship.

I: Yeah. Did you, kind of, up- uptake any of those services that were available through some of these organisations?

R: I personally didn't, erm, but if I needed, I would have needed it, I would have, definitely. I think e- even the vaccination, I can't remember where I got it from. Maybe from the local surgery. If needed, I would have gone, erm, to the, the mosque to get myself vaccinated.

I: Erm, besides from, erm, vaccines, do you know if any of these organisations were providing, erm, I think, like, I think some of them were providing food packages...

R: Oh, yeah.

I: Yeah, delivery medicine etc. to people that are more vulnerable in the community.

R: Yeah.

I: Did some of the organisations do that as well?

R: Yeah. That's, that's something that, kind of, gives a warm glow in your heart because these places of worship, they actually collaborated with each other. So, there was church and the mosques and the... erm, I think synagogues as well, I'm not sure. But obviously, I think they were all doing their own thing, which was so nice to see. At one point, erm, the, the food ran out in a Church and they did a callout saying, kind of, erm, we've run out of food, but there's still people

who need the service. If you've got any food, do let us know. And the local Mosque, erm, took their items and they gave it to the, erm, the Mosque, er, the, the church. So, it was really nice to see those services that were being given, erm, offered to people. A couple of times, people, they were really, erm, stories of people not having seen a, another person for a while and, erm, quite lonely in that sense. And sometimes when they'd deliver those food packages, they'd stand at a distance and give them a bit of a chance and they'd, to talk to each other as well. So, I think that, that was there, which was really nice to see.

I: Yeah. And do you think it was ,kind of, well-promoted? So, do you think that people within the community were aware that these services were kind of available to them?

R: I think they were. And I think it did get to a point when the lockdown restrictions were slightly lifted, erm, they, the mosque was saying that there's not much of an uptake, erm, and it, it just clearly showing that, you know, people are okay now and they're able to, erm, go out and, kind of, erm, er, get things themselves. It was, it was more the vulnerable, erm, and those people who were isolated at home, one or two people who were... you know, people who were living on their own who needed that service, erm, and came in that vulnerable category and were not physically able to go and do things for themselves.

I: Yeah. Erm, XXXXX the last, kind of, set of questions. Erm, what do you feel, erm, the government could do in future, if we were to have a similar sort of situation to this? What do you think the government, you know, how do you think they could improve their response to a, a future scenario like this? What do you think they could do better?

R: I think for a start, they could take the whole thing quite, much more seriously. Initially, they didn't take it as seriously. Erm, and then be better prepared. They were not prepared, even though they were advised to get things in place because COVID is gonna hit the, the, the country, but they were not prepared. For them to take advice on board of professionals. Erm, another one would be to consult the professionals, especially in the healthcare system. Erm, often that consultations wasn't there, erm, erm, and they were kind of, had their own little chums that they were kind of seeking advice from, and then, erm, parting that to the community. Whereas the NHS or the professionals were thinking, no, but you need to do this. This is what we're having to face on the ground. And often, they didn't have a clue what was going on on the ground because they weren't... or not on, still are not in touch with what's happening. Erm, so I think e- even take precautions at an early a- earlier stage, erm, to avoid all of that. The messaging was all there, erm, but for them to follow it themselves as well. Lead by example.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R: And I think looking after the N- NHS workers was also very crucial, because there were cases of nurses, you know, who weren't able to buy, er, food because they were working during the day and the, in the shops, supermarkets, the food had run out. So, I think that support should have come from the government to look after the staff as well, and to show they appreciate, their appreciation. What would clap do for them?

I: Yeah. Okay, the other thing I wanted to, kind of, erm, touch on as well before we finish was, erm, if you, kind of, look at the statistics, erm, around death in transmission, erm, COVID did have a disproportionate impact on black and ethnic minority communities. Do you think that there's anything they could do or could have done to, kind of, better support people from black and ethnic minority communities?

R: Who, who could have supported them, sorry?

I: Erm, community and faith-based organisations. Do you think that they could have done more to, to support black and ethnic minority communities?

R: Erm...

I: Or do you think it's a more a, kind of, responsibility of the government?

R: I think, erm, often faith communities are marginalised by the government. When it comes to the core of, er, looking out for people, that care and attention people need, the faith communities are the ones that, s- erm, come to the fore to support that, but they don't brag about it, and this is one thing I've learnt, that often they do it because they feel that it's their duty as a believer to actually do that. So, I'm even, I'm talking about people of all faith here. So, erm, and so you're talking about... so death in transmission, from the faith communities, whether they could have guided them a b- a bit more?

I: Yeah. So, like, local community organisations, do you think there's anything they could have done to support the local communities better?

R: I can't think of anything else they could have done. Even the people came together as well. There was a local, erm... the food banks and there's, erm, like, er, groups that were set up to support people as well, erm, as well. I think it was people who stood out, who shone out from all of this at the end of the day, because humanity came, erm, to the fore, erm, and where people felt, okay, I'm not working, I'm on, I'm, I've been furloughed, I've got time, I can do this, this and this. So, I can't think of anything that they could have done more.

I: Erm, and XXXX, I should have asked this question, kind of, closer to the beginning, but I can... We've got a few minutes, I'll ask you. Do you think it had any disproportionate impact on women, the COVID-19 impact? Because of, for example, increased caring responsibilities, home-schooling children, erm, you know, do you think there was a greater burden of, kind of, care of duty and responsibility on women specifically during the pandemic?

R: Yeah. Because you'd, you'd normally send your children to school, and the children are not at school, they're at home. Erm, and then how does it affect their job or work that they're doing? So it had a great deal of impact on them. Erm, so I think in that sense, erm, yes, definitely. And I think, and even domestic violence was more on the increase as well, erm, due to them being in that confined space, erm, with their partners or their husbands or, erm, you know, who- whoever they are with, erm, so it did have a great deal of impact. And if a woman got COVID then how, who would be looking after the children during that time? Hopefully, in good situations then the husbands and the pa- partners would do that, but, you know, in, in situations where they don't have that, how, how do they manage?

I: Yeah. What about you personally? So, you said you, you've got children. Do you have any, do you have any school-age children that were impacted by schools being shut down, for example, or home learning?

R: Yeah. My, my children, they couldn't do their GCSEs, they couldn't do their A Levels. Erm, but when they did get COVID, then, erm, you've got to look after them, because we confined them to their room, they couldn't go, come out and then, erm, they'd use certain bathrooms and, erm, and that kind of stuff. So, you're just keeping a, more of an eye on them as well, because they're not able to come out of their room. So, they're is- isolating in their own room, so it does have an impact. But I think we shared the whole, erm, erm, burden, if you want, or the work that was involved in looking after each other. A couple of times we cooked for, for people who needed that, erm, extra support in terms of food or whatever and my children would be the ones who helped cook the food, and we distributed it in the neighbourhood as well. And we prioritised those people who were on their own, on, on their own mainly, because... just to let them know that we're thinking about them.

I: Yeah. Okay, so it didn't, kind of, all fall on you, that, kind of, duty.

R: No, it didn't no. In, in my, in my household, no.

I: Yeah. Okay. Right, is there, is there anything else that you wanna, kind of, say or comment on before we end?

R: Erm, no, I can't think of anything else.

I: Okay. Okay

Interview 27

Date: 24/08/2022

Duration: 16:56

Participant characteristics: female, community member

Key:

H = Interviewer

M = Respondent

s.l. = sounds like

H: Okay, I've just started recording our research interview. So firstly, thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. Erm, I've already given you an overview of what, erm, this research involves. So, we're looking at the impact of COVID-19 on Muslim minority communities across Birmingham, okay?

M: Okay.

H: So, erm, I'm gonna just start by asking you, erm, a very kind of generic question to start with. So, if you think back to the beginning of the pandemic, so, March 2020, which is just over two years ago now, what would you say kind of some of the main, the initial impacts were for you when, when that first lockdown started?

M: Erm, I think mostly just like feeling isolated from like friends and stuff like I can't go see anyone.

H: Yes.

M: And it just have to be only negative impact or can it be a positive one too? [Laughter].

H: No, it can be positive 'cause obviously everyone's experiences are different. So yeah, you can, you know, say whatever you feel.

M: Okay, erm, yeah, not seeing people. I think the shopping thing was really, like really bizarre to me. Like when you go to shops and there's nothing there on the aisles or like people just like when you see the people fill up trollies and just bulking up, like, it just felt like it was erm, like an apocalypse or something [laughter]. It was really weird and erm, I think something that was good was that it was so easy to get into places because the roads were just clear but it did also feel weird at the same time. Like there was just no one on the roads.

H: Yeah.

M: Erm, it was not too bad I think 'cause we have good neighbours and erm, it was nice because like, even though we didn't really meet but we have like...we have this door in

our garden where they can see in and we can have a chat and stuff. So it was not too bad.

H: Yeah. Yeah. So, of those experiences that you've, erm, just kind of listed, erm, would you say that any of those impacts were probably more severe for certain people in the community? So, do you think that some people might have experienced it a bit more negatively?

M: Erm, yeah, definitely. Erm, like I've talked to friends and stuff who probably didn't have the same experience I did and they didn't really like it much. And a lot of people obviously weren't happy at all.

H: Yeah.

M: In the beginning.

H: How did you feel about the restrictions that were put in place? So, the social distancing, erm, not being able to visit, you know, anyone outside of your own household? How did that part of it feel for you?

M: Erm, so, I didn't really like it. I thought it was, erm, it was not, not something that should have happened but I understand why it happened, why they had to do that but then I also look at like other countries, erm, that did such a better job of containing COVID and whilst also not placing as many restrictions as we had. So, I think it was just the government probably didn't do a great job...

H: Yeah.

M: ...*[laughter]* containing it.

H: Yeah, so would you say that, erm, that the lockdowns and the restrictions et cetera, would you say that it had any kind of positive or negative impact on your actual well-being? So how you felt in yourself?

M: Erm, I would say probably negative.

H: Yeah.

M: More negative. Yeah.

H: Yeah, how about for your wider family? So, erm, if you don't mind kind of just explaining your family situation. So, do you have a big family, a small family?

M: Er, no, just, it's just four of us in this house. It's my mom and my sister and my brother.

H: Yeah.

M: Erm, I think generally none of us had COVID or if we've had it we did, didn't know we had it because none of us were affected. Like we weren't severely ill.

H: Yeah.

M: Erm, so we weren't really, healthwise weren't really affected by it.

H: **Okay.**

M: Erm, so we're generally all okay. I think my mum has arthritis though, so, but her arthritis gets worse year, after the year. So, it's not got anything to do with COVID.

H: **Yeah, what about your kind of role within the family? So, erm, I do, do you work, firstly? And if you do work, do you work outside of the home or is it a home-based job that you have?**

M: Erm, it's like sometimes, a bit of it's at home and a bit of it it's outside of the home.

H: **So, was that impacted when the restrictions came into play?**

M: Er, kind of, I think.

H: **Yeah.**

M: Erm, a little bit. Not too much.

H: **Yeah.**

M: I think I was mostly okay but I did, erm, 'cause I tutor children. I did lose a lot of children who used to come to my house because obviously they didn't wanna do it online. So, then I guess I was impacted now that think about it.

H: **Did you experience any kind of anxiety about contracting COVID at that point?**

M: Erm, not especially because I thought I was, I thought I was like following the rules. I wasn't really doing stuff that was against the rules, like visiting people or erm, you know, I was wearing a mask and doing social distancing, all of that. So, I wasn't really that worried.

H: **Yeah.**

M: But, but I also had a friend who was extremely, who is still a little extremely like germophobic. So when I was seeing her, I was like, no, I can't be like that 'cause you know, she was just, because she was so worried about getting COVID or passing it onto other people...

H: **Yeah.**

M: ...that you, I think I ended up just distancing myself a bit from her because she was acting too. Like not crazy, but like too much over the top. So obviously when I saw her, probably I was like, I don't wanna be like that and I think I just stayed normal, like not too, not too much the way she was doing.

H: **Yeah, would you that it did, it, it had any kind of impacts then on, on any kind of relationships and friendships that you had?**

M: Erm, I guess so. I just realized like, er, today I was talking to my sister and like we have a group of friends who, who used to talk to a lot before COVID. We used to go to the houses and erm, over the, over the past two years they don't really talk much on like, on chat or like on WhatsApp or anything and erm, when we do see them, they'd be like, oh, I never replied the group as if it's something to be proud of, and I think maybe in a way COVID did impact them like the isolation or I dunno. Erm, sorry, I forgot. What was first the question?

H: **No, no, you, you, you answered it correctly. It was about your relationships with people and friendships, whether those were kind of impacted but you, you have explained obviously that it was to an extent impacted.**

M: Okay.

H: **Erm, so we did touch a little bit on your kind of working life. So, erm, did, did it have any kind of economic impacts on you? So financially, were there any impacts on your household as a result of the pandemic?**

M: Erm, yeah, a little bit. Erm, obviously because I lost some children then I was getting less, erm, I was earning less per month.

H: **Yeah, did that kind of resume and go back to normal after the restrictions were lifted?**

M: Er, yeah, mostly, er, yeah, actually, yeah, it has and I also like I started my own business from home as well.

H: **Yeah.**

M: Erm, so that helped as well.

H: **Okay, that's positive. Okay. What about your role in the house? So would you say that, erm, you had kind of additional responsibilities as a result of being at home more often. So, were you doing more chores for example and cooking, et cetera? Were, were those kinds of duties kind of, did they increase?**

M: Erm, I think so, yeah.

H: **Yeah.**

M: Erm, I was already doing a lot before, anyway. Erm, but I think maybe staying at home more did make me do more stuff erm, and take on more responsibilities and stuff.

H: **Yeah, right. So, the next set of questions I'm gonna ask are around, erm, contracting COVID and whether or not anyone in your family or wider social kind of network with caught it. So, you already explained that nobody in your actual immediate household caught COVID that you know of.**

M: Yeah, yes.

H: Erm, did you experience any bereavements as a result of COVID? So, did anybody in your kind of outer circle kind of pass away? Do you know of anyone that had it quite seriously?

M: Erm, no, not really.

H: No.

M: I'm trying to think. No, I don't think so. Yeah, no one I knew or close family or friends had anyone passed away.

H: Okay, okay, that's fine. Okay (.....). So in terms of the actual, I'm gonna now kind of talk about, erm, any kind of impacts on the Muslim community as a whole. So do you think, kind of from your point of view there were any impacts specifically on Muslims living within Birmingham of the COVID-19 pandemic? So, I'll give you an example. Erm, obviously mosques were closed. Erm, some of the lockdowns happened and, and coincided with Ramadan and Eid, for example. Erm.

M: Yeah.

H: Did you feel any of those kinds of impacts?

M: Erm, me personally, no, but like, erm, obviously like we have my brother and stuff and we have neighbours and stuff in, I don't know if you remember, there was that one, there was that one, erm, rule or something. I don't know when it was, which lockdown it was where it was open for everyone and then suddenly the day before Eid, they decided to like...

H: Yeah.

M: ...not allow anyone to go to the mosque and stuff like that. So I think a lot, a lot of people were affected by that. Erm, so obviously you just see the unfairness and it makes you angry. You're like, I'm frustrated because they be like, oh, for regular people it's okay but suddenly because an Eid day is coming up, they'll say, oh, you can't go or anything.

H: Yeah.

M: Erm, yeah, but other than that I, I don't think I really saw that much.

H: Yeah, what about, erm, with mosques and community organizations? So, are you affiliated with any specific mosque? Is there a mosque that you kind of visit for prayers or conferences or anything like that?

M: Erm, not really.

H: To do...are you aware of any mosques in your local area that were providing additional forms of support for the, for the wider community?

M: Erm, I think the ones, the one on my road was closed. I'm not sure.

- H:** Okay (.....). Okay, so, erm, I'm gonna move on now to another set of questions. So some of the questions did focus more on kind of the impact on the community but obviously because you're not affiliated with a mosque, erm, I wouldn't expect you to kind of have answers to those questions, okay?
- M:** Okay.
- H:** Erm, how do you feel about the way that the government responded during the pandemic? So, you already kind of mentioned this in, in your initial answer. Erm, what do you make of the government's response to this, you know, to the entire pandemic? What are your views on that?
- M:** Erm, yeah, I don't think it was handled well at all. It's just because when you do look at other countries, like I think New Zealand, erm, and then initially a lot of East Asian countries did really good as well.
- H:** Yeah.
- M:** Erm, I have a friend who lives in South Korea and obviously now two years later, a lot of people from who are not Korean themselves get, get, erm, like they get noticed and people will talk about them and they'll have to do more tests than Korean people and all this sort of stuff, but in the beginning of the pandemic, I think, like a lot of East Asian countries did really well and I think I'm sure the government, if I know that, I'm sure the government could have looked at other people and other places and maybe taken some sort of like, like followed them, but I don't know. I don't think the government did well at all in handling it.
- H:** Yeah. Erm, what about the rollout of the vaccine? Do you think that was handled well? So, do you, would you say that, that was successful the way that they launched the vaccine program?
- M:** Erm, I think it was, erm, but I don't know if it made a difference to anyone. Erm, I mean, I know obviously there's so many people who just refused to get vaccinated because there was a lot of sheer mongering and stuff happening around the time when, when the government was making people take vaccines.
- H:** Yeah.
- M:** Erm, so I think it was done okay but of course there's probably a lot of people who, who, who have not been vaccinated.
- H:** Yeah, what do you think might be some of the underlying reasons for that? So what, why do you think that, you know, people were skeptical of taking the vaccine? What do you think some of those reasons are?
- M:** Erm, I think mostly because they, they didn't, they didn't trust the government anymore. They didn't understand the way it was handled, the way COVID was handled. The way the lockdown was handled. Erm, and then you have of course people spreading like misinformation on the internet, on WhatsApp, on social media.
- H:** Yeah.

- M: I think people just, just believe it. If you can't believe in the government, you have to believe in something. So, they just go to the people who are spreading false news or whatever 'cause at the end of the day, the government's saying something, another group is saying something and these people probably just don't know what to believe. So they, they just believed what they thought was best for them.
- H: **Yeah. Yeah, erm, I mean, this question's a little bit more personal but did you take the vaccine?**
- M: Er, yeah, I got vaccinated.
- H: **And members of your family as well, were they okay with taking the vaccine?**
- M: Er, yeah. Everyone in my family got vaccinated.
- H: **Okay, so you generally have quite positive attitude towards the vaccine?**
- M: Yeah.
- H: **Yeah. Okay, that's fine. Okay, so the last set of questions I'm gonna ask you are around the specific needs of the Muslim community. Okay, so looking forward. So, if we were to have another kind of situation like this to emerge, like another pandemic, for example, how do you think the situation could be better handled? So what kinds of things do you think the government could do to make it better next time, if this was to happen again?**
- M: Erm, maybe like care packages for people who are like isolated or alone. Erm, I'm sorry, I forgot to mention before actually, er, my mum is under this WhatsApp group that like, erm, I just remember this now. Erm, they buy and sell stuff but also sometimes people ask for help if they need anything, erm, and I think a couple of times, erm, there's few ladies who lived alone or someone who had small children wasn't able to leave and, erm, we bought grocery for them and dropped outside their house. Erm, so obviously we were doing that but it should have been like the government's job to look after people who, you know, don't have anyone, I guess.
- H: **Yeah, yeah, yeah. Do you think that there were any needs specific to the Muslim community that could have been kind of met a little bit better?**
- M: Erm, maybe the mosque thing possibly.
- H: **Yeah.**
- M: Like obviously no one was allowed to go.
- H: **Yeah.**
- M: Erm, and maybe some people do need to go so they can feel a sense of like belonging and you know, these people who have newly become Muslim, they don't have anyone and maybe going to the mosque made them feel good and made them feel like they belonged, but when this happened and they weren't allowed to go anymore and they

probably didn't have anyone. So maybe if there was a way like to work around that, that would be great.

H: What do you think if some of these kind of faith-based services were switched online during times of crisis? So, you know, if mosques had, you know, online types of, you know, support groups or sessions, do you think that would be successful?

M: Erm, I think so. It could work.

H: Yeah.

M: Yeah.

H: Hey, is there anything else that you would like to add?

M: Erm, no, I think, I think lastly, do you have any questions *[laughter]*?

H: No, that's actually the end of the questions now. Erm, so I'm gonna, erm, stop recording now.

M: Okay.

INTERVIEW 28:

Date: 14/08/2022

Duration: 19:10

Participant characteristics: female, Muslim Chaplain

I: So I guess, if we think about chaplaincy and the support that you would've been giving in the hospitals through chaplaincy, how did you find that? In terms of the impact of COVID and being hospitalised for Muslim patients, so what was your sort of perspective on that?

R: I think it was really difficult, I think especially because we're so used to having like the... when the person has died, they used... in the Asian community, especially the Muslim community, there's that you have a lot of family being involved, a lot of family turning up at the hospital, a lot of family being there for the loved ones. And it was very difficult when they weren't allowed to be by their bedside just to hold their hand. I recall going to a patient in ITU and... Sorry, ICU. And when I was there the patient went from home fine, but when he's got there he's deteriorated. Obviously, in that unit there's everybody was COVID, so even anybody who's going in, who's kind of okay, their kind of symptoms are worsening because they're exposed to other people who are in a worse kind of situation.

And I recall going in and we all look like aliens, we've all got white PPE on, we've got these aprons on, we've got the head gear on, we've got the shields on, we've got the masks on. So you couldn't tell who's the chaplain, who's the nurse, who's the doctor. And we're all standing around this patient and for him it must have been quite a difficult experience to see that. You can't tell who's a female, who's a male. Who's here for what?

But I think it was difficult because as the Muslims, how you would like to have the prayers and have everything how you want to you're not able to get that. And I was asked by the family was the recitation being played at the bedside. And it wasn't when I'd got there, but then the staff they were probably short... because I've got the other side of the role, I understand from that side as well, that being short staffed having so many other patients to deal with, not having the time to kind of attend to that need. And I'd played it when I left there but when I got there the family had already, it was requested, like, it's not to go off, it's got to stay playing continuously. But it wasn't playing.

So I think that was kind of difficult because then when the family ask you that question was this need being met and it's a difficult one because you have to, kind of, tell them that no, it wasn't being met at the time when I arrived. So I think Muslim families, knowing that they're deprived of just small things, it was a very difficult time for them.

I: Yeah. And it was brought to my attention last time we met that you developed a pamphlet in terms of giving guidance around appropriate ablutions around death and burials. So is there anything that you can say about that?

R: Yeah, so because the ablution is done in a certain way, again, because they had put the patient as COVID patient, I remember going to the mortuary and it was, like, it just felt like the plague. Like they're wrapped up and nobody wants to touch,

nobody's allowed to touch them. I think they made that, kind of, it was like a fear that was, kind of, put in that these patients got COVID and if you're going to do the ablution, it's called the ghusl, the washing and the shrouding it's called the ghusl. We call it the ghusl process. It was like made out that if you're going to do that you're going to get COVID from this patient. So nobody would want to go forward to, kind of, wash and shroud that person.

So then they had allocated like a certain amount of people that were allowed to go in and that wasn't the immediate family, it was like certain people from designated funeral directors that could actually go in and they can only do it. And I performed that and I remember being dressed in a white overall from head to toe and wearing the mask and everything, and we done the washing and shrouding the way it's supposed to be done. But then that's something the family do. That's something the immediate family come in and they do. And they were deprived of just being able to offer that, just to say their last goodbyes in the way they wanted to.

So I think that was a very difficult time for families as well, and not being able to do that. The guidance, I think that's when I realised the guidance I put in place, it was because we do the last offices in the hospital anyway. So if the last offices could be performed in the way according to the religious belief, then that would give the family a sense of relief that it was done the way it needs to be done. And it gives us then that peace of mind.

So that's when I put that guidance together and thought it'd be good if we were ever in the situation again, at least the staff would have some education, if not some guidance on how to perform or how to do, because it's you do the whole of the washing anyway when you are doing the last offices for the deceased in the hospital as nurses. So just to do it that way, it's just like a few different things that are included in that, but it gives the family a sense of relief, a sense of being supported and knowing that there's something there for them, for their religious belief.

I: Yeah. And so just for clarification, last offices, could you just describe or give some insight for people who won't have an insight into what that involves ordinarily?

R: So when any patient dies what they do is we wash the patient, we clean them up and we put on a white gown and then we wrap them up in white sheets ready for the mortuary. So they're ready for burial, that's what we do in the normal day to day for the deceased, but in the Muslim community, how we do it is the washing and shrouding is done in a different way. So it's just we perform how you would perform the ablution. We would do them. We would carry out them steps first, and then after that we would do all the washing and shrouding. So it's not very much different, it's just adding in a few extra steps of the way we perform the shroud.

I: Sure for staff members who when they know they have a Muslim patient, that this is a protocol which you can then relate to the family that has been completed. Yeah. Okay. And so I think, I guess, kind of looking into the kind of impacts around death and within the community, I mean, you must have seen an awful lot in terms of the impact of COVID for families. I mean, across many different backgrounds, but is there a perception or what was your view on the idea of COVID impacting more for black and Asian minority groups or for Muslim communities in general?

R: I think speaking to a lot of the families, I think they felt there was a lot of double standards happening for the black and Asian community as to how others would be

seen. I think they felt as though they were treated differently, it was because of your colour of skin, if you were a certain colour, yeah, things were allowed. Yes, they would make that time where you can have that video call, but if you are of colour of skin, it's like "Oh, you're just another number, it doesn't matter. You know, we haven't got time to put the call in for you or we haven't got time to do a video call for you to connect with your loved." Or if somebody wants to give the holy water, like, the zamzam water, if that had been somebody of their skin colour it will be, kind of, different where all them acts are met and all that last support is done.

But when it comes down to the religious beliefs, it's like "Oh, you know, oh stay sitting there on the side", it's not being attended to. It could be because of the lack of knowledge, I wouldn't totally say it could be totally racism 100% in everybody's kind of situation. In some cases it would be that the person, the nurse or the staff, they don't have the knowledge of what they're meant to do with that. It's just water, like, if anybody needs to sip the water they can have a sip or it's there to help themselves.

But in patients, they physically didn't have the energy to help themselves. But there'd be nurses who'd want them to be independent. Like, I think they'd have the concept where because they're of colour they're putting it on, if they want it they could get up and have it.

"I'm not gonna give it to them" kind of thing.

Whereas, if it's somebody who's the same colour as them, it's like they're making that extra effort, where "Come on, let's give you some water, let's moisten your lips, let's moisten your mouth." But if it's somebody of colour they're just there on their own kind of thing.

So there was that kind of, you did witness the double standards in some cases, but then in some cases it's staff haven't got the knowledge or they haven't got time physically. So they've got so much going on at the same time and nursing in general it's like back to back from the minute 7 o'clock you've walked in, from the minute 7:30 you leave, it's just back to back. There's not a minute in between where you've got for yourself to kind of just breathe.

I: It's a conversation I've had with a number of Imams in and around mediating guidance. Did you have any experience of that in terms of mediating guidance, either from the NHS or government in terms of communicating guidance in a way that was relatable in a faith specific way?

R: Yes, I think we had to, kind of, educate people on social distancing in not having to socialise with one another, having to respect the rules and not socialise and go out and have these family events and meet one another because of the spread. It was put out in the local mosque where they had to in the Friday congregation they voiced that out that for the spread of the virus it needs to be social distancing needs to be maintained. This is something serious that we need to take as a whole community and everything. I think the police, members from the police were actually, they're trying to see if it's being implemented and they're, kind of, says if you can kind of educate your kind of community to let them know that.

And I think the community kind of, when they hear it from, kind of, a leader or somebody who they listen to regularly they kind of take things on board and kind of, take things seriously rather than listening to something on the news. So I think that kind of helped in that sort of sense, it made people think differently that, okay, this is something that we all need to, kind of, work with together and not have that contact and to wear the masks to sanitize your hands to kind of... In one sense, you think it's

like a behaviour control and it makes you think, was this a behaviour control kind of experiment to see how people will react or how people will behave? Maybe, I don't know, in years to come it might be, kind of, something taught in institutions and colleges and universities where it was seen as a behaviour control.

When you look back and you see, obviously, when I went to college and we were taught about other things and you look back now and you think, okay, would this be something in history that will be looked at in that way to come how communities were educated through their spiritual leaders. But I think even people who go to church, people who go to good [unclear 0:54:10] people who go to mosques, I think all the leaders were, kind of, given guidance on how to guide their community on how they need to be or what, sort of, life they need to be living at this moment in time.

I: And I guess looking forward, what kind of interventions do you feel would've worked well, were needed and with thinking, I guess, with a bit of specificity around the needs in the Muslim community, but also looking forward, should something else happen again, what kinds of interventions would be most helpful?

R: I think the group, the prayer, I think, obviously they said, the exercise in the park was allowed. So I think where there's bigger parks in this communities they should, kind of, have that distancing and have where people can pray together. Because I think it's a time where people in their communities who follow their religion they shouldn't be deprived of that. I think that the praying should be allowed. I think because if you are allowed to go out to exercise, you should surely be allowed to go out and pray with your community. Whereas if you're walking in the park and you're doing social distance, you could pray and have that congregation in social distancing. So I definitely think something like that people shouldn't be, communities shouldn't be deprived of that they should be allowed to have their prayers or their, kind of, spirituality there to keep them going.

I think moving forward, I think the prayers should be allowed with mental health, then clinics should be allowed. So yeah, I think the congregation would, kind of, give a sense of relief and kind of would help people to, kind of, overcome what they're going through. And I think vaccination and things like that shouldn't be forced upon. It should be people have the choice, but they put you in such a situation where you can't do this if you don't do this, you can't travel abroad if you haven't had the vaccination. You can't enter certain countries if you haven't had the vaccination. But then all of a sudden it's dropped then so it, kind of, makes you think that for a while it was all compulsory, but now it's all okay.

I: OK, is there anything else you wanted to discuss or talk about?

I: No, no.

Remote Session 1

Date: 22/11/2021

Duration: 01:19:11

Participant characteristics: female, all community members

Number of participants: 3

Key:

I: Interviewer

R1: Respondent 1

R2: Respondent 2

R3: Respondent 3

s.l. sounds like

I: We should now be recording. So, the recording has just started. Now, I'm going to turn my camera off just so we don't get any, kind of, interference, okay? Right, so the camera's off but the microphone should still be on. Right, so, I have emailed you all a copy of the Consent Form and an information sheet as well, just to give you an overview of what the project is about and the Consent Form is something that also needs to be signed and sent back to me. So, I've already discussed with each of you as well how I'll collect those consent forms from you, okay, if you can't send it to me electronically.

Okay, so, the title of the project is Covid 19 and it's a BAME special highlight notice project and we are exploring the impact of religious community organisations and their interventions around the impact of Coronavirus on Muslims in Birmingham in post-Covid Britain. So, that sounds like quite a mouthful but what we're basically doing, is exploring the impact of Covid 19 on British Muslims in Birmingham specifically. Okay, so all three of you are from Birmingham. You're all female as well. I don't need to document your age for this but there might be questions around your family situation, kind of, your work, what you do for a living, career-type questions, okay? There are going to be questions that you think are relevant for you and others that aren't going to be relevant, okay? So, obviously, just interject whenever you think it's necessary for you to do so.

So, this is a discussion, so I'm not going to direct any of these questions at one person specifically. You can all talk equally if you feel the questions relate to you, okay? Right, so, I'm just going to start off with a very generic question on what the general impact has been of the Covid 19 pandemic in your home situation, okay? How did this impact you as a family? Okay, who's going to go first?

R1: Shall I go first?

I: Yeah, that's fine.

R1: Okay, it impacted my family in a lot of ways. I have three children, all different age groups. They were all at home, so I had to do the home schooling. I'm a

homemaker. I had a lot of stress, anxiety, because I had to do the children's with them. You couldn't focus your time on three children at the same time, so, that impacted in a lot of ways because the routines weren't in place, everything was a mess. You had to do the housework, you had to carry on cooking, cleaning and all of that. My husband still had to go out and work. He works in the food industry, so, I didn't have that help. Then, when school was calling, we had to be on time, we had to get the children's breakfast ready, it was very hard. You got anxiety, stress from all that. I think it affected you mentally, physically, in every way, emotionally, yeah.

I: Anyone else want to step in?

R2: So, it affected me. So, when Covid happened, I was working, well, as a Healthcare Assistant at the time and then I had to leave 'cause my mum got ill and then she passed away, so, I had to deal with the grief and then I had to take on, like, a mother role to my brothers and then I wasn't sleeping properly, and then I had all this, like, anxiety and then grief to deal with and I couldn't work, 'cause I was looking after my two brothers and then I had to send one to hospital, so, yeah.

R3: And, I would say that I think it did have an effect on the household, but maybe not to the extent of some people's situations because I'm not married and I don't have children, but I'd live with family members and during the time of Covid, I have a few family members who have currently got quite poor health and it impacted long term on the sorts of treatment that they were able to get and I think that was quite a hard thing to deal with at the time because there was a lot of uncertainty, in terms of when are things going to open up? When things do open up, how bad is the situation going to be? You know, is Covid going to be a problem for this person if they're already not very well to begin with? And, I think, definitely, I resonate with the two people that have already said a lot of anxiety, but, for very different reasons. Not because of ... nothing related to work, I would say, because, at the time that Covid and the pandemic and the restrictions actually began, I was working within a secondary school at the time and everything, sort of, transitioned to online, whereas, I wasn't having to physically go into the school in person, again, just to really safeguard the people that were in my house, but, the biggest thing for me and the people in my house, I would say is, just not being able to tap into the sorts of support that you would normally access at the times of, you know, feeling quite anxious or restless and I don't mean picking up the phone and talking to friends or sending a message on WhatsApp, I mean, for some of us, an escape is to just get out the house. I know that there was the one walk a day and really encouraging people to do that but that was also affected by the ... I think a lot of people were feeling quite anxious about, but if I do go outside, how is that going to impact on, if I bring something inside the house am I going to feel really guilty about somebody getting ill? Am I going to blame myself? Is that going to have been my fault or not being able to just socialise and I think having to overthink every little thing you were doing, going out the house, get some shopping, coming into the house and, you know, you'd hear about some people were washing their shopping, they were doing all sorts of things and you just, kind of, wonder, well, did I really need to go out? So, anxiety, but not, again, not to the same, sort of, degree or for the same reasons as a lot of other people.

I: Yeah, yeah. But it's good to hear about, obviously, everyone's experience is that ... and they are individual because you're involved within the home as well, I suppose, is probably different, so, [R1] just to pick up on something you said. You said, you talked a lot about, kind of, having that stress and anxiety on an emotional level and then I'm going to, kind of, pick out on something [R3] said as well about, kind of not having, you know, that escape route, so

[R1], how did you, kind of, relieve that stress or did you manage to relieve that stress and anxiety in any way during those lockdown periods? Or, how did you do that?

R1: Really, it's just faith-based then isn't it, within the home, and your faith. If you have faith, that's all you have, 'cause we didn't have that external network did we at that time? There was nobody really ... you could talk on the phone but it's not the same as seeing, touching your family, friends, hugging, you know, you didn't have that did you? And, you had to look to your faith and that was the only way to really have some, sort of, relief, I guess and relief was there? You know, you need that outside support, don't you?

I: Yeah.

R1: So, that does really impact on your life, especially when you have children. Other family members you have to look after, you know, that rely on you.

I: Yeah.

R1: Yeah, it's hard. Yeah, I think faith.

I: Faith.

R1: That's what I would like, faith.

I: Okay.

R1: And the Mosques were also closed weren't they?

I: Yeah.

R1: We didn't get out the house either.

I: Yeah.

R1: And that affected the men in the household as well.

I: Yeah.

R1: That they had to stay at home and within our community, everything was closed down as well.

I: Yeah, yeah.

R2: Can I add on to that if that's okay?

I: Yeah, of course you can, yeah.

R2: So, one thing that comes to mind for me is, whilst we were fasting, 'cause obviously there were restrictions that were still very heavily in place whilst we were fasting and it was probably the first time ever, in my lifetime, that it's a Holy month and it's something that's very special to a lot of us where it didn't feel the same. There were so many things that we missed out on and just being together as a community, missing out on the company of other people and I think that was something we felt in our household. Yes, it was nice to be around family every single day, but I think, in

terms of just really missing certain parts of your life that you didn't realise how much of a significance it held until it was removed from you and, again, sometimes we choose to stay at home and that's just out of choice and we know, if we choose to stay at home, that's absolutely fine, we can go out as we please, but I think it's just the idea of you were told, this is something you cannot do. It's a very different way of looking at things and also celebrating things, like, you need, you know, having extended family, extended families being part of Asian families are usually very big. It's very difficult not to have members of your family close by and just the little things and I know it sounds very small when you talk about it in the grand scheme of things with the pandemic, but the small things, like, being about to share food and greetings and, as [R1] mentioned, being able to hug people and feed them in certain ways and just to gather and to not have to really overthink everything. That's definitely something that I think I felt, and we all felt in our household during the pandemic as well.

I: Yeah. So, in terms of, kind of, religious or celebratory occasions, obviously that had to be done in a completely different way. So, Ramadan, for example, so, the first lockdown that we had last year, Ramadan, kind of, just coincided with that. [R2] I'm including you in this question as well, did it have an impact on the way that you celebrated Eid, kind of, fasting as well, did it dampen that experience for you in an way?

R2: Well, definitely, 'cause the fasting experience was totally different because I was the only one fasting and one brother was away in hospital and mum just passed away and I didn't have any family members at home and I was sleeping downstairs for about two months, so, was really, like, lonely and it wasn't the same experience as it used to be really.

I: Did you still fast throughout that period, if you don't mind me asking? Were you still fasting?

R2: I did for a week ...

I: Yeah, yeah.

R2: ... but, 'cause of all the grief and anxiety and stuff, and I wasn't getting much sleep, so it was hard to, even though I was trying but my body couldn't take it really.

I: Yeah, yeah, of course, a lot of different things, I suppose, coincided for you at the same time...

R2: Yeah.

I: ... yeah, I know, I completely understand. [R1], would you say that it had an impact on the way that you, on Ramadan and on the Eid celebration as well?

R1: Yes. Yeah, I'd say that the children were home, weren't they, and usually they'd be in school.

I: Yeah.

R1: You'd have that break, wouldn't you? And when you're fasting, when you've got three children running around, it's very tiring, it's a lot harder. You have to ... I had to get the children on the computer on time, they'd have to be doing their homework which, to be honest, the parents ended up doing half of it. The children, you know,

their minds weren't into it as it was so different for them, and you had the children's emotions to deal with on top of keeping the fast which is hard enough in itself.

I: Yeah.

R1: You know, it was completely different and then not being able to go to your parents' house, you know, when Eid came around, it's very difficult isn't it, it's very hard not seeing anyone? Because that's the main part of it, isn't it, gathering?

I: Yeah.

R1: With all your family members, seeing everybody, hugging, you know, the love, everything, it wasn't there.

I: Yes.

R1: You know, you're stuck in the house.

I: Yeah.

R1: Yeah, it was completely different.

I: Okay, great. Okay, so one of the other questions that I wanted to cover, and, again, this is, kind of, a continuation of what we've been talking about so far. So, each of you obviously occupy a role or multiple roles within your own family or within your home, okay. So, you might be somebody's daughter, sister, parent, caregiver, you know, you might be the breadwinner in the family or you might be a homemaker, how would you say that your individual roles within your family unit changed? So, if each of you could just tell me, kind of, what roles you occupied and how that changed as a result of the pandemic? Who wants to go first?

R1: I'll go first. I'm the homemaker. My role changed as in, I had to become the teacher as well, didn't I and the household too. Two other children, my little baby, she's in nursery, I don't have to sign in for her, but the other two ... I have a Special Needs child who's a teenager and then I have a primary school child who is in Juniors, so I became their teacher on top of the homemaker and that was really hard to do, it was very hard. It was, you know, the routine and then two different children, isn't it, and they're both going to different types of schools. One's in a Special Needs setting and the other one is in a normal setting, so, yeah, my role completely changed there. It was very hard, I was so tired at the end of the day, each day. You had to email over all the work that the children and also, and then keep the children occupied and happy and fed.

I: Yeah.

R1: My role changed in that aspect.

I: Would you say that you took primary responsibility for the whole of schooling, or was it just something that was shared between yourself and your husband?

R1: No, I took primary responsibility for that, 'cause normally he went out to work and, yeah, it was all me.

I: Did home schooling bring any, kind of, additional challenges? So, for example, like you said, it was done via computer and I think a lot of sessions, and I'm not sure if this is the case for your children, a lot of sessions were done via Zoom, for example and if you're a parent that isn't necessarily used to using the technology or using those particular websites... So, would you say that home schooling brought any of those types of challenges into the household?

R1: Yeah, it brought a lot of those challenges for me. I find it hard with the computer. We couldn't load on properly, it wasn't working properly, 'cause there was a lot of children on at the same time as well. The internet was always crashing and couldn't get on. Yet, you have to send the work at the end of the day or they'd be on the phone, bugging us constantly from school. The teachers came on for 25 minutes of the day and then you're doing the rest of the hours. You're doing all the work, they just sent it out and I had to handle the rest of it, which was very difficult, 'cause they didn't direct us on how to do it or about the work or what we were supposed to do. You know, if we can't email it or, yeah, we didn't have any of that help, so, it was very hard. I found it hard.

I: And would you say that you got any, kind of, support or any help from the school, in terms of how to navigate, kind of, the home schooling process, or would you say that you didn't get much support?

R1: No, no support at all from either school, we didn't get ... not from my son's school who's in a Special Needs setting, nor from my daughter's.

I: What do you think would have ... what kind of things would you say would have helped to, kind of, make the process easier for you?

R1: They could have called us and they could have let us know what's going to happen and how to go about things, if we couldn't do it. They should have given us a way in which we could have ... they could have sent the work home and we could have taken it back into school. It was packs at home. That would have been a lot easier for me that the teachers had done the work but I had to end up doing all of it. It was all online. You know, the children, they're not going to do it, are they, at that time? They were busy watching TV or trying to run off, 'cause there's three of them. Yeah, and they could that mummy's busy. Yeah, so we got no help.

I: So would you say it was probably difficult as well to keep them engaged with home schooling, the children?

R1: Yeah, definitely. The children weren't engaged at all because the teachers were coming on, like I said, 20-25 minutes at the start of the day and that was it and they'd just read a few pages of a book, say, get your homework done, that was it. That was their teaching job and the parent is left to do the teaching.

I: Yeah. So, I suppose you did take on an additional role, in that sense, you weren't solely the home maker, you also had to become a teacher as well, in a sense to two of your children?

R1: Yeah.

I: So, [R3] and [R2], I suppose the same question to both of you as well. So, how would you, kind of, describe your role within your family or within your home

unit and in what ways did that role, kind of, change in the context of the pandemic?

R2: I'd say that it had a dramatic affect on me, because before the pandemic, I was bringing some income home to help with, like, bills and stuff, but, like, when the pandemic started and after my mum passed away, I had the role of homemaker, care giver. In a way, like, mother role and then it felt like I was the eldest sibling, instead of the youngest one, so, we had, like, a dramatic, like, role to, like, fill, and then, like, I've had to, like, look after my two ill brothers and then make sure, like, one gets help and it was really difficult to get that help and it did, well, the middle one, he did get into rehab but that was after chasing the home treatment team because I had to go through the GP and then, I think, that happened after about three or four months and then they were able to come to the house and they did wear masks and things like that but they did keep, like, two metres distance but asking questions but that took a while and then sorting out care for my eldest brother, that took probably a year and a half as well, 'cause I had to keep on chasing the social worker and then to me about, I think a month ago they started giving him a carer, so that was quite difficult because he was at home 24/7 and it was really hard to keep him entertained and he was acting out more because he was at home all the time. There's only so much I can do and even then I was, like, dealing with the grief and then trying to, like, keep my strength up but, yeah.

I: Would you say that you had any, kind of, support mechanisms in place in order to, kind of, support our brothers?

R2: Eventually, yeah, but not straightaway.

I: Yeah.

R2: But, yeah, that took a few months, yeah, it wasn't straightaway, like, I couldn't go on with them and, like, oh, can I get some help and it was just, like, a waiting game really. Yeah.

I: Okay, thank you for sharing that, [R2]. [R3], same question to you as well.

R3: I wouldn't say things changed for me dramatically. I feel as though the role that I had within the household at that moment was the role that I've always carried, but I would say that even from a young age, I've always been very active in the household, in terms of ... from as young as I can remember, whenever I was able to, and I had a job, offering financial support, being the person who would regularly go out to visit the shops, to take on that burden of making sure that the household had everything in that it needed, in terms of food, regularly cooking and cleaning within the house and I would just say that they're the sorts of things that were still going on during the pandemic. I think, the things that I struggled with, in terms of my role was really trying to separate my professional role and me, within the house, because it, kind of, merged. You know, the place where you live became the place where you were working and I really felt for [R1] as she was talking about the struggle of being at home and having to home school her children and just how hard it was. I mean, it's something that some families had to do at the beginning of the pandemic, I would say, you know, because it came out of nowhere, people were thrown, people, kind of, easing their way into it, it all just came out of nowhere, but I think, as time went on, you would have expected a little more organisation and just to share, [R1], at the time, I was a secondary school teacher, so I'm not doing that at the minute but at the time I was and it was very difficult as a professional to maintain work but to also take on other things. For example, when somebody became unwell in the house and, you

know, I've previously mentioned that I have a few people who I would say are very vulnerable within the household, so I was very limited in terms of what I could do myself and work, for me, at that moment, was not my priority. My priority was the health and wellbeing of the individuals within my household and if I was asked to do something for work, of course, you know, I absolutely loved what I did when I was teaching but, ultimately, to me, my family would always come first. That was a very difficult thing to juggle the demands of working from home and unless somebody was ... and I can sympathise with both sides here because, whilst I don't have children myself, I know the struggle was very very real with people having to work from home but also looking after multiple children and home schooling, but also from a teacher perspective, I know people who went through very very extreme situations whilst they were trying to maintain their household and to keep their job going. So, I would say, one of the biggest struggles for me at the time was to, kind of, maintain those boundaries between, this is my house, this is what happens in the home and this is my job and I think, over a prolonged period of time, which is what I would say was, it really does start to affect your mood and how you see things. So, that was something that I think, in terms of my role in the household, that was probably one of the things that I thought had the most significant effect.

I: Yeah. Okay, so, for you, [R3], it was predominantly, kind of, the working from home situation and trying to strike a balance, say, in terms of doing your job and then prioritising your family as well.

R3: Yeah.

I: Can I ask, [R3], you're talking about your teaching career obviously in a past tense, so, would you say that your career decisions changed as a result of the pandemic?

R3: Definitely not, no. My plans ... so I actually stopped secondary school teaching in the summer of 2020, but that was a change that I had already planned to make, even prior to the pandemic actually beginning.

I: Okay. Thank you for clarifying that, thank you. Okay, so, you've all obviously spoken about what the impacts were of the pandemic during the height of the pandemic which was the first lockdown and it obviously impacted all of you in different ways. At this present moment in time, has the situation eased or has it gotten a little bit better for you all? Is it still the same or, what would you say your situation is like now compared to, kind of, the earlier stages of the pandemic?

R1: I'd say it's changed a lot now. It's, kind of, back to normal isn't it because everything's, kind of, opened up. The children are back to school. Yes, we're dealing with the flu, the bugs going back around. That's something different isn't it, that it's all come together. When we were in lockdown, that was something that you didn't really worry about.

I: Yeah.

R1: We worried about Covid but not the other bugs, the children bringing them home and we've gone back out into society and now all these strains of flu, cold, along with Covid, that's the new ... and the NHS also being a mess. After the pandemic, that's different, but closely with the fact that we can go out and for our mental health, I think, that fact is, kind of, where it was before, it's not the same, but, kind of, back to normal, I'd say for me.

I: Yeah. [R3] and [R2], what do you think?

R2: Yeah, I'd say that it has eased a lot now, 'cause I've got a carer for my brother now and this brother has now been in rehab for, I think, over a year now and then, obviously, just got back into work, so, in a way, mentally, it's been good for me to go back into work. So, it's like a normality in a sense.

I: Okay. What about you, [R3], how would you say that the situation is for you, kind of, now, compared to what it was like at the height of the pandemic?

R3: So, because I don't think things really changed significantly for me at the time of the pandemic, I would say things are okay at the moment. It's nice to be able to access the social networks and being able to attend places in person, but I would still say, on some small level, there is ... because I am still very much in and out of schools because of what I'm currently doing now, sometimes there is still a little bit of anxiety, in terms of whether it's safe to be going in and out of schools, am I still putting my family at risk? Is it sensible for us to have removed a lot of the restrictions that we had previously, because I think there's this idea that a lot of people seem to think that Covid is long gone and it's no longer an issue, but, actually, it's still very much affecting a lot of people, it's just probably something that we don't hear about as much now that a lot of the restrictions have been eased, and, you know, people getting the vaccination, I think, has made a very big difference to how people feel. I mean, I don't know about [R1] and [R2] as to whether they decided to go with the vaccine, but I know a lot of people who haven't decided to get vaccinated, so, they still have a lot of the same fears about Covid as they did prior to that and their reasons for not getting the vaccine are tenfold, there are so many different reasons as to why some people don't want to take it, not necessarily because they don't think Covid is a problem but, I mean, I would say that when I do start to feel anxious about whether this is a problem or not, I guess I tend to ... it's something that [R1] mentioned earlier that I really resonate with which is, I find that I go back to my faith a lot. That's one thing that tends to ease me and settle me, is just thinking that, just to be able to make a supplication to be protected from the virus or to be protected from harm or to be protected for many of these sorts of illnesses and then you just, kind of, get on with whatever it was that you were almost ... maybe you were a little bit hesitant to do. I'm not going to say afraid, but just maybe a bit hesitant if it's something that you dwelled on for a little bit longer than you normally would and then you think to yourself, well, actually, my faith is something that grounds me very much and it stops me being irrational and from going too far, I guess, and it stops you from thinking that you have to lock yourself in your house in order to protect yourself from something.

I: Yeah, yeah, yeah. [R2] and [R1], would you say that you agree with what [R3] said there about faith, the things around faith and spirituality, kind of, grounding you?

R1: Yes.

I: Yeah.

R1: Yeah, definitely. I think, for Muslims, that's how we ... somehow, isn't it? That's where we all go to. Any problems we have in our life, you can always talk to Allah. You can talk to ... you have that inner peace, don't you?

R2: Yeah.

R3: Yeah.

R1: If you feel depressed, you know, you feel anxious, you feel worried about anything, you go back to your faith and then you realise the base of our faith, you know, everything, everything's there, everything explained for you, you don't have to really, that worry washes away. The instant you start reading and praying, everything's just, you're calm and at peace.

I: **Yeah.**

R1: You know, no matter what's going on around you, that all, kind of, washes away for that moment, doesn't it?

I: **Yeah.**

R1: I mean, you still have mental health and that's not going to go away, but you have that inner peace and different to ... other faiths, I guess, you know, if you don't have faith, you're going to get more depressed, it's suicide, things like that happen, don't they and faith can just bring you comfort, I guess, it's comfort.

I: **What about, [R1], what would you say, would you say that, kind of, your faith grew stronger during the pandemic and difficult points obviously that happened during the pandemic, like, the death of your mum and then looking after your brother, would you say that you turned a little bit more towards your faith or did it, kind of, remain the same?**

R2: I think it remained the same because I was praying every day and, well, yeah, I was supplicating a bit more, yeah. Yeah, I would say so.

I: **This is just a question on the back of that. I mean, I know that a lot of females in the Muslim community don't actually physically visit Mosques. Me, personally, for example, I don't actually visit a Mosque but I know that there are a lot of Mosques now, especially in the last, kind of, decade or so that, kind of, accommodate for female worshippers, so, can I ask if any of you actually frequently attend a Mosque and if you do, kind of, whether that was impacted by the pandemic?**

R1: I've never been myself.

I: **Okay. [R3] and [R2]?**

R2: I'd say that, well, the centres I went to a lot, that was closed, but they did have online classes that we could attend online but, then again, you'd want to attend just for normality really, but it was hard not to attend and not seeing the people that you want to and not giving, like, some things like that, so, like, I did fit a lot, so, yeah.

I: **Yeah. Would you say that the Mosque or the Islamic Centre that you visit was a source of support for you then in that sense?**

R2: Definitely, yeah.

I: **Yeah. Yeah, yeah. What about you, [R3]? Do you attend any Mosques regularly?**

R3: I do, I frequently attend a Mosque/Islamic Centre and, for me, that's a very big source of comfort, in terms of there are familiar faces and they regularly hold sessions of knowledge on a weekly basis, on numerous ones and it's a place that's always filled and every single day, every single evening, there's usually something to take part in and you do feel like you're part of a community and you have ... it's almost like a little family and not being able to attend in person was difficult and, similarly to [R1], this Islamic Centre did hold sessions online. It just wasn't the same. You didn't get the same, sort of, I would say, spiritual feeling as you would if you were to attend in person because in the religion, we're told that attending in person, there's more reward in it and I've always found that I feel very different when I'm sat in amongst people in person than online. I feel very much removed. I don't always feel that uplifted, sort of, motivation. It can be quite difficult to stay engaged and I think that that was definitely something that I found quite hard and I don't know if I'm going off on a bit of a tangent here, I feel as though as I've probably said quite a lot of things that potentially could be perceived as negative as a result of the Covid restrictions and the pandemic, but I did just want to add that there was some things that I did find, in terms of my religion to be quite good things, in the sense that being a working professional, being out of the house all day long, being somebody who is able to perform five prayers within the day, the majority of them sometimes fall within the time of being at work. During the pandemic, it became very very easy to perform those prayers without the additional barriers that you might normally get within a workplace, in terms of finding facilities to perform ablution and then finding a place to pray. It is possible within a workplace, I mean, people are very accommodating, I've always had very good relationships with the people that I work with, where it's never an issue to have those facilities or to have a place, but it's just very difficult, especially if you wear a head scarf, having to remove it and if you need to perform ablution and then to get re-dressed, whereas when you're at home, you can do that with relative ease, it doesn't take up a lot of time. I was regularly sacrificing my lunchbreaks not being able to eat, favouring the prayer time, because that's more important to me. Whereas, at home, I found that actually I was able to do both and that was something that I don't think ... at some times of the year it's possible when there is a longer gap in between prayers. During the winter, this time of year, it's a lot more challenging because the prayers are very close together because the days are very short. That's one thing that I very very much appreciated about being in the pandemic is that, I feared it made that avenue a lot easier to pursue than having actually physically been at work.

I: **Yeah, yeah, so, kind of, praying and doing your five prayers, you didn't have those, like you said, kind of, barriers?**

R3: Yeah that probably would have come up against.

I: **Yeah. Okay, thank you for that, [R3]. Okay. so, the next set of questions I'm going to ask are about, kind of, direct challenges that you might have faced as a result of Covid. So, again, if there are any questions that you think aren't relevant or if you think they are, kind of, difficult for you to answer, then by all means you don't have to answer them, okay? So, I just, kind of, wanted to go round first and ask, what the direct impacts were of Covid for you all individually? So, for example, did any of you contract Covid? Did family members contract Covid? And what was the impact of that?**

R2: Well, my mum contracted Covid and then she passed away but then they said it was, like, she had Covid and it was a stroke as well, so, that was the impact I had on my family.

- I: Can I ask, [R2], just to, kind of, clarify as well, kind of, when that happened. Was that during the first lockdown that your mum passed away?**
- R2: Yeah, it was in April.
- I: Yeah. And, at that point as well, I suppose, we didn't know that much on Covid, apart from obviously what we were, kind of, hearing about on the media. So, when it came to, kind of, like, your mum's death being recorded, for example, was it, if you obviously don't mind answering this question, did they say that it was as a result of Covid, her death?**
- R2: Well, they said that they're not going to ... well, they put it down as Covid 19 and a stroke, so they said they weren't going to rule it out, but they were going to put that down on the death certificate, so that was a bit, so, yeah.
- I: So that did have a direct impact on you, obviously, as a family, Covid 19, at that point? Okay. And, [R3] and [R1], did you contract Covid or did anyone in your family contract Covid? [R1], do you want to go first? Do you want to go first, [R3]?**
- R3: No, no, it's absolutely fine.
- R2: Okay. I contracted it during the first lockdown and it did impact, 'cause I'm the homemaker, I have to look after three children and my son is, you know, Special Needs, as I said before. I was locked up in a room, I had to stay away from them and we didn't have the outside support and my baby, she's three. There was no-one to look after them apart from my husband, luckily, he was home for three weeks until he had to go back to work, so, at the beginning of the lockdown when I had it, he was at home, but then, after, then he contracted it, it was during the second lockdown, I think, he got it, yeah. He was at home and then I had to look after him, look after the children, it really impacted our household because he was really unwell with it. Yeah.
- I: And, can I ask, were you home schooling at that point as well?**
- R2: Yeah. Yeah, the home schooling carried on, on top of taking care of him.
- I: Yeah.**
- R2: Getting him to get up and clean. I had to do everything for him because he was really incapacitated, he was very unwell.
- I: Yeah. And then ...**
- R2: It took ten days for him to recover.
- I: And then, you said as well, [R1], that you also got Covid, was that before or after your husband contracted it?**
- R1: Well, I got it during the first lockdown.
- I: Yeah. And then how did you manage that, can I ask? Kind of, did you have any help or did you, kind of, just carry on the home schooling and doing all of the chores and looking after your children or did you have any, kind of, help?**

- R1: No, I had ... he was at home, my husband was at home for three weeks, it was during the first lockdown, so he, kind of, helped with the children but I'd still have to get up and do what I could with the home schooling, he doesn't know how to work computers or internet, he doesn't understand, his English isn't good. So, I still had to carry that one from a distance with the kids. Yeah, I'd still have to clean the house as much as I could, even though I had it and I was very unwell with it. I think you just carry on, don't you as much as you can. Yeah, my husband had it worse, yeah. I had to, kind of, carry on with the household schooling on top of it, but I did have the extra help, I did have him home too. Keep the kids with him, I guess.
- I: **What kinds of things do you think would have helped you at that point? So, for example, we had, I mean, just, kind of, after the first lockdown, they, kind of, introduced the idea of support bubbles where you could have, kind of, another household that could be part of your support bubble or network, do you think that could have helped you at that point, for example, if that was introduced a little bit earlier, just so you'd have that additional help with the children and the home schooling?**
- R1: Yeah, definitely, because then, somebody else, you know, family members or anyone, families, they can bring round food, they can help you in different ways, can't they? With the children, you know, when you're unwell, we didn't ... you know, when you don't have that, it's very difficult.
- I: **Yeah.**
- R1: 'Cause, when you're the mother, you have to ... even though you're unwell, you have to carry on and do it yourself and that impacted me a lot. It made my recovery longer. If it was introduced before, it would have been a lot better.
- I: **Yeah, okay. [R2], just to go back to you as well, after the death of your mum, did you have any support mechanism? So, for example, were you offered any, kind of, bereavement or counselling support or any of that from anywhere?**
- R2: I was, by my GP, offered counselling but at that moment in time, I wasn't really thinking of anything, I was just trying to, like, I was putting my brother first, so I wasn't really in the right frame of mind, so the only thing that was on my mind that I need to keep my strength up and just make sure that he has meals and his meds but it took me a while to get counselling or, like, support from the GP. Like, I had to, like, bring myself to, like, to speak to someone and be, like, look, I actually do need the help but that took a couple of months for me.
- I: **Yeah. So you did access it eventually, the help by the GP?**
- R2: Yeah.
- I: **Okay, thank you. And, [R3]?**
- R3: Yeah, a few members of my household did get Covid and I would say this was during the first lockdown and it was a difficult time because it was a few family members all at the same time and I mentioned before that some of my family members have got, they're vulnerable for different reasons because they've got underlying health issues and one particular member is a very elderly member of the household as well and I think that made things quite difficult and, yes, that meant that there was more responsibility on me, in terms of things that I was doing in the house but I didn't really see that as significant, because, I guess, it's something that I'm used to doing

anyway. You know, prior to Covid, if people were unwell, it's normal for the one person who isn't struck down, they will step up, so it's not something that we've not really faced before in that sense. You know, it's usually one person gets a cold or the flu and everybody's down with it and some people step up, so, in that respect, I wouldn't say it was something that ... it wasn't a situation that I hadn't been in before, it was just, before, it had never been related to Covid and something that was difficult for me was knowing that I had other people that were outside of my household that were unwell, that if I was isolating, I wouldn't be able to then go and support, in terms of, they were quite reliant, in terms of me having to drop things off, like, bits of food or whether it was medicine or just making sure that they were okay and similarly with friends, if they had had a death within the household or family, due to Covid or any other reason, within the Muslim community, it's very common to go and visit that person to pay your respects after somebody passes away and that was something that I found quite hard not to be able to do. You can feel very guilty and as though you've not been there for that person, it's very hard to be there for someone when you know sometimes all you can give is your physical presence. Sometimes that's all you can do, you can't ... something that happens to another person, you can't fix it for them and make it go away. Sometimes, all you can do is be there and sometimes it's just very physical, in terms of you're able to hold them and give them a hug, that was a very big challenge for me to not be able to support people with that, but, yes, people in my household did get it. I was the only person who didn't have it at that particular time, so it did mean that I had to do a few additional things. But it was nothing that I hadn't done before, it was nothing that I couldn't manage and, obviously, you know, as family members improved, I did get it a little bit later on and I can't remember exactly when it was but at that time, again, other family members were well enough to support me when I wasn't very well.

I: Yeah.

R2: So, it was just a bit of turn taking in that sense and just, again, it's just being really thankful that it wasn't very ... it didn't get to a very serious stage with respect of nobody had to go and visit the hospital, although, with one particular family member, it did get very serious, where we were just constantly monitoring, it wasn't just that they were unwell, they were struggling very much and I think just that worry of, well, we'll have to keep an eye on them, have to keep an eye on them, what do I do, what do I do? You know, you see the guidance, the guidance was out there all the time. If you were not sure, dial, I think, it was 111, but, yeah, and then trying to get through. Sometimes, it felt like you were passing on information but getting very little back. It was just monitor them, or if you think they're very unwell, you would call an ambulance, but then it's very much a judgement call, in terms of how do I know if this is what I should expect because Covid is obviously not very pleasant, it's not going to be easy for the person? Is the, sort of, level of difficulty that they're experiencing right now, is this how it should be or is this now far beyond and I think, you know, it all sounds very silly, but when you're in that moment, it is quite hard to make that call, like, hang on, are they bad enough now? Something that I would consider to be quite poor health, another person might think that's absolutely fine, why are you thinking about sending them to hospital for that, but maybe for me, I do over-worry, I think, when it comes to these things, I always think it's better to be safe than sorry and it's better just to, kind of, seek support and if somebody turns you away and then says, well, actually, there are people that are far worse and if you don't really need that support right now, at least you did everything you could, rather than somebody taking a turn for the worst, but then saying, well, actually, why didn't you seek support? This idea of, what if I'm making the wrong decision, especially if you're the only person at that particular moment in the household that's well enough and you

have to make decisions for other people because they just can't manage at that point. That was something that was quite difficult within my household.

I: Yeah. Okay. Thank you for that, [R3], you said a lot of interesting things there in terms of how it impacted them and you and family members. On thing I just wanted to pick up on, on the basis of what you said was about being able to give people support during times of bereavement. So, for example, like you said, if there were friends or family members, or extended family members that had passed away, you said, normally, the culture dictates that you visit that person to give them some comfort or take food or offer your condolences in a physical way. So, this is just a question towards all of you, did you feel that it was difficult to, kind of, grieve for people during that period?

R1: Yeah, definitely. It was completely different, wasn't it? It was completely different because it was a shock, it was almost like it wasn't real.

I: Yeah.

R1: When you did hear, you know, a family member had passed away, it was because you physically couldn't be near them, didn't witness it, didn't go to the aftermath, you were stuck in time, stuck in a place, you couldn't get to them. Talking over the phone isn't the same thing, so it was a completely alien experience, I'd say. It was very strange that you couldn't hug or physically comfort that family member. It was completely different, yeah, for me.

I: Yes. What about ...

R1: It didn't feel real.

I: Yeah, and what about, kind of, attending funerals? Is that something any of you were able, you know, had to do during that period or wanted to, kind of, go to a funeral or were unable to go? Did any of you experience that? So, if there was a bereavement in the family or extended family, were there any restrictions if you were attending a funeral, were there any restrictions in place there, that, kind of, impacted you?

R1: I was told that, well, I asked about if I could attend the washing and burial of my mum but I was advised not to go because they were worried about crying out loud and that I couldn't bear the pain. So, I was advised not to go, so it was, yeah, that was a big hard really.

I: How do you think that impacted on you? 'Cause, obviously, if you're saying that that was something that, kind of, advised, did you feel that you still wanted to go after that, or did you think that was the right course of advice at the time? How did you feel about that?

R2: About 50:50 really. It just felt really lonely, like, I wasn't getting enough support, like, if this had happened, if there wasn't the pandemic, I'm sure, like, I would get a lot of family and friends supporting me and things like that, but it was just really alien and a long time for me really, so, yeah.

I: And, can I ask, [R2], were you able to attend her burial? Were you allowed to attend?

R2: No. No, because we were told that only six people were allowed to attend the funeral because of the pandemic.

I: **So, you weren't able to go?**

R2: No.

I: **That's unfortunate. What about, [R3], same question to you. Did you attend any funerals or were there any burials that you would have attended if there weren't any restrictions in place at the time?**

R3: There were some that I would have attended had the restrictions not been in place. It was very hard. Whilst it's something that I think is a very difficult thing, you know, to attend funerals, it's very hard, I think it's very necessary in order to go through the grieving process, in order to accept that this person is no longer here. As [R1] mentioned before, it didn't feel real. I think the reality didn't hit you, it was very hard to, sort of, work through and, just, sometimes thinking that, well, actually, this person's still here, you didn't get to go through the process that you normally would have done and I definitely think that impacted on a lot of people mentally, but also, just ... I think [R2] mentioned about the washing of her mother, you know, it's very common that in the Muslim community that when somebody dies, they're washed and shrouded by members of the community, either family or members of the community. This was something that was very difficult for the Muslim community as well. People that maybe normally would have gone to these sorts of practices, either were unable to, 'cause of their own health or I think a lot of people were potentially afraid of going because of Covid, wondering, is this a way that I'm going to contract Covid? Am I putting myself and my family at risk here and I think that caused other sorts of issues for people as well, but, yes, I definitely felt that it was a hard time, it was very sad to hear of a number of people, not necessarily your family members, familiar faces within the community, but also the loved ones of friends passing away and knowing that I would have been at that funeral, I would have been there for that friend but maybe even that friend hasn't been able to attend the funeral and I know that's going to have a long term, sort of, negative impact on that person and knowing that you wouldn't be there to support them and it was a very unusual time because I don't think I had previously heard of so many people that I know in real life telling me about my family member that I know, or my friend that I know, or my colleague that I worked with, my neighbour who lives down the road, the person at my child's school, naming people that they know, sometimes you'd just hear about it on the TV and it's a stranger, it's a not known, you don't really connect with it in the same sort of way as when you know. This is a person I know, they lived down the street from me and that person, their family member and it felt very strange and to know that people, as a whole, just not being able to grieve, it made me wonder about how that was impacting on them and if I just mention briefly, I've said that I go into schools every now and again and I come across, you know, I work with children in primary settings, secondary settings, and something that we actually mentioned very recently is that, we can still see the impact on children within schools who haven't been able to fully process the grief of having lost somebody as a result of Covid, so it's all still, even though the restrictions have eased, it's all very much an issue now, I would say.

I: **Yeah. We're still getting those, kind of, residual effects of it.**

R3: Yeah, definitely, yeah.

I: **Okay, thank you for that, [R3]. Okay, right, so the next question I'm going to ask is about the, kind of, national response to the pandemic, okay, so this was**

the Government's response to the pandemic. So, how do you feel that the pandemic was handled by the Government, in terms of the national responses we had? So, just some opinions on that.

R3: Do you mind if I go first here, only because I might have to leave.

I: **Yes, [R3], is that okay?**

R3: So, I mean, I would say I think the Government response was pretty poor. I think that, especially within the school that I was in, people were feeling very anxious well before anything had actually happened, there was any sort of response from the Government. We were told, not long before the restrictions were put in place that, actually, there's nothing to worry about. We were given a completely false sense of security. I think that there were people who were very misinformed who were actually people who were responsible for calling a lot of the decisions. They had no idea the scale of the situation at the time which was why we were amongst some of the last to put restrictions in place and to have any, sort of, a lockdown and I think by the time we did actually lockdown, I think things had already spread so much that, yes, I would still say it was necessary, I think it was necessary to have that, sort of, a response, but things had escalated so much because of poor decision making and I think, essentially, they dragged it out too long and if the decision was made a lot sooner, everything had shut down a lot sooner, maybe it wouldn't have been as prolonged as it was. So, that's my take on it and that's just purely from, like, just thinking about the amount of ... any, sort of, place you work in, knowing about the amount of contact that you have with people, but when it comes to children and knowing the sizes of some of the schools and, sorry, the number of children that are usually on a roll and sometimes the sizes of the buildings, and just knowing how close those people are to each other and, for me, personally, I just think that poor decisions were made and decisions were made very late. I think things could have been done a lot sooner and I think things were going to spread, it's just the nature of the virus, that's what it's designed to do, it spreads, but I think things could have taken a very different route and maybe then we wouldn't have seen such a stretch on the NHS where a lot of people are saying that, well, actually, had this person have had a bed, had this person have had a ventilator, maybe that wouldn't have been their situation but they didn't have that, sort of, care provided to them, purely because the NHS were not prepared for the intake that they had and maybe that is a direct result of the fact that things had shut down at such a late date. Because, we know this was circulating in the media well before anything had happened. I even had children asking me weeks in advance of the lockdown, whether schools were going to close and I remember thinking, at the time, that's never happened in my lifetime and I couldn't ever imagine that happening in my lifetime, at that point of that child asking me, did I ever think that would ever be a reality and the only reason I didn't think it would be a reality is because of the way the Government were handling it.

I: **Yeah.**

R3: But, obviously, look at where we are now, fast forward, however, more than a year, almost, like, going on two years now about it really, the fact that restrictions have eased is, yes, it's a good thing, the fact that there's a vaccination, yes, that's a good thing, but, actually, even despite restrictions easing and people being double vaccinated, there are still a large portion of people who are suffering from health issues as a result of Long Covid or even some people that have had the double vaccination that are still dying, it's still fatal for a lot of people, despite that, and I think, for me, personally, I don't have a lot of trust in the Government, in terms of the way that they handled things. I think there are other places that I have seen who,

even if they have seen just one positive case, you know, things will take it seriously and everything would shut down. Some of the headlines were very shocking. If we only have however many thousand deaths, we can consider that to be a good thing. That shocks me because one death to one person is significant. One death to one person, to me, just to see people as numbers, it was a very cold, sort of, approach towards the population really and, I mean, I don't know how [R2] and [R1] feel, but I'm going to give them a chance to speak as well. I think I've said quite a lot.

I: Thank you, [R3], that was some really good points that you've raised.

R1: Totally agree with you.

I: [R1], what would you say, in terms of how, kind of, the Government dealt with, kind of, the response to the pandemic? What are your views on it?

R1: It was lazy, it was too late. Firstly, they should have shut down the flights way before. They were letting people in from other countries carrying the disease which had spread around. They knew what they were doing. These people were going out of the hotels, they weren't isolating and that's how it spread in this country. If they'd stopped the flights, they stopped all flights coming in as they did in other countries, you know, we wouldn't have seen this happening in this country and the care home system, you saw what happened there. A lot of people died. Old people died because they stopped family members going in and was spread from, I'd say, it was all the fault of the Government not closing down airports, not closing down schools faster, not closing down establishments faster. They did everything slow, then they came on the news and they tried to put fear into people. There was no warning, was there? It was just all of a sudden. First they were saying, it's nothing, it's nothing and then all of a sudden it was a shock to the system. Fear-mongering and it was all mixed messages also. It was never clear, you never understood what's really going on, what's going to happen. Yeah, I didn't agree with the not shutting down the borders, not shutting down flights, you know, letting people in from other countries. I was really against that. As soon as, you know, they were letting people in and they're all roaming around with the disease, you knew it was going to spread like wildfire.

I: Yeah. What do you think, [R2], do you agree with that?

R2: Yeah. I agree with what [R3] and [R1] have said, totally agree.

I: Yeah. What about the actual lockdown periods? What do you think about the lockdowns? Do you think those helped to, kind of, curb the spread of Covid? I know, [R1], that you mentioned that you think it came too late in the day but if they had introduced it any earlier, do you think that those lockdowns would have been more effective?

R1: I think it should have been introduced earlier.

I: Yeah.

R1: And, yeah, it would have been more effective if they'd shut down the borders, didn't let people in from other countries, you know, when we didn't have the infection rate in our homes, yeah, it would have worked, I think it would have worked, definitely. I think, because of what they did, because they were slowly on everything, the mixed messages, locking us down too late, by that time it had already spread and then the fact that they were letting people go out shopping, they didn't have anything in place,

everyone's mixing, you know, you're queuing outside but then you're going inside and everybody's, you know, you're not five feet away from them, you're right next to each other, breathing on top of each other. Yeah, there was no protection was there, so it's going to spread there, isn't it? Everyone was socialising in the supermarket.

I: Yeah.

R1: Spreading it to each other. Everything was a mess. You know, it was very confusing, a queue outside for protection, but then get inside, you know, like, sheep. Yeah, it was strange.

I: Right, okay. The next few questions I'm going to ask are around the vaccines and the vaccine programme. So ...

I: Yes.

R3: I'm going to have to prepare his dinner and things like that.

I: Oh, that's fine. Shall I, [R2], do you want to leave at this point? I've got, literally, a couple of questions left and then ...

R2: Do you know how long they will take?

I: About five minutes. Obviously, I'm not going to keep you here if you need to go, so, if you need to go, you can, I can just carry on with [R1] with the last few questions.

R2: Okay, yeah, I need to go now then.

I: That's fine. [R2], thank you for your participation in this. I will contact you just to give you a debrief of this and then we can obviously, kind of, just extend on the discussion in our 1:1 interviews, but later on. Good. Okay, [R1], [R3] did tell me that she was going to leave and [R2] has now left as well, so, it's just you, so I think the last, kind of, questions I'm going to ask you are around the vaccine programme. So what are your kinds of views are on the vaccine, so, is there anything, for example, about the vaccine that has concerned you? Do you have any concerns about vaccines?

R1: I have concerns that it was a rushed vaccine, it was made very quickly. It's not been tested properly. The fact that they're rolling it out to teenagers. Yeah, I don't think children should be having it. I don't think teenagers should be having it. It's okay for the adults to have it, older people to have it, but, yeah, my concern is that it was very rushed vaccine and people were often catching Covid after taking it. That's not very reassuring to me and that people are still getting just as bad symptoms of Covid as they would have if they didn't have it. So, that does ... I have cause for concern there.

I: Okay. What would help to, kind of, address or alleviate some of those concerns that you've got around the vaccine? What kinds of things do you think would help address some of those concerns that you have? Is there anything that would help alleviate it?

R1: If it was tested properly, if we could, the ingredients properly, if they explained it to us and they read it out to us, and be completely clear exactly what they mean, they broke it down and told us that this is what we're putting into your body and if we knew

it was really protecting people but the fact, it would have reassured me, people weren't catching Covid, you know, the fact that they said, it's 99% effective, I think they said, and, you know, people are still catching it after being double vaccinated and still getting unwell with it, you know, just as bad, like I said. That's scary to me. If I saw people weren't catching it as much, you know, that would have reassured me.

I: Yeah.

R1: And if we knew the ingredients list.

I: Yeah. So, do you have concerns around what some of the long term impacts are of the vaccine, would you say?

R1: Yes, yes, definitely.

I: Can I just ask, kind of, just from any reading that you've done or anything that you might have heard from anyone else, or the media, for example, are you aware or any, kind of, impacts that have been reported, in terms of the vaccine? Can I ask?

R1: I've read about people having heart conditions from it, getting a slight murmur of the heart as a side effect. Periods changing, you know, the menstrual cycle for women. Yeah, I know a few people personally who have told me their menstrual cycles have become heavier and they're having different symptoms and that was a direct impact from having the vaccines.

I: Okay. So, would you say that that has a, kind of, impact on your perception of the safety of the vaccine?

R1: Yeah, yeah, definitely. I don't think children should ...

I: Okay, yeah. So, that has an impact on what you think, in terms of the safety of the vaccine for children as well?

R1: Yes, yes.

I: Yeah, okay. Right, okay. So, that was the last questions that I had on the vaccines. The economic impact of the pandemic, 'cause I think you've, kind of, covered nearly everything else that I wanted to, kind of, discuss. So, I suppose, the last question that I have for you is around whether it had any, kind of, economic or financial impact on you as a family, the pandemic?

R1: Yeah, it did have a financial impact when my husband wasn't working and we didn't have his income coming in and that was a very worrying time, because it was a risk of, he had the option of, he had three weeks off and then he had to go back, 'cause it was a takeaway service, so he had to go back faster and then there was the fear of, if he didn't go to work, is he going to catch Covid and bring it home and I have a vulnerable child at home with Special Needs, and we'd both just had Covid as well, but then, financially, he wouldn't be able to survive if he hadn't gone back early, so it did impact us because we did suffer those three weeks when he wasn't at work, we were suffering and we knew that he'd have to go back sooner than later and it was that risk of, you know, he took that risk.

I: Yeah. Okay. Right. Okay, right, [R1], I think, seeing as you're the last member of the assessment session, I think I can say now that we have, kind of, covered all of the areas that I wanted to cover for this discussion, okay. So, just to tell you what the next steps are after this. I will contact you to do a debrief of what this session involved and then, obviously, what happens with your data after this as well and in your participation, so, obviously, you already know that it's all confidential. Your identity will be kept anonymous as well, so your name won't be published anywhere, there won't be any, kind of, identifiers there either, in terms of the published work, about your participation in the research. I have emailed you an information sheet and a Consent Form as well, so I will collect those from you shortly and then I will follow this up as well up on to one interview with you at some point in the future, if that's okay?

R1: Okay, that's fine.

I: Okay, right. I'm just going to end the recording, the session now, so just bear with me.

Remote session 2

Date: 11/09/2022

Duration: 1:06:25

Participant characteristics: female, all community members

Number of participants: 4

Key:

D = Interviewer

M = Respondent 1

R = Respondent 2

S = Respondent 3

T = Respondent 4

s.l. = sounds like

D: One second, yeah, sorry, go on, M, if you want to give an introduction.

M: Okay. So my name is M and I am currently working as a personal assistant for the procurement for the NHS. And I was studying during COVID during my master's and also my undergraduate.

D: Okay. So R, do you wanna give an introduction? And I think that's really useful as well, any roles that you have in terms of supporting Muslim women in Birmingham or any voluntary work and that kind of thing is also interesting for our purposes.

R: Okay. Sure. Hi everyone. First thanks, M, for inviting me. Like, it's really a pleasure to come and join this focus group and thanks, thanks, D. So my name is R, I work as a communications officer and just with refugee service, which is an organisation that advocates for refugees. When it was COVID I was working, so yeah, I haven't been really in any like women empowerment, like, groups or anything like that but maybe in the past, like when I was back in Yemen, I used to do voluntary work and stuff, but not in the UK like anything related to women.

D: Okay. No, thanks. That's really helpful. I'm gonna drop the camera just for bandwidth purposes. Yeah, and I think also it's being in the focus for our project is Birmingham. So I think even being at your experiences in Birmingham at the time are...

R: Yeah. Yeah. It was, yeah, I was in Birmingham when it was COVID.

D: Yeah. Okay. So S, do you want to give a quick introduction?

S: Yeah, that's fine. Hi everyone. My name is S. I am a nurse, I work at the hospital at the moment. During the pandemic I was working as a student, but then I was also... I had to do, what was it called? A programme where I was actually working as a nurse, although I didn't... I hadn't qualified yet, so I was working during COVID in the hospital during the pandemic.

D: Okay. Yeah. Perfect. And T?

T: Hi. My name's T. Do we say our age?

S: I don't think anyone did, but.

T: Okay, that's fine. I'm currently just working as a retail assistant after completing my master's. At the time of COVID I was living in Leicester doing my undergrad and then I moved to do my postgrad in Birmingham and yeah.

B: Okay, thanks. So I think going back to... I sent the... have you all seen the group questions or have you? Because I only sent them over very late yesterday, has anybody had a chance to have a look?

Yeah (All).

S: Yeah, I did go over the first few, yeah, questions.

D: Okay. So I'll throw to the room, and I think we'll figure out how to, kind of, make space for everybody to speak. But so the first question that I want to engage with is, is thinking and reflecting as a Muslim woman and the experiences going back to the beginning of the pandemic, what were the first sort of challenges or impacts that you faced? And there are a couple of pointers here. We've had things come through in the research around maybe shifting changes in family dynamics, employment status and that kind of thing. So what were the initial impacts of the pandemic? Feel free to...

R: I can start.

D: Okay.

R: Okay. So for me, like, is it initial or you mean like the whole period of the pandemic?

D: I think we'll try to move across a bit of a timeline. So I think initially, kind of, what were the initial impacts for you at the beginning when things... it seemed like something was going to be happening?

R: Okay, so for us I used to work at that time and we started working from home and we couldn't see like our colleagues except like online and stuff like that. And I couldn't see anyone we were like isolated and stuff. So that's, at the beginning, that was the impact. I cannot think of anything more. But yeah, later there are, there were more impacts, which I can talk to about later maybe.

D: Yeah sure. And were there any implications of working from home in terms of were there pressures or challenges that that brought with it for you?

R: I think for me it was actually good. I was able to focus more on work because I didn't have any distractions from colleagues or anything. So I think it was actually good for me at the start, but it was like at times I felt isolated, for sure. Like, I wanted to see people and like at times and stuff like that. So it has its good and bad, I think. I was able to focus more on work, but then I was like isolated and I needed to speak to my colleagues face to face, stuff like that.

D: Yeah. Sure. Okay. Yeah. Does anybody else want to jump in?

M: Yeah, so for me at the start of the pandemic I think the most thing that was challenging was I was doing my, I think, class semester for my undergraduate and I was working on my dissertation and we, kind of, had to stay at home. We weren't allowed to go into uni and I had problems with like accessing going when you go to, like, when you were at uni, you'd be able to go to the library to get books, to get all the resources that you needed. But because of the lockdown and everything, that was kind of hard. And I think you had to like book a time, so it was just like a bit of a hassle. And also, it was kind of sad that I didn't get to see my friends and it was the last semester, you wanna make the most of it and that was kind of, like, taken away from us. But yeah, I think that's the only thing that I can remember that was the challenge to me personally.

D: **Okay. S, do you want to come in?**

S: Yeah. Hi. So for me because I was a student at that time it was just really not knowing what was going on with the course because we weren't able to go on placement, so I just felt like everything was just at a standstill at that moment. And also, like M said as well, with the whole resources, not being able to access it, 'cause I think at that time I was in my second year, I think it was halfway through my second year, so it was just at a standstill. There was no...we didn't know what was going on, so it was kind of, like, I had feelings of being like anxious and nervous and not knowing. And it just kind of, like, really impacted me in a sense of like just feeling uneasy about university. So I think that's the most, like, at the beginning that's how it kind of affected me.

D: **And T?**

T: Yeah. I think I agree with M, when she said she felt like uneasy about everything. Like, I just I feel like I just lacked a lot of motivation when everything went into lockdown. Because I was living by myself it was quite like I lost a lot of motivation, I was a bit uneasy about everything. I didn't know how we would complete our exams and it was just the uncertainty gave me a lot of anxiety. And I think from the anxiety I just felt like "Am I even gonna complete this degree?"

D: **Yeah. So I think we've touched upon this a little bit and maybe we'll move forward and discuss other things, but I think so most, I think three of you were students at the time and you've talked about your experiences in terms of studying. I'm wondering if there are any other insights in terms of thinking about working from home, studying from home, or family dynamics. I'm not sure if there's a, kind of, picture of household that you were in at the time and whether there were other family members around? Or you've mentioned living on your own, T. So I think some insight into the, kind of, implications of lockdowns and having to stay at home. Is there anything additional to reflect on?**

M: I think in terms of work, at that time I was working as an interpreter and as an interpreter we used to go a lot to hospitals and healthcare places and when the pandemic started I literally just didn't wanna take any jobs because I was too afraid and I was too anxious to go into a healthcare environment and potentially get COVID. So I just didn't take any bookings and because of that I, kind of, lost that position as an interpreter, so that was the only thing in regards to work.

As for family, I think all of us were just at home. My brother was also working, but for him it was the same thing, he kind of had to stay at home because his work required

him to interact with people. So it was kind of a bit tough in terms of work, but yeah, that's my take.

D: And R, I'm interested in your responsibilities throughout the pandemic and what the implications would have been. Can you give a bit of substance to the role that you have in supporting women who are refugees? Or are they refugees or are they seeking asylum or are they... is it both? And can you reflect on the implications of having a lockdown and having to work from home in that world?

R: Yeah, sure. So basically, when I was in Birmingham, like, I used to work another job so it wasn't with refugee women.

D: Okay.

R: I used to work in training and like coordinating trainings and stuff, so I didn't do that role. But yeah, I used to live with my flatmate and we just used to stay home like most of the time, of course, because we were in lockdown, so we just used to go to the groceries when we need to. But we used to be, like, really scared of COVID and getting COVID and stuff like that. So and we used to go for like walks because we were allowed to go for walks and I think that helped us a lot, otherwise we would've gone crazy. So going for walks was really good.

And yeah, I remember like my flatmate because she used to work in a hospital, so there used to be people who used to get COVID in her hospital and then she would stay at home. They would tell them to, like, work from home because there is someone who's got COVID and they don't wanna... maybe they'll get it or something if they go. So yeah, so it used to be a bit like worrying when she used to work in the hospital and stuff. So yeah, it changed from like we never used to go out anymore. Like, it was a bit depressing as well for both of us, but we were happy that we were at least together because if each one of us was alone it would have been, like, worse and stuff like that. Yeah. So that's what I can think of.

D: Yeah. Are there any other points on work and working from home and those things that anybody else wants to raise or anything additional?

T: I think during the start of COVID that's when I transitioned from living by myself to living with my two grandparents.

D: Oh, okay.

T: So I became their carer and stuff and I think I was a lot more vigilant and a lot more paranoid about contracting like COVID or spreading it to them when I lived with them rather than by myself. Like, I was scared by myself, but I feel like the anxiety hit a whole time, like a whole different level when I moved in with them. So I think, yeah, that's all I can remember, just being really scared to go outside because of them.

D: Yeah. Yeah. And that, I mean, that leads us directly into thinking about people that you are around, loved ones, extended friendship circles. Were there people around you, friends and family, who either contracted COVID-19 or that, kind of, what was your experience of the people around you and how vulnerable they might be to getting COVID or their experiences of getting COVID?

- M: Okay. So with me my mum, kind of, had some health issues. So we were all kind of worried that she would get COVID and she did get COVID at some point and she was really, really ill. And I think that was very stressful because at the time a lot of people were dying, getting really ill. So just the fear that a person that you care about and love could potentially go through the same thing is kind of scary. And it was also sad because we couldn't really interact with her as much. We'd only give her food or whatever and then just leave, we couldn't sit with her or anything. But towards the end I did get COVID too, but it wasn't as bad. I think I just, you know, just had loss of smell and taste and that was it. But that just shows how different it is from one person to another. But yeah, other than that, I think yeah, that's all that was happening from my end.
- D: **Yeah. Can I ask if you... were you living in the same house as your mum?**
- M: Yeah. Yeah.
- D: **Okay. Yeah. Anybody else, any other experiences of people close to you or concerns about people close to you?**
- T: I think at the start of COVID I didn't really know anyone that had COVID, as it went on, some of my friends got it and they were fine afterwards. Then their parents started getting it, and then two of my friends lost parents and that's when it... I feel like it became very real. Because before that I was, like, I was scared of it, but I hadn't seen that first-hand of like people passing away. But then when I saw that, I thought, like, it just... I don't know, it really hit home like, "Oh, this could actually take away people, like, really close to me. It's not just statistics anymore."
- D: **Yeah. Yeah. And I think as well, thinking about is there, was there... Did that change over time? Did those feelings of... oh, sorry, S and R, you've not come in yet, but did you want to just comment on that?**
- R: Yes. I just wanted...
- S: Yeah.
- R: Oh, sorry. I just wanted to add, like, my experience. So for me I didn't live with my parents, so I didn't really, like, because my parents live abroad, so I didn't really have any, like, a parents experience. But there were lots of people at work who got ill, like lots. Almost all of them at work, they got really ill. And some of them had like long-term COVID which was really, like, scary. So it was really scary for me to hear these stories of, like, people at work getting ill and stuff like that. From friends or people I know, like, they didn't really get out at the start of COVID so it was fine. But then at the end some of them they got ill, but they were fine after it. Like, they didn't get any like really horrible illness. But I used to hear from the community, like, some people dying because we had like a Muslim community that we were close to. So yeah, we used to hear, like, older people that were dying. I didn't know them closely, but we were hearing like in the community that someone died and stuff like that, so yeah, it was a very scary like news and like experience.
- D: **Yeah. Can I ask which area of Birmingham that was? Or which, where the community was located?**
- R: So yeah, around like mostly area and yeah. And like Sparkhill and stuff like that.
- D: **Yes, yes. Okay. Okay. Yeah, sorry, S?**

S: So for me, what it was at the beginning of COVID because I was still working to like support myself, I was working in a care home. So what had happened is because I would work in the care home and there were people that were getting COVID, I think my most... the thought that I had the most was just being concerned about passing it to my family members. So I had actually just moved out and I had to go live somewhere else and just stay there. And my interaction with people was a lot less because, like, I was concerned with my mother, I was concerned, but at the same time I still needed to support myself in terms of money. So that's what I, kind of, did and it was hard because you don't interact with people apart from when you're talking on the phone.

But eventually in my household we did get COVID and it wasn't as bad as it was we did get symptoms and stuff but it wasn't...no one felt extremely ill. But then after then I think we just kind of, like, was a bit more relieved to know that that we've had COVID, at least we've got the antibodies and the fact that we wouldn't be concerned about anyone going into hospital all of a sudden. So yeah, that's what it was like for me at the beginning.

D: **Okay. And I think as well, I think there's two things to touch upon in terms of wellbeing, health and wellbeing. One is experiences of COVID but there's other related things, so I'm wondering what was the impact in terms of some of you have already mentioned anxiety and stress, but what, how, what, can you walk me through kind of the impacts on mental health for you? Maybe thinking about the beginning of the pandemic, but then did this change over time and at what points did things get better or feel worse? If you could reflect on that, that would be really useful.**

M: Okay. So I just wanna say that at the start of COVID we had like Ramadan approaching. I think most people would be thinking because you're isolated you don't get to see people that it's gonna be like a really depressing period. But for me, like when I look back, I think that was probably the most peaceful and less stressful Ramadan that I've ever experienced. And I think it's mostly because there was no other distractions. So I was just at home, there was nothing to do. But because Ramadan is like a month of worship and just getting closer to God I felt like I could actually do that and focus on that alone. And so it felt to me like it was very, like, cleansing and very calm and nice. After that I think towards like the end, not at the end of COVID because we still have COVID, but once things got back to normal and you could interact with people and go back to work I didn't feel like... I felt like it was a bit more pressure and more stressed because you are going back to work, but then you are so likely to contract COVID by interacting with people.

So that was kind of like the time where I was more stressed rather than you were in full lockdown.

D: **Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Anybody else wanna, kind of, comment on that as well?**

T: I think for me it was kind of the same, but as in it was a peaceful time. I feel like it kept me grounded, like, trying to get closer to God. But I feel like because I'm a... it made me feel even more isolated, like, I was just by myself. Whereas before I would have friends and that would participate in fasting and breaking the fast with me, but like because I was by myself it just felt even more isolating. So it was kind of 50 50 for me. Like, it brought me peace, but at the same time it was kind of hard, like, just being by myself.

- D:** Could I ask you a little bit about your pathway? How long had it been since you'd, you know, said...hits you harder than in terms of when COVID kicked in? How long had you been a revert?
- T:** So I had been like studying for about, like, participating since I was really young. So it was probably 2015, 2016 and then 2017 and '18 is when I took it very seriously and then I started participating every Ramadan, yeah. So since then I would always have friends or their families would welcome me in and we would spend Eid together or even break our fast together and then during COVID, like, the first? The first wave of COVID? The first period of COVID it was really different in comparison to what I was more used to.
- D:** Yeah. Were you near a community at the time that you could, sort of, connect with or that you had connected with? Or did you feel... or in terms of where you were living, where you were a little bit isolated anyway, in addition?
- T:** I was a bit isolated anyway because some of the Muslim friends that I had made at university they had moved back to, like, their own cities. So I don't really have that community because my community there at university were my friends. But when they moved back, and obviously because it was lockdown we had to stay at home, yeah, I just didn't feel like I had that, the circle that I had.
- D:** And when you were living in... so you were living in Leicester at one time as well?
- T:** Yeah, so that was that period, so the start of COVID I was in Leicester.
- D:** Oh yeah. Yeah. And I'm curious, whereabouts in Leicester were you living? Anywhere nearby established Muslim communities at all?
- T:** I was living in student accommodation, so it's in town, like, in the city centre.
- D:** Yeah, okay. Gotcha, yeah.
- T:** But I do know the areas that you're referring to because there's certain areas that have more of like a Muslim community, but I wasn't really near those areas and like to just walk into people like yeah.
- D:** Yeah, okay. Yeah. Thanks. That's really, really useful. And sorry, yeah. So any other reflections on mental health and wellbeing? Stress, anxiety and how that might have changed over the duration of the pandemic?
- R:** Yeah, I can add something. So for me, like at the beginning as M said, I agree with her, like for us Ramadan is like a spiritual month, spiritual time of like so we really appreciated the quiet and like staying at home, working from home and fasting. 'Cause fasting is not that easy when you go to work 'cause it's more like tiring when you go to work you spend more energy, but then when you're at home you're just on your desk like working. And then like after that it's easier to go and like prepare the Iftar and stuff like that and pray. So it was really nice. So I agree with M on that point. And then after that when it was, like, it got longer and longer and they always extended, like, the lockdown and stuff like that.

So we felt, like, my mental health was I felt like really bored, more like depressed, not severely, but I was like "Oh, what's this? Like, it's just getting too much." So yeah, I think what helped me a lot is like going on walks. I think if we were like in complete

lockdown that would've been really like horrible. But yeah, it helped a lot to go on walks, but I think because they were always like extending the lockdown so that was not very good on my mental health. It was just I didn't know when was the end of it. So yeah, it wasn't that good. Like, at the beginning it was alright, I was like "Oh, I can work from home and stuff and like take the time" but then it got longer so I just felt like it was worse for me.

D: S?

S: Yeah. So I can agree with M and R in regards to the whole Ramadan. At the beginning it was nice to just be able to focus and just stay home and not have to worry about going to work and things like that. I just feel like the only thing that was the downfall was not being able to go to a mosque and attend the prayer that we usually do and then at prayer, I think that was a bit like isolating. But also, so once Ramadan was over, I think because it was summer as well it was a bit easier to go out and go for walks whenever you'd feel bored at home or you needed some fresh air. But however, when it just kept on going on, like the lockdown just kept on extending, I do feel as well, like, my mental health did deteriorate in a sense where I was like feeling more like low self-esteem, very depressed, you know? Because you're not really interacting with a lot of people.

So it was summer at that time but when it was going more towards the winter times it's not easy to just go out and walk out at times because it's dark and it's cold, so I was staying more indoors in during winter time, and yeah, it was really like depressing. It was a really hard time to, kind of, get through.

D: Yeah. And I guess, we've landed on talking about kind of faith and kind of faith and spirituality, and I mean, was there any kind of impact in terms of how?

S: Can I just?

D: Yeah, sorry, go on.

S: Sorry. Also, I'm so sorry, I just remembered as well. I just wanted to add as well the fact that 'cause I still had my uni work to do as well. So like on top of that I had all my third year uni stuff to do and you know you just? I just felt like a lack of motivation because everything was online, but we were still expected to do the work. And it's just whenever you wanted help or needed the extra help or like guidance from friends, it wasn't there. So I just felt like even with university, I just felt like it was going nowhere. Like, I couldn't see the end of the tunnel at all.

D: Yeah, yeah, yeah. In terms of thinking about faith then, do you think there was an impact in terms of how the pandemic affected how you engaged with your faith? There's some practical things that you mentioned saying about not being able to attend the mosque and so on. And so yeah, can we unpack those things more? I'm really interested in how the pandemic impacted on how women in particular engaged with their faith.

S: Sorry, I'll just go first.

D: Sure.

S: I think what it is is I think in a sense where you could focus more on yourself and God and your religion and your relationship with God. However, it is just the fact that community wise, I just felt like there was like a disconnect from the community. Like,

I would say the night prayer when we'd go and pray after it's that it's very traditional where we would have our Iftar and then we would go and pray together. And just having that connection with other people to pray and like stand in prayer I just felt that disconnect. But in regards to like one to one, I think that was, kind of, you had your lows and your downs, like up and downs because you were able to just focus on, like, on you and your relationship with God.

D: Yeah. Could I ask which mosque did you attend, S?

S: So I attend the one in Small Heath, so I go to either XXXX XXXX Masjid [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], the XXXX Masjid [small Mosque in Small Heath] or I go to there's another one, like, my community background goes to its called XXXX [small Mosque in Bordesley Green] it's not far. So usually I go between them and usually because like even after we have the night prayers we always... there's always, like, a lecture afterwards and I feel like it kind of boosts your like Iman it just, it boosts, it gives you a little like reminder of things and just like sets you on the right like path. So I just really enjoyed taking part in those things and because I wasn't able to take part in those things it was just me, myself and God and my relationship with God.

D: Yeah. Thank you. Yeah. Yeah, so anybody else wanna jump in in terms of reflecting on how the pandemic impacted faith?

M: I think I agree with S in regards to when it comes to faith, like one on one, that was something that I felt like it made me closer to God. Like I said, because I had so much time that I could actually focus on that alone. But I think when you say like in regards to like going to mosque and everything during Ramadan I agree that we couldn't go, for example, after and stuff, we couldn't do that. But I feel like with those kind of things it impacts men more than women because even like for men they usually go to Jumma prayer, which is Friday prayer and it's every week. And they weren't able to do any of that like at all. So I think for them it's because with, like, in Islam it's good to go to the mosque, but for women like we believe that a woman can pray at home and it would be the same as going to the mosque, whereas for men it's better for them to go to the mosque.

So in that kind of sense, I think it impacted men more. But yeah, also like with Eid, I think there was two or three Eids that we weren't able to celebrate and we were in lockdown. I think that was sad. It was more upsetting than actually not being able to interact with people during Ramadan because I feel like in Eid it's like when you come together with everyone. But yeah, other than that I'd say I feel like just one on one I think it made me closer.

D: R, I'm not sure if... forgive me if you've already spoken, but I'm interested in your insights as well.

R: Yeah, of course. I just wanted to say that I agree M and S about like being closer to God because we had like more time to devote to spirituality and like praying and stuff like that, so we felt closer to God. And I think that actually impacted our like mental health in a good way because we felt like we can handle it more when we're closer to God. So I think that was really useful for us.

Regarding like going to mosque and stuff, personally, it didn't really affect me that much because I prefer praying at home rather than going to the mosque. So I actually was okay with just staying at home and praying at home, so I didn't really

find that really bad or anything for me personally. But I can see that for, like, lots of people it was really depressing and stuff like that.

In Eid it was really depressing, I agree with M. It was like we can like go out and celebrate with everyone. And I just stayed home, I remember like I didn't have anything to do, like, no one can see each other; so it was like really hard times. Yeah, that's what I can think of.

D: Yeah. And T, was there anything you wanted to add?

M: Not really. I think I agree it was just sad not being able to see everyone. After completing like a really nice month of like getting close to God and then not being able to, like, I don't know, even speak to people that, like, and hear their experiences. Like, it's different. I feel like it's very different from, like, sitting down and eating with people than like over the phone. Like, do you know what I mean? Like, over the phone you can have a conversation like "I hope you have a nice day" etc. But when you're sat in person and you're eating with people, like, I don't think anything beats that.

D: No, no. And so I think it is interesting to consider, I think how far you each feel that your experiences were typical of Muslim women in the context of the pandemic? Then I think it might be worth thinking about generation as well. So I think, how far do you feel like your experiences were typical and whether that's specific to people in your age group or in the similar circumstances and how that might have contrasted with what you observed with older women perhaps? Or women with different family structures or different responsibilities?

M: I think all of us here are single and we don't have kids, so I feel like for someone who does have kids it would be a lot more different. Especially because I don't know if like kids, I don't even remember if kids had to stay at home during the first lockdown or not, but I think they did. I think everyone did. So for that, I think my aunt she used to complain a lot about having to be there with her kids. Not that in a bad way, but you know when like when they go to school? She had that time alone where she could focus on other things. But when they were in the house she found it hard to just do things that she would be able to do when they're not there.

So I don't think our experiences, kind of, like cover every Muslim woman's experience just based on us not being mothers in my... but if it was to people who don't have kids, I think it does kind of like cover most women that don't have kids. We, kind of, went through the same thing.

D: Yeah.

T: I think, like, especially older women they had a lot of pressure on, that a lot more pressure because they would have to cook and like take care of the kids and just do literally everything for the household. Like, I have some friends their mothers were, like, exhausted at the end of the day. Or they would help their mum prepare for the evening meal, and yeah, like some of their mothers complained of like just being so tired and so, like, drained because they had the kids in the house also and like while fasting, while making the food, so yeah.

D: Yeah. Any other insights? R? S?

R: From my side really I didn't, I don't really have like any close like married friends or anything like that. But yeah, I think I agree with M, it would be really difficult for a Muslim woman if like during COVID because yeah, as she said, like the kids are like at home and I think some of the parents had to like teach the kids as well at home, which was really a big responsibility and they were like worried as well because COVID was spreading a lot between kids. So I remember hearing a lot of like parents being worried about like COVID with like getting COVID from kids and stuff like that. So yeah, other than that I don't really, I can't remember anything useful, like, or additional to what M said.

D: S, anything? Anything that you wanted to add?

S: Yeah, I was just gonna say I do think that it was, it's a different experience for mothers with children. I do remember my brother's wife, she was quite struggling at home. So at one point I have to move over because the kids are at home, they have nothing to do and she's constantly looking after them along with housework and then cooking and stuff like that. So I just used to, like, take the kids out for walks just to get their energy down or just get them like a change of scenery. So I think it is like a different experience in regards to them. I think they were more, like, stressed in another way whereas we were facing difficult, different challenges in regards to like what we was, what we had going on and what they had going on. So yeah, that's what I think as well, so.

D: Yeah. So I think there's... I'm just a bit conscious of time and it seems to pass really quickly. So but I'm interested in, kind of, whether you were aware of interventions that were put in place by mosques or local Muslim community organisations or local organisations that have significant Muslim stakeholders or responsibilities within those communities. So were you aware of any, kind of, changes and support that was made available through mosques or other community focused organisations?

M: Nothing from my side. I don't think I was aware of anything.

D: Okay.

R: Yeah, so okay. So in the mosque near me they used to do like face to face events, so they used to like always meet up and stuff like that. But during COVID they transferred these like events and meetups online, so they still used to meet online and it was really good because they wanted to, like, they didn't wanna just... because when people don't meet and stuff like that their mental health gets worse. So they were trying to maintain like meetups and talking to each other and stuff like that. And in these events they used to also talk about like COVID and mental health. So some of them were about like COVID or mental health and people used to join online and stuff like that.

Also, what I can remember, which the mosques used to also offer like COVID vaccines. But that was later on, so lots of mosques used to do that as well.

D: Yeah. Can I ask which mosques you were attending or that you were aware of these things developing?

R: Yeah, so the mosque near me was a XXXX XXXX [a moderately sized Mosque in Mosely]. So this mosque was doing lots of, like, online events, so yeah.

D: Okay. And was that in Birmingham? Sorry, R.

- R: Yeah, sure. It is in Birmingham. It's in Moseley.
- D: **Mosley, of course. Sorry, I forgot. Yeah.**
- M: It's called XXXX, I think. Is it called?
- R: No, it's called XXXX XXXX. Yeah.
- M: Okay.
- R: It has two names. That's one of the names basically.
- D: **Yeah. So any other, kind of, insights in terms of being aware of interventions from community organisations or mosques? Anything else?**
- S: No, I was just gonna add that I wasn't aware of any. Sorry, any help that was going on in any mosque. I wasn't aware of any, any things like that. Any interventions. I didn't hear of any.
- D: **Okay. And then I think, I guess, we talk about the government response. So I'm interested in your perspectives in terms of the government response, I do wanna think about gender in this regard, although I appreciate that this is probably gonna be two different points. But is there an idea of what the specific or particular needs might have been for Muslim women in the context of the pandemic? It can be your own experiences and it can be some of the stuff you've described with women with other family related responsibilities. Were there things that the government could have done to better support Muslim women in the pandemic? Or were there things that were elements of the government response which were useful and helpful, or yeah, any of your insights on how the government responded to the pandemic?**
- R: Personally, I think like, okay, so I think the government response wasn't good, like in general. But like for specifically for like a Muslim woman to help them I'm not sure if I can think of something like that would've been like specific for them. But yeah, sorry if that's not helpful.
- D: **No, no, no, everything's helpful. Well, let's think about the government response more generally then. I mean, what are your views on the way they handled everything?**
- R: Yeah. I think it was, well, because I think at the beginning, like, we didn't really have a strict lockdown, personally, that's like my personal opinion. I mean, someone might disagree with me, but I think if we would have had like a really strict lockdown for just a few weeks and stuff we would have been okay. Rather than just what, how like Boris handled everything, which I think it wasn't wise at all. Yeah, that's what I think.
- D: **Yeah.**
- M: I agree with T. Sorry, T. I agree with, R. I think even like with lockdown, just the on and off lockdowns was kind of the reason that it just wasn't handled really well. I think if we had something that was strict and we all stuck to it we could have dealt with this better and more effectively than just going on and off, on and off, but yeah.
- D: **Yeah. T, sorry, did you wanna come in?**

T: Yeah, I agree, I don't think it was handled responsibly. I think even the aftermath and the after effects, like people's mental health, like they did not take into consideration anything 'cause I actually did... I had a friend and he sadly committed suicide during the lockdowns. And I think part of it was he felt very isolated. And I think just all the aftermath after the pandemic, during the pandemic, like people that have lost people, like they just didn't care. Like, not to get political or anything but...

D: **Why not? Why not?**

T: Yeah. Not to get political or anything, but like just seeing the recent reports about they were just partying, they didn't really care. I think it was a real like slap in the face, like to everyone that has faced like actual issues during the pandemic.

D: **Yeah. Any other insights? R? S?**

R: Yeah, I totally agree with T. Like, they didn't put any like effort on like mental health and how to better, like, mental health during that time. All they did was just to, like, isolate people and like they were like killing them slowly. I mean, I know that I think that if they would've done like a quick lockdown, like at the beginning, a really strict lockdown at the beginning it wouldn't have...we wouldn't have had to make it really long and like on and off and stuff like that. So I think that they didn't care about people at all.

D: **Anything additional, S?**

S: To be honest, I think I could just agree with everyone's point there. I just feel like it was not very, like, the lockdown they didn't really care about people's mental health and as well just not knowing because they would give us that false hope at times. "Oh, lockdown is gonna be until this time and then it's gonna be lifted at this time." And it was just very like, I don't think there was no, no help whatsoever on the government side and the way things were handled was not in a very good way.

D: **Yeah. Okay. So I guess we are running out of time. So I wanna talk about vaccines, vaccinations, because it's a big recurring theme in the project. So I mean, what are your views in general on the vaccine strategy? How it was rolled out and perhaps how it was received in and amongst Muslim friends, family members, etc.**

R: Can I actually add something before that for answering this question?

D: **Yeah.**

R: I actually just wanted to add that, yeah, I basically like got redundant like while it was COVID because of COVID and stuff like that. So it was really like hard time and I was trying to, like, for volunteering for like jobs for like anything and it was like really hard to find any job or anything like that. So I just wanted to add that point. So and also I know a lot of my friends, like, who got redundant as well, so we were all like redundant like at the same month and stuff like that. So it was really very bad and stuff and the government didn't really offer like anything like that helpful for people who got redundant.

Yeah, that just relates to the previous like discussions. But yeah, I think vaccinations were not really like... lots of Muslim people they didn't really accept vaccinations.

That's what I heard from like the Muslim friends. So they were not trusting like vaccinations and they were thinking it's bad for them and that if they get COVID they would have the immunity to fight it and that would be okay. So I know, like, a lot of actually Muslim people who didn't get the vaccination they were afraid of it, especially the younger ones because they thought that if I'm young I'm gonna be okay and face it. But the older ones, they actually took the vaccinations. So yeah, from my side, I know a lot of like Muslim people who didn't really accept like vaccinations, but on the other side there were like lots of Muslims as well, but I think only a few of them who... maybe fewer than like, yeah, fewer of them accepted the vaccination.

D: Any other views on vaccinations and how the government rolled them out? The approach that was taken and so on?

M: I think the approach that was taken, I don't really agree with the approach at all. I feel like it was kind of forced upon people, even though it did say to you that you have the freedom of choice whether to get vaccinated or not. But it got to a point 'cause I worked in the NHS and it got to a point where they were literally saying, "If you don't get the vaccination, you won't be able to continue working with us." So it's they're giving you the... they're saying that you have the freedom to accept or not, but at the same time they are putting you in a position where you really don't have a choice. And not, a lot of people were forced to actually get the vaccinations against their will just to keep their livelihood and just to get an income.

And also there was a lot of things that I used to like notice where, for example, if you wanted to travel you had to have a travel passport. If you wanted to go to a... I think there was an indoor, like, was it an indoor funfair that was in Birmingham? And then I was looking at it and I was like, "Oh my God, it's so cool, I wanna go." And this is kind of like going back to normality and everything but then if you look at the conditions it would say that you have to be fully vaccinated to get in. So in a sense it was kind of forced upon you, which I completely disagree with. You shouldn't be forced to do anything against your will. But other than that, yeah, that's my take on vaccinations and the approach.

D: S? T?

S: So I do agree with some of the points that M was saying. I feel like they took away, like, some of our rights, I think it was very much forced. Especially me being a student nurse, at that time I do remember being sent emails in regards to taking the vaccinations or else I wouldn't be able to complete my course. And of course, when you are studying and you've been studying for a three year course and you're halfway through it's just you're put in a position where you think is it worth me giving up my three year course? Or else I would have to take the vaccination. So I do feel like definitely I was definitely forced a 100% into taking the vaccination. I wasn't really happy about taking it. Not that I wasn't... not that I was anti-vaccination, it was just the fact that I didn't have time to process it myself and weigh up the pros and cons and make a decision for my own self. So I do feel like it was very much forced and I didn't, I just did not like it at all.

D: Yeah. Yeah. T?

M: I think I agree with everyone that they just they said that it was like, "Oh, it's your choice" but like when it came down to it was it really my choice or my employers? Or yeah, so I knew people that were like really anti-vaccine and then I knew people that were like pro-vaccine, like "Go get it, go get it right now." But I feel like I was just in the middle like, "I'll get it when I wanna get it." Like, I don't know, I was quite... I

didn't run to get it, but I was like when I feel like getting it I'll get it. Like, I wasn't on either side.

D: **There's something that came up quite early on in this question, which was the mistrust. The mistrust in the vaccination strategy and I'm curious about your perspectives on where that mistrust might come from and whether there is a relationship between mistrust in health authorities or authorities in general and Muslim communities.**

M: I feel like the government itself, like no offense, it doesn't really cater towards minorities or Muslim communities. It's repeatedly like shut down any, kind of, issues we've raised or like anything that's important to our communities, I feel like it's never heard unless there's a protest, unless there's a lot of noise around it. It's never really acknowledged. And if it is, it's only acknowledged for like a day. And that's like nothing ever changes. If we want to say something or something's important to our communities, like, I don't feel like it's just taken seriously to be honest.

D: **Any other, kind of, reflections on trust or mistrust in authorities?**

M: I think... sorry, R.

R: That's okay. Go ahead.

M: I think you said when it comes to Muslim and their mistrust in healthcare, I think it was more so to do our mistrust in the government rather than healthcare. And just like the idea of them forcing it and like pushing it is something that you, it just like... if you're being forced to do something and they're telling you "Do it, do it, do it, do it" you're just gonna have the idea at the back of your mind or like, "Why? Why are they pushing for it so hard?" And also, something that I just noticed, I wanted to mention it earlier, is the fact that it was so, like, the stigma around people who didn't wanna take the vaccination, it was so big. Like, at the start I didn't wanna like be forced into taking it. I wanted to do what, like T said, take it at my own pace when I'm fully convinced, when I know it's what I want to do. But I felt like I had to hide it from people. Like, I shouldn't be telling someone, "Oh I don't wanna take it 'cause I'll get judged for it." I didn't like that kind of feeling, it just made things worse and it, kind of, gave me a lot of anxiety and stress because I did work at the COVID vaccination centre at some point and it was like a question that was always asked and I tried to like avoid speaking about it with someone 'cause it does kind of get political, but yeah.

D: **But did you think, can I ask you, M, did you feel like there was an elevated sense of that politics when you were discussing with friends who were Muslim compared to friends who were not Muslim? Was there any difference in the extent to which there might be that sense of tension around vaccines?**

M: Yeah, I feel like, to be quite honest, when it came to like the topic of vaccinations when it came to the Muslim community I didn't feel like I was judged as much if I was to tell someone. I didn't wanna take it, but if I was speaking to someone who isn't non-Muslim, I mean who is non-Muslim, I would feel like I was very much judged.

D: **Right. Okay. That's interesting. Yeah. Any other insights or comments on vaccinations?**

R: Yeah, I think also I wanted to add that I totally agree with the points that everyone said. But yeah, like, I think because the government didn't handle like COVID in a

good way, so people like developed this mistrust at the end about the vaccine from the government. And also I think because they were hearing lots of stories of people like developing like blood clots and I think there wasn't done, like, enough research about like the what's gonna happen, like, if you get the vaccine or what's the consequence there. So there wasn't like really enough research and everyone was just writing like what they want and stuff like that, so it wasn't really clear. So I think people like developed that mistrust from that, and yeah.

D: S, anything additional?

S: Yeah, I think I can agree with a lot of what everyone else is saying. It's just the mistrusting government not being able to choose yourself when you feel comfortable in having the vaccinations and then being forced to take it. I think people should know or have a choice of to take something that they wanna take whenever they are ready. And just the fact that it was... I feel like people that were not vaccinated they were almost like discriminated against, like, thinking that your life's gonna be very difficult because you're unable to work, you're unable to go to events. So it's a lot more isolating when you haven't had the vaccination because you're not able to carry on with your normal life or carry on with life like how everyone else is able to. And then just certain things, like, not knowing what the effects are.

And I know they usually say the fact that people who are within the black ethnic, black Asian, I think certain ethnic minorities are at high risk of developing COVID and being severely ill. But personally working in the NHS or working as a nurse, I've spoken to a lot of people who have had side effects from taking the vaccinations and sometimes knowing that I've took it myself, sometimes I do wonder if my body is or my health is slightly different because I took it. It's just that doubt that I have in my head thinking, "Oh, I did take the vaccinations." I try not to think too much about it, but I worry about the long term effects or effects, any effects I might have later on in life.

D: T, is there anything, I know you spoke previously, but is there anything you wanted to add?

T: No, not really. I think literally all the points that people have said I totally agree with.

D: Was there a question with regard to the technology that was used to develop the vaccinations and whether or not this was consistent with Islamic faith, was that something which was in people's minds, do you feel?

R: Not that I know of. I haven't heard about that yet.

D: Okay.

S: I think mostly it was just about how quickly it was developed. I think it just, kind of, questioned... people questioning it a bit that it was a very... it was developed quite quickly. But not anything that's, like, I think some people did have actually was a bit concerned about what's actually inside the vaccination, what is it made out of. Yeah, I did hear certain discussions like that as well.

D: Yeah. Yeah.

R: Yeah. And the fact I think that there is not enough research that was like a problem for people. Like, they didn't know who to trust.

- D:** Yeah.
- M: Yeah. I didn't hear anything regarding when it came to, like, is it okay to take the vaccination with the Islamic faith, I didn't hear anything much of that. So I'm not sure, but yeah, only concern is what both R and S have said.
- D:** Yeah. When we finish recording I'll share some of the other insights from other parts of the research, which explain why I asked that question. But anyway, so I think looking to wrap up, I think now, even though there's a number of bases I didn't manage to cover. A few questions, I think do you feel like the pandemic could exacerbate or drew attention to pre-existing challenges faced by Muslim women?
- T: I did have a thought about it, I was talking to my friend about this. It was the whole identity and security thing when people were wearing masks it was, it was okay then, but now when you see women in the *niqab* like why are you still offended that you can't see? Because like I was in... I think it was JD, I can't remember the... was I in JD? And this woman was just "Oh, like why is she near me? She's too close to me. I can't even see your face." Like, I just remember that conversation. That's what got me and my friend talking about it. And it was just like, I don't know, I felt like the pandemic showed us that we can, like we can accept people that like that they don't have their face showing. So I don't understand why it's a problem now. Now that it's 'over' and we don't have to wear the masks anymore.
- D:** Yeah.
- R: Yeah, I totally.
- D:** Go on. Sorry.
- R: Yeah, I just wanted to add something as well. I totally agree with T because personally me, like, when I used to... sometimes I used to forget my mask and I just covered like my nose and like mouth with my scarf, so with the end of it I'll just cover it and that look like if it was before the pandemic and if I did that I would look like I'm a terrorist, I think. Or some people would think like, "Oh, she's weird she looks like something like that." But the pandemic made things like that look normal. So, and even me, I would feel confident doing that, but before like the pandemic I would feel really like not confident to do that. So I think, yeah, that's a very important point that she touched upon and it's really like valid.
- D:** Yeah. Any other comments on whether challenges of pre-existing challenges faced by Muslim women might have been exacerbated by the pandemic?
- M: No, I agree with M and T, it is something that I thought about too, and it's just crazy how things, like, there's a shift where you were being discriminated against before for dressing a certain way or covering your face, but then during the pandemic it was completely normal and everyone was doing it and no one had a problem with it.
- D:** Yeah. So I think are there any areas of need or any impact or challenges that are faced by Muslim women that we haven't discussed that you think are relevant? And that we haven't covered yet? I'll take silence as...
- M: I'm just thinking. I think we've, kind of, covered everything. I was just speaking to S about something like racism in the workplace and I was telling her, like, did you experience anything like this during COVID? And she said to me something really

interesting, which is that it's something that she probably experienced throughout like her whole life. So even if it was to happen during COVID she wouldn't link it to COVID because it was always there rather than it just coming during COVID. So I think that's, kind of, interesting, even if say we were experiencing racism during the pandemic we wouldn't really be able to distinguish between whether it's linked to that or not because it's something that we've actually been through from way before COVID even started.

D: Yeah. Okay. Is there anything else anybody wants to raise before we close the session? Okay, well thank you for taking part. I'm gonna stop recording so bear with me. There we go.

‘Remote’ session 3 (took place in person)

Date: 22/08/2022

Duration: Approximately 30 minutes

Participant characteristics: female all community members

No. of participants: 5

Further details: Notes were handwritten as participants did not want to be audio recorded

Key:

A1 = participant 1

A2 = participant 2

A3 = participant 3

A4 = participant 4

A5 = participant 5

I = interviewer

I: At the beginning of the pandemic, what level of concern did you have/was there in the community?

What were the first indications that this was going to be something that might have some significant impact?

What do you think were the most significant impacts for the Muslim community early on in the Pandemic?

A1 – Lots of concern initially because I wasn’t sure whether it was just hitting BAME women – if you remember the first person to die from Covid was a Muslim woman from Walsall if you remember ...

A2 – Not sure if she was the first person but definitely it made me worry as a Muslim women I was thinking is it just hitting us because of our ethnicity that got me really really worried

A5 – I can definitely talk about it in terms of impact because in my family we have an extended family and at least 6 people I know caught Covid – all of them by the way were men not women but for me personally at that time I was struggling.

A3 – Me too....I had a really bad struggle because my son is autistic I had to make sure I was caring for him I also had to feed him and I was so scared as I was working part-time in a restaurant that I might catch Covid and bring it home.

A4 - The biggest impact on us as women was big because I had to look after my mom and dad and my mom in fact caught Covid at the time ...I had to call the doctors who never gave me an appointment and then I was calling ambulances every 5 minutes it felt like because her oxygen levels would go down and then other times she just kept vomiting ... when I did take her to the hospital they never had a clue how to deal with her- they just told me go home and I was worried sick because I was home and mom was in hospital and I had to then make sure my dad was ok

I: Over the course of the pandemic, what do you feel were impacts that were most felt across the community?

What were the most sustained areas of need as lockdowns and the pandemic in general went on?

Were there areas of need which were distinctive to Muslim communities in the context of the pandemic?

How were these managed? How did people get through it? What support mechanisms were available?

A3 - I think the community were impacted large because we all felt it as we lost so many loved ones – I lost people even back home in Pakistan my aunt and mother-in-law passed because of Covid

A1 – Our community really suffered because the media kept saying these Muslims are breaking Covid rules

A2 – I really struggled because I was a working mom and I had to make sure I could feed my kids. So the impact on me and my family was massive. We never had any support mechanisms and no one got in touch with me. Not sure what the other ladies think?

A4 – That's true...because I had no support too.

A1- Me too.

A5- Me too.

A5 – I think no one really cared for us because we were Muslims and even the media made it out as if we were the problem.

I: How effective was the government's response to the pandemic?

What views were held in the community with regard to: handwashing (to the national anthem); mask wearing; social distancing; lockdowns – did the government do enough?

Local government or council support?

Trust in information being given out by government? How did Mosques/community leaders deal with this?

A5 - The government were useless. What response were you expecting? I wasn't expecting anything from them.

A2 – The government I think didn't understand the problem and especially the impact on Muslims. We live in big households and have lots of different generations under the same roof. I think they forgot about us because of who we are.

A1 – The community in my area were doing everything properly like cleaning and handwashing but other people who were not following those rules but again it was Muslims who got criticised.

A4 – I think you are right there was no trust you see. How can you trust this government when there not following the rules themselves. Boris kept breaking the rules and all the politicians were partying but we couldn't even meet our relatives.

A5 – I didn't really have any interactions with the community leaders so cant really say.

I: What role did faith have in experiences of the pandemic in the community?

How did people stay connected?

What was the impact around Ramadan 2020? What was it like to experience this in lockdown?

What other impacts were there on religious observance?

How did individuals adapt to being unable to attend the Mosque?

Did the pandemic impact on faith and religious observance more widely in the community?

How important was faith in the context of the pandemic?

Faith and ability to observe religious practices and Mental health?

A1 – My family and cousins all stayed connected because we used whatsapp and could send messages.

A2 – We also used video calls to talk with my family.

A4 – My faith was really important for me because that's what made me think about we will get out of this. Plus we knew lots of people who passed away from Covid and my faith teaches us that you need sabr (patience) otherwise what's the point of life.

A5 – I used to pray inside the mosque with my family and I wasn't able to do that.

A2 – I think this was a problem because even my family couldn't go pray with the men.

A5 – During Ramadan we couldn't even take food from people because we knew it could be contaminated so we had to say no. We also use to give food for people to break their fast but we couldn't because of that.

A1 – My faith made me stronger and made me closer to my religion because I realised life is too short and temporary so it made me think more about existence and life and death.

I: What views were/are held around the national vaccination strategy?

Vaccination centres?

Testing

A1 – I think it was mainly that apparently Muslims would not take the vaccine. But in my family everyone took it.

A2- I couldn't find any vaccination centres in my area it was just lots of queues and I couldn't get to it but I made sure the rest of my family did.

A3 – The whole testing process wasn't clear at all too. Some people were being tested positive but they were negative and others were tested negative but should have been positive. The whole thing was a joke.

I: Social media, connectedness and information

What role did technology play in supporting the community through the pandemic?

What role did social media have in keeping the community up to date with information?

What role did social media have in the circulation of mis-information or sceptical perspectives?

A4 – It was mainly whatsapp I couldn't find anything else to be honest online.

A2 – I don't use tech for stuff anyway so couldn't see information but assume it was there.

A5 – We just used our text messages.

I: Were pre-existing tensions exacerbated by the pandemic? (e.g. Islamophobia, hate incidents, hate crimes?)

A4 – I think there must have been hate crimes but I didn't see anything personally.

A2 – I felt I was being watched in the shops when I went out but I don't think that's a hate crime.

A4 – I definitely felt it was a factor but it was not reported in the media or by anyone.

A5 – Islamophobia depends how you call it when someone stares at you and treats you differently. I went to a shop and they kept telling me only to queue up and the white shoppers were all pushing in but the lady said nothing I could feel they were being racist.

I: Looking forward, what do you think worked well and what didn't work well in terms of the government response to the pandemic and how far this met needs specific to the Muslim community?

What approaches would have met the needs of the community better?

What responses would you have liked to have seen from local government/the council during the pandemic?

What areas of need remain for the Muslim community as a result of the pandemic? What kinds of interventions might help in the longer term looking forward?

A1 – I think the government was a joke.

A3- The community shouldn't have to explain anything. Maybe they could have got together faster but that was difficult.

A4 – I would have liked the council to be more involved. But they were all silent.

A5 - If the people (LA/Gov't) had come sooner into our communities something might have happened but one spoke to us ever and they were so slow.

Focus Group 1

Date: 21/07/2022

Duration: 43:53

Participant characteristics: R is a male Imam at one of the largest Mosques in the city located near Highgate and is also a Muslim chaplain, R2 is a female Muslim Chaplain. Both had extensive Chaplaincy duties in hospitals during the pandemic.

Number of participants: 2

Key:

I = Interviewer

R = Respondent

R2 = Respondent 2

s.l. = sounds like

I: Okay. I think that's recording. Probably better. I'll give a quick summary. The project is looking at impacts of COVID, within Muslim communities in Birmingham, and we're looking as well at the roles that mosques and other community led organisations have had in providing interventions. For context, we're looking at mosques and other community organisations' interventions to support the community, what the community needs were, and also thinking about things like the role of faith in community in times of crisis and that kind of thing. I think going back to the beginning of the pandemic, what have been the main impacts do you think for the Muslim communities Birmingham? I guess if we move through. What do you think the main impacts have been?

R: One of the main impacts that we saw, and felt initially was, initially there wasn't any leadership, whether in civil society or whether it was about the faith, anybody taking them or moving everybody going forward. For example, when there's a terrorist attack or anything, we see that people stand together, whether it's faith group leaders, or other people of other organisations, and they say, it's all going to be fine, don't worry, we'll be able to move on. Over here, these times, we never saw in our lifetimes, where mosques and everything were closed down. There wasn't any message coming out from anybody. So it was the uncertainty that what's going to happen, even the leaders and everybody hid down and nobody was allowed out, and that is the feedback that I got from the communities that we're calling and saying that there's a great big fear because there's no message coming out from a mosque, that "don't worry, it will all be fine."

That void was really felt in those initial days. The fear just grew more and more because of uncertainty and different services not being able to deliver a service, because it was the first time ever in our history that the place of worship were closed down. That was some of the main impact that he had at that time, and then of course, there was the ripple effects and many of the issues and problems that we faced and came across.

I: What's your view on the main impacts within Muslims in Birmingham?

R2: I think, again, like he's just mentioned, I think the main impact was it was mentally, spiritually, not being able to pray, not being able to have that connection. I think, in times like that, you need that little bit of spirituality to kind of refocus, reconnect yourself, reset yourself. I think that was the main impact where people were not able to pray and go to the mosque

and I think mentally that was quite traumatising to have that isolation, especially being the Friday prayer as well, which people have been doing for years and then all of a sudden it's come to a standstill.

I: Thinking about I guess, the COVID the health side as well, how hard was communities in Birmingham hit do you think was the effects of the pandemic?

R2: I think that was very difficult, especially with families losing loved ones, not being able to attend the funerals, not being able to bury their loved ones, being able to be with them in the last hours. But then when you hear about the party coming out at Downing Street, that's something that can never be reversed. People have been hit with that and it's okay for the government to sit there and enjoy their parties and their festive seasons, but yet, we don't have the right to mourn. I think that was a very difficult time for the Muslim community to accept that difference between the cultures and the religions.

I: Yeah. You've both had roles as I understand it within the hospitals during the pandemic. Could you give some insight into that and what it was like supporting families or individuals through that role?

R: There was a lot of challenges. We had the families, especially from the Muslim background, trying the utmost best to try to make the hospitals and everybody understand what our requirements are, that for a Muslim as soon as they pass away, it is wanting immediately burial. That was already difficult enough here in Birmingham anyway, compared to other cities, they have much better facilities in place for Muslims and for burials. It was already a difficult time even before COVID. But then with COVID, things just went out the window. There was a big struggle with the staff, end of the day, they're human beings, they were trained to save lives, they hadn't seen these kinds of things before in their lives as well.

It was seen a big struggle on all sides. One is the Muslim community wanting to bury their loved ones that are passing away, what seemed really rapidly, and then on the other hand, the staff that already worked really hard, and sometimes don't get their work appreciated, but then they are trying their utmost best to make the committee understand that, "Look, we are doing our utmost best." It just made things back to worse. Then being in the middle and trying to understand both situations and scenarios and trying to facilitate the community as best as possible, then trying to see the challenges that the staff are facing and try to accommodate them. It was a difficult time. Here in Birmingham, I wouldn't say people have recovered from the effects of the pandemic, and what they have felt and seen and what we are still seeing whether it's Muslim communities, non-Muslim communities, people are still struggling.

Things haven't really gone away that what we've seen lately in the news as well, those people have gone through a lot, they have ended up losing their lives for whatever reason, but they were going through a very difficult time in the pandemic, but I think some of the major things were the requirement that the faith has that being able to bury their loved one as soon as possible, but then at the same time to be with their loved ones when they are passing away. We did try to use other means and resources to try to accommodate and try to facilitate the Muslims families, who had their loved ones in the hospital and weren't able to be with them at that difficult time and they were about to pass away. But of course, it wasn't the same thing and then it made it just much more difficult after they've passed away to be able to get sort out that people work and try to bury them as soon as possible. Even when it came to the burial and then not be able to be with them.

Because for a Muslim, it's very virtuous, the more people that you have in the funeral prayer, it's probably unlike many other faiths that you don't get, it's not something that you get invited to, is the whole community will gather together for a funeral. It's going to be for

sometimes up to 10,000 people coming for a funeral because people feel attached and part of the community. Had it been possible in normal circumstances, they would have been in a massive funerals and this was another throwback for the Muslim community not being able to... Not even the immediate family being able to attend a funeral.

I: What would your reflections be as well with regard to the health impacts?

R2: I think the health impact, I think a lot of it's not being acknowledged, people are still carrying a lot of the anxiety, a lot of the stress but because being on the forefront, you have to show that front that we're okay because in your role, you're there to treat others, you're there to help others. Your own mental health is not addressed or acknowledged, but day-to-day, you have to just carry on. I think it's an overall not just for the Muslim faith, I think anybody who's passed away and they've closed up that body, they've cleaned up that bed, they've wiped the name of the board and it's been replaced with somebody else, to see that happen day in day out over and over again and it's like, oh, my God, it's just a piece of paper with the name tag, and that's what's left. By the time you've got home, you're so tired, that you're not able to address that, but you're still carrying that burden and then the next day, you wake up and start all over again. I think a lot of the mental health and the mental impact, the anxiety, all the issues that were raised in terms of wellbeing in the house, it's all just been shoved under the carpet and it's just carry on as normal.

I feel a lot of that's not been addressed. Yes, they have for wellbeing services, which they have put out, but realistically, because of the workload, nobody's got time to attend these wellbeing, unless they're giving them time off work to say this is your session for your wellbeing to recover. There's no other way that you could do that because of your home commitments, your home life, life outside of work. I feel a lot of people are still carrying all of that with them, and will it ever be addressed? Will it ever be looked into? Is it just going to one day come out in mental health?

I: Yeah. I think it's interesting thinking about being on the frontline. Can you just describe your role, in terms of supporting in terms of faith within the hospital.

R2: In terms of chaplaincy, I think the difficult part was going in and being with somebody's loved one, but they can actually see you from the other side of the corridor and yet, you've got no connection with this person, you don't know them personally, but you'll be holding their hand and there's somebody across there whose grandma or loved one it is who's longing to be on this side and there's nothing you can do for them and they know that this person is going, you know this person is going. Mentally, it's like, how do you justify that? Then you don't know what to say to the family because it's just the rules that have been set out.

But then when at the end of it, their loved ones had to go like that. Then at the end of it when the government's all got together, and it was okay for them to celebrate and have that, but yet, I think that will never come back and that will never be replaced and they just have to live with that. But you think that's something that you'd probably see in a different country, not in the UK.

I: What would your reflections be in terms of your role in the community and your role in the hospitals during the pandemic in terms of supporting community members, I guess, through almost the hardest sides of the impacts of the pandemic?

R: I think there's been a lot of really difficult situations and challenges that we did face. I think what kept me moving, was the faith itself. Had it not been for the faith, then I probably don't know where I would have been with that. You've got really difficult situations that families, loved ones, initially, were really frustrated that the hospital is not letting us in, and

then you saw all the rest junk that was going viral showing empty corridors of the hospitals and conspiracy theories and whatnot. And you go in in the hospital and I think one of the most difficult things for me was seeing staff in tears that you expect somebody's lost a loved one, you expect the family to be in tears and everybody else, but those people are saving lives trying to protect you, at the end of day, they're human beings as well and you're there to support them as well. Seeing them in such a tired and weathered and really shattered staff who are doing their utmost best, but this community is not just accepting it, not willing to accept what they are going through because of all what was really been shown and portrayed on social media.

That was, I think, out of many of the challenges, I think this was one of the biggest challenges I initially saw. Then being in that position where you are a community leader, you are a faith leader, but you just so happened to be in the depth of the pandemic on the front line, seen all that's happening on this side as well, to try to calm things. It was trying to address the communities. I was trying to do things from both ends, that the staff needed support and courage and motivation. So letting them know that we will constantly praying for them in the mosque. Because initially, everything cut off when the mosque closed, but then we came up with all these wonderful ideas because of technology. We were live on Facebook, or YouTube or the transmitter. Every week we were praying with the community over the radios. That was one collective act of worship that everybody could take part in, even though they couldn't pray the prayers, the actual five times prayers together over the transmitter, but we could lift our hands up and say a prayer, which would have been for everybody.

It was really in that message to them as well, that, "Look, you are in our thoughts and minds," and we're letting the community know that. It just unfortunately, there were times where reality struck home, that those that were wanting to go as visitors to see their loved one who's in hospital, they ended up catching the virus themselves and falling ill and then it sunk into them that, what the staff are telling us is a reality that we need to stay away from that. That took a bit of time, but it was just being in that position at that time, it was trying to think of things that what can we do to try to work amicably and support the staff and at the same time, let our communities know that, yes, we've got our faith requirements, those are priority, but these are times that are unseen and heard off and we need to try to save lives at the same time as well.

I: There's two things that you bring up there in terms of misinformation and those things, which was circulated on social media, but also how you were using social media and other mediums to connect with the community as well. But I'm interested in picking up on both of those points. I think initially, in terms of misinformation, what would your perspective be on the kinds of misinformation that might have been circulating initially around the pandemic, I guess?

R2: I think the 5G poles that were coming up, and there was all these conspiracy going around that that's to kind of kill you. The radiation is going to. I think when people are isolated, they can't go out, then they see a 5G post go up, the fear of that. I think there was a lot of fear that was put out into people, which didn't help. Other than that, I think there was quite of it, it was the jab, the injection of the vaccination, the conspiracies that you're going to be chipped. There's going to be something going into you, you're going to get ill with it. So it was all the mixed messages that were coming out and I think that created a lot of fear amongst the communities, so you had split communities, that was half that were for the injection and there was half that went for it. I think that was mentally difficult for the community because it was trying to make sense of what's actually going on.

I: Yeah. In terms of addressing that, then I think, did you find ways of contesting some of that stuff in terms of how you engage with community and some of the

messages that maybe the mosque endorsed or in order to try and contest that kind of misinformation.

R: Because I had to bring some... I'm part of the faith Leaders Group as well. We were having and when everybody started moving online, we started having our meetings, sharing ideas, thoughts, concerns, what was going on, and how are different places of worship, addressing the community and then when we thought of going online and something that many faiths didn't ever think about, but then set up a transmitter radio, circulated that and because there was the uncertainty so people were in touch, whether by phone or email or whatever they wanted to keep that attachment at the most. So we were able to share with them that we are reaching out to you on these platforms, do look out and if you've got any concerns or whatever. Then throughout the lockdowns on and off, whenever we were able to have our prayers in the mosque as well.

Our Friday sermons and prayers and everything was addressing whatever challenge it was, that this is what we need to look out for. This is a neutral platform, our faith is teaching us this, we are going through this, and this is how we would want you to tackle it. There was the positive messages going out as well, which really helped. At the same time, people seeing the reality on the frontline and the reality was sinking in as well. But I can remember, initially, that when we set u... From the mosque we set up many projects, because mosques had closed down for congregation, but we were still working on the front line, and see what was happening, and then bring it back and thinking how communities can still help, even though we're in lockdown.

There were things like these staff members who were working long hours, they were going home, and if you remember at that time, in the shops, you couldn't find any basic essentials, you couldn't find any tomato, you couldn't find bread, milk, and you felt really sorry for the staff who are working relentlessly and then coming home and not being able to find these things, so we set a project and asked everyone to donate food items. There are several things but then when we're taking this in into the hospitals, and the staff were in tears that, "oh gosh, really are you bringing this?" Because until now all that we faced is abuse. Because at that time people are fighting and wanting to get into the hospital because of their loved ones.

They weren't used to ever being turned away from the hospital, saying that, you can't come in, and then you've got the conspiracy theories, then things were just firing up. People are putting two and two together and thinking, "No, gosh, really, that's what happened, that's happening. We can look in the windows, you can see empty corridors where are the patients, where are they going?" It was something that for everybody that, they hadn't seen before, but for, especially the Muslim community and our congregation and people that we could reach out to, we were fortunate and really blessed to be in that position, not only as a faith leader, not only as community leader, but seen what was going on in the frontline working on the frontline, but then coming back relaying these positive messages that from a faith perspective and point of view, what are our next steps and what we should be doing in this kind of difficult situation. We were able to reach out, it wasn't the same thing as reaching out on a Friday prayer, we get thousands of people, but through that communication was still really helpful for those people that we were able to help.

I: You mentioned injections and so on. I think it's a topic which is not gonna lose its relevance or interest, I think. What was your perspective of the community's response to things like testing, access to testing, and then later on, I guess, the vaccinations when they come through.

R: Everybody had their own experience and whatever information was put in front of them and whatever they were seeing. What I was seeing being on the front line, seeing

many people passing away, then taking information from our faith, what does the faith teach us to do in a difficult time like that to protect our lives and put our lives, the safety and sanctity of life as a priority. As soon as the jabs were offered, and to our best of information that we were given the information from the NHS, from the medical directors, and then from Islamic experts as well that this was all fine, that this is what we should do. As soon as they were offered, I took one myself, and then I was able to tell my congregation that, "Look, there are those stories outside, but me as an Imam as a faith leader and working out there, I've seen what's happening and because of that, I think it's piety that I need to save my life and protect my life and I would suggest and recommend everybody else and if you've got any medical issues, do consult your GP or whoever you can any medical expert, but I can tell I'm not only propagating this and preaching this, but I have had my jabs as well.

I think that it's these kinds of things that, they really calm down the communities. So I said, it's not only because of my work, but looking at from a faith point of view, that it is a priority that we need to do the utmost best to try and protect our lives, that if there was any doubt about something, then you probably would not have taken that step. But experts that know a lot better than us about the jabs that we can say that should go ahead. It did mean a huge difference.

I: And so, you know, thinking about, again, testing other interventions, wearing of masks, PPE and that kind of thing. What was the wider sort of perception of that do you think in the community more widely, and did it change over time, or?

R2: I think it was scary for patients to see everybody coming to them looking like robots, because they couldn't differentiate who's male, who's female, who's coming to them. I think one, it was scary as a whole being in hospital, I think because there was conspiracy theories about people who were going in or not coming out of hospital, which was the case for some people unfortunately. People had that fear inside them, patients had to fear and then seeing stuff coming to them all dressed in white, and they can't see their faces, they've got these big masks in front of them. I think that was quite, for them it wasn't a nice experience in the community and then they're telling their loved ones, this is what it's looking like over the phone. That's creating fear among them as well.

I: Yeah. Then I think, I guess, come aware of time. But I'm thinking, what do you think the main needs of the community were kind of, I guess, at the height of the pandemic and then compared to where we are now? And I'll ask the same question in a moment to you, but initially, what do you think the main needs of the community have been in the worst moments of the pandemic? And what do you think they are looking forward?

R2: I think just being able to come together as a community, just having that Friday prayers, even if it is with social distancing, having them facilities in place where people are allowed to come out and have that prayer, whether it be in a park, whether it be in an open space, just having that spirituality, having that faith, having that connection. I think that in itself is kind of important. Moving forward, I think, a lot of mental health issues need to be addressed, a lot of anxiety that people have had the side effects of the vaccination people have had. These are all questions that have not been answered. It's like, okay, they weren't given the benefits of the vaccination, but then, unfortunately, the people who it wasn't successful for, it's just like, that's it, live with your condition now.

I feel they're having to deal with the consequences with no answers. So moving forward, I feel there should be something addressed or some sort of support network or some sort of compensation in that to say that, "Okay, we weren't aware of these, this is what's gone wrong, but then this is what we're able to do for you, this is a sport, this is the help. These

are to help you recover, to help... Next time there's a pandemic and they put out the new vaccinations, because of the side effects that other people have encountered, it will make the community reluctant to move forward, will hang on this happened to such and such person and they will find pre-COVID. They will be reluctant to have that vaccination.

I: I guess they're the same question in terms of what do you think the needs were in the hardest moments of the pandemic and what do you think the needs are as of this moment looking forward, I guess?

R: I think even before COVID, life was tough for many, many people, and it just made it harder in the COVID, that people not being able to congregate together, not being able to see each other face to face, not being able to meet each other. Yes, there would have been many, where the elderly or the people that can't even communicate, they don't know how to use the social media, especially the elderly, then it's a language barrier for some that not even been able to make a phone call, they don't know how to do it. Then when you sit down with somebody and it's like coming, sometimes it feels like coming out of a big battle, you don't know who's lost who. I just met somebody today after two and a half years. I didn't have his number. I didn't know whether he was alive or not, or whatever, I knew that he was suffering from cancer just before the pandemic.

I was just dreading, I don't know who can I ask and is he still alive, yet to know. I just met him today after two and a half years. It just makes you feel at times that you're coming out from a battle and it's going to take decades to kind of... Whether we are going to recover or not is a separate issue, but that all these people that have suffered, and you will still be hearing about, oh, you know, that person, he lost his life and he was gone as well. Many that we have seen but as a faith leader in the community, we lost many people in our congregation, there would have been... There were many occasions that I would end up on the end-of-life stage of a patient, and when I meet the family, they will say, "Oh, yes, he would come to the mosque, and he would be behind you."

They would be so glad that I was there, but at the same time that we saw that we losing a person. It was difficult enough anyway, but then not being able to meet, greet, communicate, talk, and I'm afraid the reason why it's extremely busy, many people will come up just to meet and greet you, that connection, that physical connection, they want to offer you something or ask you something or ask for a request for prayers, that means so much to them and that keeps them motivated until next Friday. So this was all missing. This wasn't there. I'm really, really thankful for all faith leaders. Initially, the government didn't think about and close down all the place of worship.

But then later on when this consultation and these talks were going on that no faith places must stay open, that is the only thing that keeps everything moving, because people are passing away anyway. But why make it even far worse for them that they are passing away without having any blessing, any prayers or being able to go to a place of worship or donate any money because that is a priority in everybody. And then there was this conversation that we had as well that there were many people who didn't identify themselves as following a particular faith. What would you have to say about that?

What we saw... Working as a chaplain in a multi-faith setting, it's not that Muslims only see Muslims only or Christians only see a Christians, you're there for anybody and everybody, and you there for those individuals that don't believe in any faith at all. The pandemic taught us that they had a faith, everybody believes in something, whatever. They might not believe in a God, but they believe in hope and goodness and kindness, and they want to be in somebody's thoughts and prayers. All these things were really missing, and what might seem like the virus has gone away, or going away, or whatever, the problems and issues

that has created, I'd be really hoping and praying that, but I can't see any ending sight. I don't think that all the problems and issues are going to be sorted out in our lifetime.

This is across all faiths. Those staff members that had been on the front line, we see that around us some are losing their lives for one reason or another, but they have been through really difficult times. That was them and those people at home. There are many people who lost the mother, the father, the child and several members of families and then during the pandemic heard about, oh, he's lost 25 members of her family, he's lost, or she's lost 32 members of her family. It does in some ways, makes you feel like it was a battle people losing their lives and we haven't been able to reconnect. As I said, seeing somebody today after two and a half years, and it's probably going to take all our lifetime to try and recover, but those issues, they still exist. In many cases we would say that you need to go even more severe rather than going away, because people have issues of anxiety of their mental health of their wellbeing and whilst other people might seem like life is moving on, they would probably feel that we've been ignored, that nobody's interested in this, whether it's from top level or locally, or whatever, that there's no real support for us.

I: Yeah. Is there anything that you think I've missed having asked couldn't know about not being in the spaces that you've both been in that you think needs to be mentioned and documented?

R: Well, I think we've slightly covered but moving forward, I think a lot of help and support is required and needed, we cannot just go forward blindfolded or happy thinking that everything's sorted, everything's in place, we don't need to wear masks anymore. That's a separate issue. But the problems and especially the Muslim community, the challenges that they faced, they are deep rooted, they embedded, they still exist. Mental health and wellbeing and anxiety and depression and the diets and the way of living and everything, that already existed that this has exposed that these are really serious issues that need to be addressed and they became far worse in the pandemic. All these issues do really need to be looked at seriously. We can't really deceive ourselves and think that, "No, it's fine, things have moved on." No, they have become far more serious, because they are getting heated, so we need to really pinpoint them in the best possible manner.

I: It has been implied... sorry, go on...

R2: I think for frontline staff, I think, because they're wearing normal masks, patients are coming in but they don't know their COVID status. They've interacted with that patient when the COVID test has been taken a day or two later, the result has come back as positive, but that member of staff has been exposed to that person, but then that person has gone home and interacted with their family. These are issues that are not being addressed. How will like now they're saying that it's on a rise, the cases are on a rise again, but then this is probably the problem people are coming in, they don't know their status, normal staff or looking after them exposed, but then that staff is looking after other patients as well. That's something that would need to be addressed moving forward of how to tackle certain issues of or how to keep the numbers down to a minimum.

I: Yeah, what I was gonna say is, it's been implied that the impacts for the Muslim communities in Birmingham has been heavy. I'm just kind of reiterating in terms of your perspective, do you feel like it was significantly disproportionate within the Muslim community compared with other communities in Birmingham? What would your experience kind of say to that?

R2: I think due to the isolation, you don't really know what was going on with it, anybody... For me, I wouldn't have known what was going in other faiths. In my chaplain role, what I would do is, I would go out and reach out to other faiths, just to see if they're

okay, how they're doing because that's humanity regardless of your faith. If your loved one is isolated, so are they. The struggle I think was there from my experience from what I seen, was there for all faiths. I think everybody was in the same kind of boat. I don't know about your experience you might have encountered something different.

R: I think it was a bit of both. When you ask about faith communities, I think all faith communities face their own challenges. When you talking about Asian communities, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Indians, because of the country that they originate from, there were separate issues. They could have been issues like the language barrier, especially the elderly generation that they're already ill and sick, they don't know what's going on, they're getting misinformed about things, but then they don't have access to the website or social media or even making a phone call could be a struggle for them. Yes, when you're talking about the Asian communities, so Muslim communities separate issue. When you're talking about Asian communities, yes, I think they suffered far more than other people of other countries and backgrounds, simply because there was issues, I think, an example, there was a time where a female came in and she was really terrified because she couldn't speak the language and she had heard all this, that anybody who's coming in, they don't come out again.

She wasn't used to being alone at any time. She had limited family members, she just had a brother or something, and even that brother wasn't allowed and she was absolutely terrified. So there would have been many, many examples like that. Muslims face challenges, because of the rigid requirements that the faith has when it comes to burial, about mourning, about being there for the final moments, and Muslims are always so used to being there being called in and being part of that process, because we believe the journey of the soul is leaving this world and going into the next, so everybody would want to be there at that time, which normally doesn't probably happen in the same way with other faiths. Those were challenges that the Muslims already faced, but then because of being an Asian, and especially if it's an elderly person, or whatever, there were further challenges.

It just made life much more difficult. When we would talk amongst other faith leaders, everybody was facing their own challenge, but I think compared to that, Muslims faced a lot and then the Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian in general, that they faced a lot more that they were losing quite a lot of family members and then not having the correct information. Then sometimes it probably could have been a challenge that getting into the hospital, and not getting the full support that they would have been able to receive at normal times, because staff end of day were human beings as well, are short staffed or not having the right facilities in place to be able to inform the families and the loved ones. Sometimes there weren't any loved ones that these individuals had. It was a big struggle and I would certainly agree that yes, Asians and Muslims suffered a lot in Birmingham, because of these various factors.

I: Yeah. Is there anything else you wanted to add?

R2: I think the women in labour as well not having their birthing partner with them, in that difficult because they weren't allowed in up until the right last minute. I think that was quite difficult. Again, like he's just said, the language barrier. These women were terrified because they've come in, they don't know the language, they've probably never experienced birth before and they're having to go through that without the partner and then they don't know whether they will be allowed in or won't be allowed in, or are they going to miss it. Whilst going through all of that, the mental torture of that as well and being terrified of being in hospital at the same time as well. Some of the effects of that, but none of that's been taken up to see what the after effect is of all of that.

I: Okay. Well, thank you both, honestly. Your time is very much appreciated.

Focus group 2

Date: 27/07/2022

Duration: 01:24:23

Participant Characteristics: R – male, lead role in an Islamic Trust Organisation; R2 – female, organisational lead for a Muslim charity; R3 – male, works for a Muslim charity; R4 – male, community leader representing a large Mosque in Handsworth bordering Aston; R5 – male, works for a Muslim charity; R6 – community leader representing one of the largest Mosques in the city located in Small Heath.

Number of participants: 6

Key:-

Interviewer – I

Respondent – R

Respondent – R2

Respondent 3 – R3

Respondent 4 – R4

Respondent 5 – R5

Respondent 6 – R6

S.l. = sounds like

I: Start on there, and I'll just start the audio.

R4: Have you got a pen? Have you got a pen on you?

I: Yeah, yeah.

R6: This is XXXX XXXX [community leader for a large Mosque in Handsworth bordering on Aston]. So, when we had our very first meeting with XXXX XXXX [director for the local public health authority], I think only three mosques turned up. There was the XXXX XXXX [the Islamic Trust Organisation], XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] if I remember and yourself [large Mosque in Handsworth bordering Aston].

R4: Actually, and XXXX [small Mosque in Alum Rock], they were there as well. That was the only meeting they actually came. They didn't come after that. that was the first...I don't think we even had any restrictions then, nothing at all. It was the very, very, very first. It was the first week of March that was. I might have some comms on that, I think.

I: Yeah, so I think, kind of, given a little bit of an overview, I think, of the project so far. I think the first thing to do, which would be useful is if we probably go round the table and just have a brief introduction to just introduce yourselves and describe any roles or responsibilities you've had in the community, or you have in the community. And perhaps an indication of whereabouts you're located with regards to either that role or where you live in the city, and that will just help us to document space and place, and those kinds of things as we move forward. So, [R1], do you want to start?

R: Oh, thanks. My name is XXXX XXXX, I work at the XXXX XXXX [the Islamic Trust Organisation], part of the community engagement team. Sorry, what else did you want to...?

I: So, essentially a description of basically that role and also, kind of where your work reaches in the community?

R: ...okay. So, part of my role at the mosque is one to make religious services more relevant and more attractive to Muslims. Number two, develop and deliver our outreach work, which is around the food bank, the public health side of things, health and equality, knife crime, climate change. And the third objective is around social justice. It's one thing giving out or helping, but then tackling the barriers, which are stopping people prospering in their communities, and quite often, we have access around the table, but we don't use it in the right way.

So, it's using those platforms now to push for policy and legislation change, so we can overcome those barriers to the issues that cause communities to be in the deprivation that they've been finding. So, hence I work...we were involved in COVID because we were doing some work with the council, and they called us for a meeting. It just started from there, and we have been involved ever since.

I: Do you want to give me an introduction?

R2: Yeah, my name is XXXX. I work with XXXX XXXX [Muslim charity organisation]. In terms of my job, I work for XXXX XXXX [a Muslim charity organisation], and we do UK projects and mission possible. Mission possible is where we take volunteers abroad and raise money, and then we do long-term, sustainable projects abroad. In terms of UK projects, we do the food bank, and then during the pandemic, we did a lot of, we did, for instance, we did the food packs. And then, it was hard to source some types of food that we were giving out, so we would source them out. We gave food packs for Ramadan, for Iftar meals. So, that's the work we did through the pandemic.

R3: My name is XXX, and I work with XXXX XXXX [Muslim charity organisation] as a digital marketing coordinator. Throughout the pandemic, I obviously did my job but also had to help with volunteers' recruitment, and volunteers, and using the local community to carry out those activities that [R2] just mentioned in the community. So, that's what I have been part of.

I: Okay.

R4: So, my name is XXXX XXXX [community leader, large Mosque in Handsworth bordering Aston], I'm just going to give you some context, so I run a mosque in Aston, Birmingham...10 minutes, a few minutes from the A2, right in the heart of the Commonwealth Games... So, just a bit of context here actually, so there are 165 mosques in Birmingham, and those guys [R; R6] actually run mosques which are really far and few between the 165 mosques you're talking about now. They're really well organisations. They set templates, they set fundamentals for everything else that spills out to other masjids, mosques in the city.

About 80 to 90 per cent of other mosques that are in Birmingham are run by people like myself who are volunteers. We have a day job, so I work for a pharmaceutical company, and apart from that I run a mosque. Everything that [R] spoke about in terms of what he does, but what [R6] is going to tell you what he is going to do, is what I encompass in my job as part of the volunteer service in my mosque. So, in for example, COVID, we did

a food bank, hot meals, mental health, knocking on doors, putting awareness for the programme.

Getting medicines for people, helping out the local hospitals, vaccinations, vaccine incentives, awareness, the whole lot that we do here for the next hour is what we did as a mosque. But more importantly was the engagement and the working, we got involved with other mosques was key to what we did during COVID. But I'm just giving you context that XXXX XXXX [R6's Mosque] and XXXX XXXX [R's Mosque] are very few organisations that are run the way they're run, so just giving context on that.

I: Yeah. Do you want to go next?

R5: Yeah. My name is XXXX and I'm a fundraising officer in XXXX XXXX [Muslim charity organisation]. Fundraising officer, pretty sure I get involved with anything, like projects even with [R3]. With [R2's] projects it was that I was mainly the driver, helping volunteers with [R3] as well, and getting all the food for the food bank, and all the shopping, and just getting people we know in our local community who have got restaurants, that are friends and stuff, they helped a big part in COVID because they were open.

A lot of places that were closed, we couldn't get the hot food. I got donated quite a lot as well from our friends who have got restaurants, and we just got involved in anything, to be honest with you. Whatever they were doing, we were helping on the floor, getting it done in any way possible. Getting shopping for your old next-door neighbour, basically anything and everything.

R3: Most of our work also was in partnership with the XXXX XXXX [R's Mosque]. So, most of the stuff, we also supported them with incentives.

I: Yeah, sure. And XXXX?

R6: Yes, I'm XXXX XXXX, I'm the centre manager at XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath]. So, when I first joined, it was in 2020, in January, and then the pandemic hit around March time. And at that time, I was head of welfare and youth, so similar to what [R] is doing in terms of the outreach work, food banks, welfare services. So, really that came to life, so we were running the food bank seven days a week at the height of the pandemic. We had a guard service, which was all the time anyway. We introduced a listening service and other services to help.

We work with other mosques, the acting wellbeing society, they were really helpful in bringing food banks together across the city. So, we worked with them quite closely. He was being modest about the work they've done because if anything, we were embarrassed in front of him because we have paid staff doing the work that those guys are doing on a voluntary basis, and they're doing just as much as we are. So, we're going to reward them for that. So, yeah, like the others have said, the mosques really came together, regardless of the backgrounds of the mosques and everybody really came together.

The community all wanted to help everybody, for example, we put a call out for volunteers to deliver food, within the first few days we had 150 people saying they wanted to drive and deliver food. We launched a PPE campaign in collaboration with other mosques, and then a local business called XXXX. So, we produced around about a quarter of a million pounds worth of free PPE to give to the NHS, which we did.

R4: A million masks

R6: And the million mask campaign as well, where we asked mosques to distribute mask materials, so their members could sew it. And people, just the general public, the wider public would come and pick up material that they could take home and sew, and then give out to family and friends.

R4: Funeral services.

R6: Funeral services, yeah. We had an emergency COVID funeral service, so we have our own mortuary but because of the increase of deaths in the community, we had to have a makeshift container in our car park, and we partnered with central funeral services, but again, all the mosques came together on that. I think the weekly meetings with [the Local Public Health Authority] were very beneficial. That was a platform for us to all meet together and to discuss the issues that the community were facing. And on the whole, I think the issues were heard and actions were taken.

R4: The main issue, I'm jumping straight in again.

I: **No, that's fine.**

R4: When we realised that there was going to be a total shutdown, while the things were still on standby, the here and now the need was two or three things, one was food. And if you remember those days, we were running short on food, there's nothing out there, people queuing up and even those who were in the hospitals and working, the NHS staff, they would not even be able to buy food. So, food was one of the major issues we had. The second was, of course, those who had been isolated, for them, their mental wellbeing. The listening service, that was key. And the third biggest issue was about awareness about COVID, the impact of it, and then subsequently the vaccination.

These three were big umbrella points at this point, and we tried to touch base with the council, [Local Public Health Authority], were there was police, were there was authorities, politicians, everyone got together at that point. And most of us were meeting with the Acton Wellbeing Society, Birmingham City Council, The Bower Trust. You'll see a lot of those examples being shared, and I'm sure, there's one from the guy, the filmmaker?

R6: Yeah, yeah, so it's all documented.

R4: He's done a fantastic job, what was happening at the point, but it's worth actually putting into. But also around the table should have been someone like the [a national Islamic Governance Organisation], who did a fantastic job doing that. I mean, they were one of the leading organisations which helped us to understand guidance, and break it down to a local level, and to understand what that means for us in our mosque, in our supplementary school. Online, if you remember one of the key things we did was go digital. Again, that was really important for the mental wellbeing of our community because they could not come out. For many of us, for thousands of our elderly population, coming to the mosque was the only thing that they would have on a daily basis.

R6: BMA as well.

R4: BMA as well actually.

R6: The British Medical Association. So, they gave guidance, you know, many of the members, congregation members from the mosques, so they were able to come and speak to the congregation members as Muslims, as medical professionals to give them the facts, to bust any myths that were being circulated because there were a lot, so they were there.

I: So, I guess I'll just throw a question to the room, and the more that you talk with each other, the more helpful that'll be for me. And by all means, I'm approaching this, you know, leading a research project but not having lived through the experiences that we're documenting. So, if there are things I'm missing, by all means redirect the conversation and bring your insights in. But I think going back to the beginning, you were talking about initially, the first lockdown, and thinking about the implications for that. and I guess, what was the level of concern in and around, or within the community at that time in terms of how long this might go on? Or what the worst of it might look like if that makes sense?

R4: We have the biggest one here, so they should.

R: Concern was one of the places, I I don't think it really hit in until after the lockdown. I mean, we all knew it was coming over the months because it was in China, then in the Middle East, then Europe, so we knew it was going to happen at some point. We had that initial meeting with XXXX XXXX [director of the local public health authority], it was only, what, three or four of us I think? And XXXX XXXX [director of the local public health authority] had visited a few mosques. And then, we had a bigger meeting in XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] where we all met. I think we need to be proud of the fact that all of the mosques had decided to close before the lockdown voluntarily. That was our first ever joint decision by the way.

That needs to be remembered. And it wasn't at XXXX's [director of the local public health authority] say so. He was saying I think most people in the mosque were saying no, no, up until the government doesn't say we're not going to do it also. Then, it was two doctors who spoke. I mean, I don't think they were meant to speak. They then said look, you guys can say what you like, but we are working in the hospitals, and we can tell you this is what. Were you there? Yeah. And we can tell you...so, they reached out to hearts and minds, but XXXX [director of the local public health authority] was more the scientific, the, and I think everything just went silent. And then, the majority of mosques then had said yeah, we will. Because it was, I think two days before jummah. Everyone said, well let's get this jummah out the way, then we'll close.

But then, they all decided okay, we're going to close. I think there were a couple of other mosques, including the XXXX Trust [Islamic trust organisation] said look, we just need to talk to trustees. So, then all those mosques closed, and I think that made it easier for other mosques to close when they see the majority. It gets harder when...so, I think it was just filtering into people what's going on, what's not going on, is it happening? When they see the mosques doing it, then it hits reality. So, I think we got in there pretty quick. It didn't help like, we had Khalid Mahmood make some comments not long afterwards saying it's the Muslim community that's causing the spread of COVID, and the mosques.

So, I think it took a little while, because we are social animals, our community. It's a shock to everyone. I don't think it would have been something that would have been new for anyone. I think with us, there's nothing we do that's not social. We meet five times a day, Friday prayers, so of course it would impact us more. And just not knowing. It's only when you start hearing more deaths. I think even illness doesn't bother people because we've faced health inequalities for decades, you know? So, diabetes, high cholesterol, you know, what we feel, for us it's normal. But when you start seeing more funerals take place.

R6: As soon as the death announcements. Somebody writes a status this person has passed away, this person has passed away, and it just kept on coming. And that's when I think people really took it seriously.

R4: Yeah. I remember when, so you'll hear XXXX's [director of the local public health authority] name quite a bit, by the way. It's worth making the point to him. So, XXXX [director of the local public health authority], I think [R] introduced us to XXXX [director of the local public health authority], and I managed to get XXXX [director of the local public health authority] to our mosque, it was the first mosque he came to. And I remember him walking in, it was a Friday, the Friday before we shut down, right okay. And imagine this is like everything is, in his eyes, where he is seeing it from, it's a ticking timebomb. A packed, packed mosque with nearly a thousand people inside the mosque. He walks in, he is looking around, and all he can see is heads. And all he can see is this is a disaster.

He stands up, and I, he's a very soft person, but he is a very strong-minded person, right? And he walks in, he stands up and says I don't know what to say to you guys, but you need to just...this is what is coming your way, you need to decide what you have to do. And it hit home really badly. So, again, as you can appreciate for us, as I said earlier on, on a weekly basis, on a Friday, thousands of Muslims around Birmingham meet together on every single Friday. And that's an outlet for all of us, right?

When we had to announce that our mosques were going to close from, this is the last prayers, people were crying. I saw men, big, burly men crying their eyes out that day because there's no mosque after that. For us, it's not just closing off four walls, or four doors here, it was closing off the ability to practice their faith in a secure space that was there for them. And that was a pretty hard experience for all. I've never experienced somewhere that we didn't said they didn't have to shut a mosque.

R: It was, yeah, it was very hard. Our CEO, XXXX, he was sitting in this chair, I still remember, he was in tears. He says the only thing he's ever known, he's trying to get people to come to the mosque, and this is the first time having to deal with a decision where you're shutting the mosque down. And he really felt like look, it wasn't a decision he could make by himself, he made sure, which is consultation. The Imams were brought in to discuss it all. So, it was a very difficult decision for everybody.

R6: It was difficult. I think like many mosque leaders had that experience. We found that the XXXX XXXX [R's Mosque], 'cause normally our older folk, they're quite feisty, they don't let you get away with anything. When we announced that we're voluntarily closing, we didn't have kick back from anybody in our mosque, and I think deep inside, they were relieved, but nobody wanted to suggest it because they felt it's a mosque, it's not for us to say that we should close it. Everybody said good decision. No more than that. There was no patting on the back, everyone felt it. It felt really...but we were geared up that we have to make this case, everyone remained silent.

R4: Yeah. We did get a few pushbacks, but I tell you what, I'm telling you my own experience that I was convinced in my head that I was doing the right thing religiously by the way, yeah. I work for a pharmaceutical company and I know what I did was the right thing at that point to make that call. But you always question yourself and you're just thinking have I just taken the right approach, and you question saying how long do you think? In our heads it's going to be two, three weeks, sharp, done, and that's it, it's going to come back to normal. With that in mind, we said incidentally yes, but even at that point, I remember having massive arguments in the mosque at that point because I wanted to still continue the running of the mosque in some shape or form, not with people in, but something or the other.

And I remember saying this, I went out with the tagline saying closed for accommodation but not for community. I went out with that tagline. I went out everywhere and said look, we can't run the mosque five times. We'll have one person coming in to do the prayers, but we'll reach out to the community, and that's the essence of what we tried to do. I did not want for us to have a despaired next few weeks of not going to the mosque and

not speaking to your relatives, not going to see your own grandkids or your grandparents. All that bits and pieces. We wanted to reach out to somebody, and that's where these big boys, they came to the party saying okay, what can we do? And that's how we're here two years down the line being able to help the community.

R: I just want to add to that because it's going to sound very small now, but at the time it wasn't. Now, most people at that time hadn't ever heard of Zoom. Zoom is a household name now. For us at the XXXX XXXX [Islamic Trust Organisation], we've been using Zoom two years before the pandemic. We've been using it for our action work and various. So, Zoom was this new thing because Teams was a thing then, Skype only survived with three, four people at most, even then. So, that's a tool we had at our disposal to say okay, how can...because working with mosques at that time was very crucial, like we had certain conversations with XXXX [community engagement officer] and with Dr XXXX [director of the local public health authority], I remember three of us thinking do we call mosques in?

Like city council had strict rules with XXXX [director of the local public health authority] saying well, I can't be there, then calling other mosques together in a room was breaking all the protocols, it didn't make sense. So, we said we've got Zoom, let's try this. In fact, the first thing, even before the mosque meeting, we did a community Q&A for everyone. But the Zoom thing, I mean, the whole world latched onto it afterwards, but at that time, the council, they didn't have Zoom, and they didn't buy it. They didn't spend £120 until nine months later. They used our Zoom account for every single community meeting, not just within the Muslim, because one there was a security issue with Zoom. Zoom is owned by the Chinese, so everything goes through their servers, and Skype and Teams, so there was partly that.

So, we found that Zoom worked so well because it felt at that time, you're all on one screen, you can talk, and we had access to XXXXX [director of the local public health authority] and XXXX [community engagement officer]. So, XXXX [community engagement officer] was brought in from prevent. Yes, seconded. He didn't come in with a prevent background because actually he did a good job, but he also didn't hide that's the background I come from, so I think people bought into that. But he was very good at pushing a Muslim narrative to say this is how we need to. So, we were all like okay, we're getting very vague guidelines from the government. It was a little while before we got more, but XXXX [director of the local public health authority] really helped us break it down, and then we were only a month away from Ramadan, so Ramadan is coming, what do we?

Jumma is one thing, like, even people who don't pray will always come for Friday prayers, but now we've got Ramadan, what do we do here? So, Zoom allowed us at a very strange time to stay very connected with each other, that allowed us to see each other and have meetings, but the meetings were always recorded, and then they'd go out in the public domain. So, anything we had to share with our congregation, we'd say look, it's not just us making this up, here it is with XXXX [director of the local public health authority], and here we are working with all the other mosques together. And I think that helped us build a lot of public confidence, and we were able to sound bite and pick up things. So, that was quite a crucial thing in the beginning. I think that bit, all of us working together, and then I think that also led to...there was also a Whatsapp group, which complemented that. So, we created the Zoom, XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] created the Whatsapp group. City council created the email address, and then everyone used each other's, you know, like XXXX XXXX Mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] worked on the risk assessments.

R4: Absolutely, that was brilliant that was.

R: So, we all used all these tools at our disposal, which put huge public confidence into what we were doing. We all just had information at our fingertips, and I think we'll be so much more clued up the next time if something happens.

R4: But also what's interesting is the reliability of the council and on faith organisations, Muslim organisations. I think that's where they realised, I'm not going to say the power, the influence that we had over the community. We have a large Muslim population in Birmingham, and they realised quickly that they could shout as much as they want, it was not going to go through, unless they got the faith involved. And that I think really worked for all of us, to be honest.

I: Yeah. And I wanted to ask, I mean, I think by way of your communication, and all of the efforts that we've been talking about, did that have implications for the community trust and [the National Public Health Authority] then, or [the local public health authority]?

R: [Local public health authority], yes. I don't know about [national public health authority].

I: Yeah. I just mean in terms of the name of it...?

R: No, no, they're two separate. So, this is [the local public health authority] Birmingham City Council. I do think, again, it's largely to XXXX [director of the local public health authority] because he comes from a minority group himself. So, he understands the community separately, you know, he would change his own terminology. He doesn't use the word mosques, he uses the word masjids. He learnt about our funerals. So, he talks to us in languages we get. He would listen to us separately. I think XXXX [community engagement officer] playing, I do think that is a one off. I don't think city council have learnt from that because we're working with [the local public health authority] since. They've gone back to how they used to work before. I think he played a large role in that, and it was done in a way that every mosque is empowered, and also if people snitched on certain mosques. Yeah, they were very good.

So, instead of coming down hard on them, they'd call one of us and say look, we have received some intelligence on this mosque, could you speak to them and offer them help or support? Yeah, help them. They were good in that sense. So, I don't believe at that time anything that we needed, compared to what we were getting from [the national public health authority], or the government, very vague and it was do what you feel is right, but remember if you don't do it right, you'll get prosecuted. While here, we had the police onboard too, like for instance the taraweeh prayer. We were allowed certain extra allowances because [the local public health authority] and the police had decided, well, we're going to allow this, we won't enforce it.

But the community needs this, and these are the grey areas. And then, over time, like each lockdown we had was slightly different, and it became even more vague than the first. The first one was easy, just don't go out. The other ones were weird, they were like do this, but don't do this. So, we were able to get that, and I actually even recall, like XXXX XXXX [R6's] Mosque, for instance, we had two different spectrums of our listening service, but we would have between me and XXXX [lead for the Islamic Trust Organisation], we would have lots of personal discussions on what we're doing separately to learn from each other. I don't believe that's ever happened before.

I: And is that ongoing now? Those relationships?

R4: Yeah, Yeah. Seriously, we have never seen it like this and *insh'Allah* will be celebrating the second year of the amazing work that's happened within us. It's 21st of August, isn't it? The next one?

R: The date changes, doesn't it, yeah?

R4: Yeah, it's 21st of August, I think. But we came together just to recognise the work we've done collectively, and we hope it should continue as it is. I just want to touch base on what he said about XXXX [director of the local public health authority]. One thing about him was that we also, most mosques run supplementary schools in the evening, and don't forget, those days schools were still running. The schools were the last ones to close. But then, we were in that conundrum to think okay, our mosque is closed, but the supplementary school can still be open. But then XXXX [director of the local public health authority] helped us through that process. Do you remember, [R]?

We shut down everything at that point, even our *Madrassas* were shutdown at that point. We didn't go ahead with our *Madrassa* piece of work. But then, the process how he was speaking to [the national public health authority], going back and forth, and back to understand how does that work? He literally became the voice for the Muslims and other faith organisations within Birmingham. It would be like a congregation between us in Birmingham, and probably England, or even the government. As much as he could really.

R: Yeah, and he was very tactful. He wanted to be critical of guidelines, but then that helped us because he was tactfully, like, he has to be careful what he says because he knows this is going in the public. But it allowed us to empathise with what he is going through, and then we could have separate conversations with him, which were not. So, we had access to what we needed at the time.

R4: The videos that you guys made as well at that point. They had a fantastic media team in XXXX [R6's Mosque], and they would make these videos to say okay, this is what it looks like for COVID, this is what you should be doing, wash your hands, this, that, and the other. And that was the template for all of us. We just changed the name, and just whack it out. It was brilliantly done in those days actually. And if you see it, it might be the same thing compared to you and I doing it, it makes a huge difference actually.

I: **And so, I think you mentioned the first lockdown was straightforward, shall we say, rather than more complicated as time went on. But thinking about what were the...I guess, if we think about a period in time where there's maybe access to testing, there isn't a vaccination programme yet, maybe the peak of that first lockdown where it's one hour outside for exercise, or whatever the rules were.**

What was the impact within the community within that timeframe, and when did things start to become more of a concern in terms of numbers of deaths within the community as you describe, where people are seeing the Whatsapp notifications, and so on, and so forth? Can we just look at that period of time and I guess, before there's a vaccination available, and as things are starting to get...the pressure is starting to mount, and we're realising it's going to last a bit longer?

R: I want to bring...because you guys were on the streets. Because these are, I mean, they're not saying much, but I want to...they were engaged, they got a lot of youth involved. They did all the training on social distancing and all the stuff we were going through, and they had a team of volunteers, just like all the other mosques, who were going out to people and knocking on doors, and meeting people because I think for some of those people, some of them it was the only time they were actually meeting people. So, what kind of experiences did you guys get?

R2: So, we had like 40 volunteers that were onboard. We had a Whatsapp group with them, so we'd get calls in from different types of people to say they needed food delivered. Normally with food packs, we normally do it around our community area, but then obviously if we'd get a call from a different area, we wouldn't let them down, we'd be like okay, we'll deliver. But then, it's just about making a conversation because if the person alone, it's just about how they're doing, how they're coping, and I mean, there were some people we delivered to, if they had COVID, then it was a bit hard to have a conversation with them at the door, it's just we'd had to leave it there and go. I mean, there were people struggling really hard, like who had no families or anyone here to talk to. So, even on the phones at times, you could tell that there were people who just wanted to talk to someone, they didn't want a food pack, they just wanted to talk to someone on the phone.

I: Yeah. and how about people that were isolating?

R5: We'd have to leave it on the door. I was talking to them through a small open window, standing across the road shouting, and he was like thank you, brother, I was literally on my last pack of cereal or something. And you know, they would just, the most we were doing is just walking around our room, you can't do nothing. They were watching TV, Netflix, whatever. Like you said, just pick up the phone and have a five-minute conversation to keep them sane. It was difficult.

R4: [R2]? No, no, you go first.

R2: I think we had a lot of, well, mental health obviously, a lot of people were distressed. But I had personal family members that...my sister was going through major problems in London, and because everyone was dealing with COVID, there wasn't...there is already a struggle for mental health support for our community that understand the ethnic backgrounds, and there was no support for her. So, there was no...because she's also based in London, she's moved back to Birmingham now, no GPs wanted her, no one-on-one, would keep her waiting for hours and hours. It was a very difficult situation for mental health people, and us, me being at home, I was working in London first, then I moved to Birmingham and got a job here.

But it was very hard for the families to be able to cater for something that they don't...or give that support that the medical professionals should be giving. And I think that was...I lost one good friend of mine to suicide in COVID, and all this stuff is, I think a lot of people suffered mental health-wise, even myself dealing with all of that, and not knowing what to do next. There was no help because everything was COVID, COVID, COVID. But I think the people that were suffering from other illnesses or mental health issues, I think were not neglected, but forgotten about, or left to the side, and those people didn't know where to go for that support. So, I think mental health played a big part.

The people that we spoke to, like mentioned, when our volunteers would build a relationship with the people that they were meeting because that's the only interactions that they would have. So, I think, and also being a faith organisation, it's from our religion to go and help our neighbours, you know? And I think a lot of people were interested in volunteering and being part of this work because they wanted to be able to serve the community when it's most needed. And that's why a lot of people came forward.

R5: But also, some of them, sorry to your point, they were going through their own mental health, they didn't want to stay indoors. It was getting to them staying indoors, they wanted to get active, back in the community, and I had two brothers that approached me and said brother, if I didn't have this, I don't know what I would be doing or where my mental state would be.

I: In terms of volunteering?

R5: In terms of volunteering, yeah.

R3: There's a sense of satisfaction and being able to say I've done something to help the suffering that's around.

I: Yeah. And do you think as time went on, sorry.

R4: No, I was just going to say that interesting hearing from these because it was young people that actually really came out during this time. And I remember, it's all bringing back now, so I would have gone mad actually, to be honest, if I didn't do what I did at that point. I literally would have gone mental. I decided to not stay at home for a single day, not because I didn't want to stay at home, but because I needed to do something. So, I took my three kids every single day, I'd go to the mosque, we'd pack stuff.

We spoke about the Active XXXX Society, they were one of the key, absolutely key organisations in this entire food distribution network that was created in Birmingham. [R's Mosque] was part of it, and we were part of it. They filtered the requests that came in, so what would happen is if I need food, I'd call you as a mosque, I'll call them as a mosque, I'll call them as a mosque, I'll call XXXX XXXX [Muslim charity organisation], and before you know it, they were having a full house. We were trying to make sure at a time where everything was rationed, to make sure it gets filtered down the correct way.

R5: But once we pinpointed them, we gave them a chance. For me personally, I'm not going to lie, I don't let anything go like that. As an organisation they will, but me personally, there was one lady, she done it. I seen another guy going with a bag, I stopped him. I said bruv, where are you from? He explained where he's from, I go do not give that food parcel there now. I've given one, give that to somebody else. If she asks why not? Tell her why you're not giving her because she had different people opening the door.

She had different people opening the door and giving the food. So, once you have one, she phoned us again and I said to them directly, basically, put me on the phone to her. I broke it down and she just said, look, I'm sorry, I just needed more food. I go not a problem, if you needed more food, you tell us, and we will give you more food. We don't want you cheating other charities or us for food packages. She said to me the food pack is not here. I delivered it myself.

R4: If you remember, hoarding was a big issue.

R: Toilet paper became an issue.

R4: Toilet paper, oh my god. That was a massive one. So, it was important that every time we get calls, requests, we would tell the Active XXXX Society. When we started off, we were doing like, two parcels a day because the first bit that was there was about reaching out to people to speak to them, and understand those who are isolating. And the next phase immediately within two weeks was food. Food was just...so we started going with parcels, and we put up a huge box outside a mosque, and we started on our YouTube saying right guys, we're collecting food. Every single day for the next year and a half that food box would be full. Every single day, not a single day when it was not full, right?

And we started building up a food bank, and my team used to say what are you talking about these things? And where are we going to deliver? What are we going to do? I said look, it's a marathon, it's not a race, hold on, hold on, hold on. And then, once we

knew what is going to happen with the Active XXXX Society, we started off. We averaged about seven a day, we reached 116 a day. 116 food parcels on one single day, and that day I put a stop, and I said to the Active XXXX Society, we need to have a better mechanism than this. It'll break the team completely right now. basically, there would be a queue outside of my mosque because my rule was that you'd come, you'd park the car there, we will put it inside your car, you take the car out and go back again.

But it was a huge queue outside my mosque because imagine delivering 100, so you need at least 15 of us to go and deliver these parcels now. Eventually, we managed to deliver more than 10,000 food parcels from our mosque alone, but that was a huge task, you see. And that's what people like Active XXXX Society, even XXXX XXXX the MP, he was quite at the centre of all this, he helped out quite a bit. There were other organisations like XXXX XXXX, and stuff, they came to the party with what we were doing with the food parcels. But after all of this, right, the basic element of what we were trying to do was to make sure that we're there for the community, and the community trusts the process.

And we did a bit of research as to how many Muslims we were helping is how many Muslims they were helping out from the door. It was quite stark because it was not even touching the demographics of our area. So, where we serve, we've got a 50 per cent Muslim population, and then 50 or 40 per cent non-Muslim population. But what we were helping was completely across. We were about 20 to 25 Muslim population, and about 80 to 75 per cent was the non-Muslim population. You see, the network or the family set up is quite different within the Muslim community than it is for the Caucasian. It's okay.

I mean, I'm not saying it's good or bad, but then loneliness, the fact they're alone, the fact that they have no recourse to food and everything, that was really. And touch wood, you know, may God accept the efforts that we all have made, but it just made sure that we were able to showcase the work the Muslim community were doing to an enormous extent, it was brilliant. And don't forget, XX XXXX [a high profile sports personality] helped quite a bit, by the way.

R: I just want to add to that about some of the issues in the community doing that first. If I remember correctly, the issues that we were having, one was the hospital admissions because you had people passing away, and the news was just full of gloom, and everyday you just get the figures rising, rising, rising. People feel ill, they're afraid to call 999 or to go to hospital because they thought we're going to end up dying, or we're going to be on our own, or they're going to kill us.

R4: The kill us was the main one.

R: Yeah, yeah. So, conspiracy theories was also a big factor in people's mental health. And I don't blame people for feeling the kind of things they were feeling, whether they're right or wrong, But because we've just been through Brexit, which was a very toxic debate, where people just don't know who to believe, and you hear so many other things. At that time, you had the 5G going. They're locking us down, so they can put 5G. People had genuine concerns, and I had a number of conversations with XXXX [director of the local public health authority] that do not tell people you're stupid for listening to conspiracy theories, educate them, empathise with them. Because the moment you say you're a looney, you've lost them. You've got to work with them with compassion, with empathy. If they're thinking like that it's because they've felt let down by the system for decades.

There was a conspiracy theory about the microchips, that came afterwards, but why we're all under lockdown, the army are going to come. So, when you're in a lockdown that's all you're thinking, what's going on? What's happening? What's going to happen? What's going to happen? And then, when you do get COVID, anxiety kicks in and your breathing

problems become worse. So, there were all these things. It was them not being able to...and then, this just contributed to a massive factor of all sorts of things. That's why I think the mosques coming out, and the faith community going out and giving some kind of hope. But it caused all these issues where people struggled during at least the first two, three months.

R4: Our Imam then was from Kuwait, and he never got COVID, but it got stuck in his head like mad. The man for the next eight months did not say any word other than COVID. He must have contacted a million doctors and nurses. The ambulance must have come down 50 times. It just got stuck in his head, until he had to go back and eventually, that's one example. Secondly, one of my very good friends who is a paediatrician, I went to take my kid to him, he's left the NHS, he does only private work now. Every time I see him, he's gloved, he's masked, he's the whole, he never even got COVID. But just the psyche of people has changed so much since then actually.

I: Yeah. I want to hang onto that point about the conspiracy theory, and those kinds of things, and the impact that that might have had, but also there's something which has come up in previous conversations, I believe with either yourself, or with [R] as well. That some of the pressures things which have been underlying as forms of inequalities impacting on Muslim communities, it wasn't that these were new things, but that the pandemic gave more...amplified them or gave more focus to them. Is there something in that notion? I feel like that's come out of some of the interviews so far.

R: Yes. I think in our communities what we are hearing now, all these inequalities that have come out is not new. I think our communities know these things. Our literacy rate is low, our employment rates have been low. The crime rates are high. So, when we hear that the death rates are high now, for most people, we're desensitised to these things. So, first to hear, oh look, and it's mainly white people who are saying this is because...it gets a bit like oh, really? You needed a pandemic to know all these things, and what are you doing different about it now? Okay, we're over the pandemic to some degree, what have we done different? What are we now learning to say okay, like I think Balsall Heath and Lozells had the most deaths in Birmingham. So, what are we doing now, COVID isn't going to be the last pandemic, we've got more coming. No, but I think that's a sign of what's to come.

R4: How many arguments have you had personally on those phone calls, on those Zoom meetings when you say exactly what you're talking about. The social injustice, the inequality, if you remember there was a time when Eid was around the corner and we did not get for Eid, do you remember? There was something around that, we did not get permission for Eid, but they had permission for Easter, or something like that. Do you remember that?

R: Christmas, yes.

R4: Christmas. It was just like come on, it was really bizarre because we had to then go back and explain this to our community, although we would have fight for XXXX [director of the local public health authority] at that point. Were there's this and you spoke about, it's not the first time it happened. It also happened with things like diabetes, catastrophic events. We also spoke about the West Indian community was really against the whole thing. You mentioned that to XXXX [director of the local public health authority] at that point.

R: But what happens, so any money do come into these areas don't go into the community, sorry, this is my rant now. What will happen, you've got all these faith places who have shown how they are a source for the betterment of the community, but you'll still get organisations like XXXX XXXX College, which will get millions for sports activities, XXXX Cricket Ground, which will get tens of millions for health activities, and then we don't see any

of these things. They'll say oh, XXXX XXXX [R6's] mosque doesn't have the capacity, the XXXX XXXX [R's Mosque] doesn't have the capacity, or they're too focused on Muslims, for instance. Well, first of all, if that's the larger demographic, then what's wrong with that?

Secondly, we've already proved that we don't only work with Muslims. So, there's all these things. Why are all these other bigger organisations, and then you need to invest money to develop the capacity. I'm sure if these mosques, or these faith places had extra money, they would have brought in other people to have done three, four. So, at the top, there's this lack of thinking, of okay, how do we tackle this now using the same people. They won't have learnt, and even, like, I'll give you an example, like XXXX [director of the local public health authority], he does now...sorry, this is a criticism to you guys as well now, yeah.

He has put tendering processes, which are targeted at faith communities. We've applied for them and we've been successful in them, but the tendering process, which is a council-wide thing, is so solid that if other community organisations want to apply for it, they can't get through the process. And what will happen, a London-based organisation will apply, and they will do work in this area because that system still hasn't changed, and a director can't change it, it's the politicians that have to change how that works. So, start applying for these things

R4: I tell you, just recently I applied for, just over the six weeks summer break, so we have a lot of activities for kids and stuff. So, I applied for a grant for young Asian kids from the community background, BAME background, to get involved in sports. I got to the stage and presented, and we were about to get it. So, one of the brothers says but you predominantly work with the Muslim community. I said, look around you, you are in Aston, where do you want us to go? To go across to Solihull and bring people from there?

So, she got very upset with me. She didn't give it to me, she gave it to a church because they said we don't work enough with other communities. Well, we're not going to place a BAME-led project to say well, you can't come in, and you can't come in. That's not what we do, right? But it's targeted towards that, I just don't understand. She says we don't work enough with other communities. I said we've just landed so much stuff in the COVID time. It was a £10,000 grant, but it just shows of it being said that we don't work other communities, which is totally, totally unacceptably wrong.

R: So, if these areas don't...sorry, this is like the conspiracy theories, and there may be some truth in it. If these areas don't stay in deprivation, then you can't bring funding in there for other organisations to apply for, the big ones. So, then people think well, nobody cares for us because we never get the money for these things anyway. So, it just feeds into wider, more crazier stuff because the actual things people believe in doesn't get listened to.

I: Yeah, okay. And I think going back to thinking about some of the conspiracy side of things, or I mean, I guess, as things are going on, time is going on... What were your experiences as time went on, maybe moving into more localised lockdowns, those kinds of things? Because you talked about it becoming more apparent that mental health was increasingly one of the peripheral things, it wasn't directly related to COVID, but it was definitely affected by it. Were there other things like that over time that became more apparent in the roles that you had doing the interventions that you had?

R5: I just found that when it got a bit easier on areas, I think people...once they started getting out and talking, I think it was a bit lower than at the start. That's what I found. People were a bit more out and about in that sense. It's just when the chapati flour got low, the fights in the local.

R: In the first lockdown?

R5: Yeah, first lockdown.

R4: One thing I realised was the children, the kids. Kids had to suffer a lot of these issues, especially the schools shutdown. That's when I realised a lot of...and I used to do this YouTube channel thing across, and the number of kids that were online just trying to talk to us, and it was like strange enough because all day they'll be on their screens trying to do various things, and then they have a supplementary school in the evening as well. They were just mad at that point.

I: Okay, yeah sure. So, if we start to move forward a little bit, I guess, and thinking about getting a picture of the needs of the community. I mean, if we can get a handle on what the main areas of need were moving through the pandemic, even up until now I would say, and how far they were or weren't met by government responses, and then looking at community organisation responses...

R3: I think one of the things that we did in COVID is worked with autistic and disabled children of our community. Like I said, most of the stuff personally what the organisation were thinking about the people that are most vulnerable. You know, normal people suffering, okay, fair enough, but they're getting looked after by other organisations. But people like disabled people or children.

R: And their families.

R3: And their families were extremely struggling because there's no care work anymore, there's no playschools. They're not accepted in the immediate, and they can't be active in the park and stuff. So, what we wanted to do at the time of Eid is firstly, we distributed sweets to celebrate Eid around our community, so we distributed to around 1000 households in our local area, just to celebrate Eid with them because they weren't allowed to go out and visit their family and get any gifts. That's one of the things that we did.

And the other thing that we've started doing, and we realise we're going to continue to do this beyond COVID hopefully is do Eid Salah for disabled and autistic children because they don't get to go to a mosque. Not every mosque is facilitated for those children to come and have it, so we have a dedicated Eid Salah for those children that they can come in with their families, and be able to be part of the community, and feel the vicinity of Eid. That's one thing that I think we did and we're quite proud about, and we want to continue doing that.

R5: It's the third year now. And we gave them a hot food parcel as well for Eid, for the family. The kids get the sweets, and they just get to roam around the mosque. What they don't normally get to do.

R3: So, that's one of the things that we're extremely proud about and we want to continue beyond COVID.

I: And I mean, that touches on religious observance as well, and I think how do you feel that religious observance was impacted in the pandemic? In terms of, I mean, we've talked already about inability to celebrate Eid in the first lockdown, for example. But what are your perspectives on the impact on religious observance that came through with the pandemic?

R6: I think it was what others mentioned about having to move a lot of what we do online. That was very important, for example, we have lectures almost everyday in the mosque. We have weekend lectures, which is like a, it's an Islamic thing, but it's also a social activity where people all come together on the weekends and listen to a talk, and gather round together. So, because that wasn't happening in person, we had to move everything online. And I think most of us did that, and we moved all of our lectures, talks, reminders, guidance, also the welfare services as well.

For example, our counselling service, we moved that online. I mean, we're similar to [R's Mosque] we had the setup already in place from before, so we had been using Zoom for a couple of years as well. So, we had that facility, and we were able to use that, so that congregation still felt connected to the mosque, and that was very important because if they couldn't come and pray here, it was very important that they were still receiving Islamic knowledge, reminders, and also constant reminders about what we're going through is a test, just like throughout the Quran and throughout the life of the Prophet Mohammed, he went through tests like this, he went through famine when there was war, all sorts of things that were taking place, and his life is a lesson for us. So, we were able to draw upon that and say look, this is not something new for Muslims, this is not something new for many faiths.

There's always been times throughout history where you have to knuckle down, you have to dig in and just be patient, and have that trust. There's people who are saying how long is this going to last? People were anxious about that. They were worried that this is going to be how life is forever. We kept on hearing on the news that life will never be the same, we're never going to go back to normal. This is the new normal sort of thing, so it was just constant reassurance and using examples from the faith to strengthen people, and to advise them to be patient, and also in terms of the way that they react, even their reaction is part of their faith. So, if they start spreading conspiracies or if they start being abusive towards the mosque for the stance we're taking, or anything like that, that is their own personal test.

And by not acting or by not responding Islamically, they're actually failing that test. So, it's very important. So, many people actually became stronger during that period, and people obviously, they were able to worship at home because they weren't working, for example, many people were on furlough, so they were able to spend...I mean, I got married quite young, so my kids are older, but many of my friends who have toddlers and younger children, they were like, you know, this is so nice, we get to spend time with our children. We realise family life, even though Muslims are very family-orientated, they still felt during that period that actually, we spend so much time working, we spend so much time on other things, actually now that we get to spend time with our family, we really realise what we're missing out on.

R: It's like Eid, for instance, how do you do Eid without a mosque? It was like wow.

R4: We all learnt that, didn't we? We had to do it in our own houses.

R: Then there was debates amongst the scholars whether you can do it at home, or you need to be in the mosque, or the congregation.

R4: Wow, that debate was hard.

R: Yeah, that was. But forgive me if I'm wrong, I don't know how you guys, for us, the challenge of the mosque began when the lockdown was eased because at least then, everybody is at home, and we're working out as we go. But once we've let people back in,

now we're dealing with people's built up frustration, and now they're being shepherded in like sheep.

R4: Yes.

R: You have to pray like this, you have to wear a mask, and that's where we started seeing people's aggression. Like, either you're not doing enough, or you're doing the work of the anti-Christ.

R4: Or you sold yourself to the government.

R: Yeah. Who are you to tell us whether I can come to the mosque or not? So, that's where the first time we had to deal with it. Like, we saw videos from mosques in other cities. I saw stuff, but I thought here in Birmingham we all dealt with it really well, like how we...most people got it, but we were all consistent with what we were doing. We were all very similar in what we were doing, so nobody could say to us, well, this mosque is doing it like this, this mosque is doing it like that. Yeah.

R4: And the thing is the correct word here is about the consistency piece because we were across the board having exactly the same template for all of us. So, if the risk assessment came from [R6's Mosque], we would just go with the same risk assessment across the board, and everyone, the media coming out would be the same video, literally, because it's showing our entrance, you come in from here, you go out from there. But I'll tell you what though, it's the response from the faith...I'm just talking about the mosque because that's what we're talking about here now, was just spot on. Going digital, helping the community, trying to go out, even as the lockdown eased. How we would do this, the separation of them, the little markers they put, the sanitisers, the masks, the whole system, and we used...everybody helped out in that where there's PPE, where there's masks, hand sanitisers. Where have we got the cheapest hand sanitisers coming from? Is it halal or not? Is it not alcohol-free or alcohol?

All those conversations we've had, we sat around the table around the Zoom four walls, and we would discuss all this. It was amazing. Even now, *Zakat* for example, which is compulsory, but our online content went over the roof, it just went mental at that point. No one is in the mosque, but we're getting the contributions. Then, what we started doing is as part of your daily walk, if you remember, as part of your daily walk, you're going for a walk for an hour, come to the mosque, we've left a box outside, go put your *Zakat* in there. People would do that. Every day it was filled up with money inside there actually. But that's what they said innovation's greatest drive is need, and how the need changed, and how innovative in every sense the mosque became to make sure they could really serve the community. It was brilliant. Going back, and I'm sure you could pull out a lot of stuff online as well, the contributions made by the mosque.

I: And I think, thinking about moving into vaccinations and so on, I know a lot of mosques opened as vaccination centres. How was that navigated? If I'm getting the sense that there was an element of conspiracy, which might be slightly more prevalent. And also, I think where does that come from? Where do you think that scepticism or, you've given some insight already, [R], but yeah, how was navigating all of that with having vaccinations?

R4: I think you guys started off the trend in that sense.

R6: Well, I think XXX XXXX Centre [Mosque in Balsall Heath] started it first, and then we were approached and asked if we'd like to host a centre. Obviously, because of the welfare work we normally do we were asked whether we wanted to do it, and we said...we

had a consultation again amongst ourselves and with our scholars, and I think the key thing consistency and being fact-based, so whilst there was a lot of conspiracies going along, our faith teaches us to be fact-based. It teaches us to seek, speak to people of knowledge, if you don't know something, ask those who know. And that's in all realms. So, it can be in terms of Islamic knowledge, it can be in terms of the medical profession.

So, what our stance was, and all of us shared that I think as well, is look, we're only going to do something if the professionals are telling us that it's something good, if Islamically it's okay for us to do it, and look, Islamically, the verse in the Qur'an that drove us all is 'the person who saves one life saves the whole of mankind'. Now, even though many people in the community were sceptical, the way we navigated around it was we said we're going to make it available for people. We're not standing at the front of the mosque to say everybody who comes to XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] has to be vaccinated now. We made the conscious decision not to say that. We said according to the medical professionals, it's very important you take the vaccination. For those who want to take the vaccination, we have a vaccination centre on-site now.

I mean, many of the people who visited were non-Muslims. People would come in, and it was a swimming pool before, and they talked about how they used to use this building 30, 40 years ago, and it's the first time they've been in since it's been a mosque. So, we still have lots of non-Muslims coming in now, but also Muslims. Initially, sceptical, then when the deaths went up, they started realising okay, now we need to do it. Then, later on, when restrictions were lessened they realised okay, to go on holiday now we need to get vaccinated. So, over time it's just become a normal thing, but we've never gone out and said, you know, everybody who comes to this mosque, it's your duty or religious duty to go and do that.

It was a case of saying this is what the professionals have said, this is the Islamic ruling behind it, they agreed what the vaccination contains, etc. Is it halal? You know, we worked to bust those myths. And we put the videos out, we put the videos of our Imam taking the vaccination to show that look, it's not just XXXX XXXX [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath] promoting the government stance, we actually believe in it as well because we believe that the medical professionals are telling us you should have it. And there's still people amongst our staff who don't want to have it, and that's fine. That's a personal choice, and we're not going to force it on people to say you're not doing your duty as a Muslim if you don't get vaccinated. But what we are saying is that according to what the experts are saying, this will help save lives, and as Muslims, if you want to help save lives, this is one method in which you can do it.

R: Yeah. We took a slightly different stance with the vaccination just because there was so much...we took a neutral stance. We chose not to have a vaccination centre at our mosque, just because so many people locally were against it at the time, or when I say against it, they were unsure. And so, we chose to be an LFT centre, instead of a vaccination centre. And also, within our trustees and staff, we had two different. So, it wasn't our job then to say we're going to have it, we're not going to have it, let everyone make their own, like half of our Imams had it, and they were...the rule was you can speak about it, but you can't speak against it. But our message was trust the experts. If you're going to make a decision not to have it, do it for the right reasons. Not because you received a meme about how Bill Gates is going to stick a microchip in your arm.

So, whatever you choose to do, do it because it's an intelligent choice. Be educated and work out how you still need to keep yourself safe. So, we did webinars as well, without us approving it, but at the same time letting the experts say their things, and our Imams would say trust the experts. You know, when you go for a heart operation, or when you go for a kidney operation, you don't know the science behind it. You go because you have trust

in the system. But also, we didn't want to associate with our masjid with a vaccination centre. We just wanted people to focus on that just being where they can go to pray, or like just say they did have...one thing even after the vaccination, there have been a number of deaths, yeah?

Not saying it's related to the vaccination, but people say oh, it's after he's had his. So, the last thing we wanted was people to associate that with us, yeah, so they come to pray. We've got plenty of places around us, I mean, XX XXXX Centre [Mosque in Balsall Heath] was only half a mile, there's no need for us to do it anyway. And that we found worked better for us because we were able to convince people by allowing them to convince themselves. It's a bit more empowering, so we all knew who was doing what, so everyone had a different role to play.

R6: We were talking about inequalities earlier, so one of the things, I won't name the doctor, but there's a local doctor who's a regular attendee of XXXX XXXX, and he also works with the CCG. And he was saying that look, this is a really important opportunity, XXXX XXXX should really take this opportunity because in future, this will help to tackle further inequality, health inequalities. If you can show to the NHS that you're able to run it, you're able to do this on-site, it may be they have diabetes clinics in future, cancer drop-in clinics in the future, and they will then realise that Muslim organisations, mosques, faith institutes are capable of running these services for the community.

So, if members of the community are having trouble going to hospitals, going through to their GPs, etc, it could be that the mosques are used in future for these things. So, that was a big thing and a very important factor in us deciding to do it because that doctor was very supportive, and still is today, made the point that this is one way of tackling those inequalities.

R4: We went slightly middle of both of them actually because we said we didn't have the capacity to do it on a daily basis like [R6's Mosque] did. We had the bus. So, we started doing the van. So, we used to have vans...we did it 16 times. Well, 15 finished now, 16 is coming on the 5th of August. We did 15 sessions of this van coming in with an average of between 100, 150 vaccinations every time. So, it was a massive drive. We went out with the...I went out to the local council on CCG and said, look, we can do it. We have the will, we have the skill as well, but we can't have the capacity to do it on a daily basis. So, I went out to them and reached out to the local commissioning body, and told them we'll accommodate two vans, we need two because we need the women and the men to be separate, so we had two different sites.

And I started talking, and lo and behold, my anecdote was really correct because our uptake within our area was pretty low, so it was about 33 per cent uptake at one point. So, I said let's try and build on that, so we do a little bit of a piece, like yourself we researched it, so can we up this from 33 per cent to a certain number with the van coming in. So, that's what we managed to show that, and since then, the trust has built within the commissioning bodies and local health authorities to understand look, the faith organisations can play a vital role in actually addressing health issues right now. Going back to the controversies, I was sent down a package with my name, a picture had been taken out, and a picture of a snake on it. And I had been told that what are you giving people? Snake venom, and you're...

R6: Snake venom, yeah.

R4: Remember that? I was sent a package like that saying you're giving these people this, and you've sold yourself, how much did they give you to do this? And blah, blah, blah. I'm going to check your bank account. It was just bizarre, but yeah, that comes through actually.

I: Wow, yeah. And did you have vaccinations or testing through your organisation as well then?

R: Yeah, testing. We were an LFT hub, so all the door-to-door ones were based at the XXXX XXXX [Islamic Trust Organisation]. We've also had anybody who wants LFT tests, like we've got thousands, even now we've got loads, so we used it for that.

I: Yeah. And I think time is getting tight, so I think looking forward, should we encounter issues on the scale of the pandemic again, initially, I guess, if we maybe run round the table, but what would be the main key areas of need? What would be the main lessons learned from the impacts on Muslim communities from COVID? And what kinds of things would be most beneficial to have in place? So, [R]?

R: I think, you know, we keep hearing that they do these modelling and testing before pandemics, beforehand, I think they need to do that now for the next, but keep the faith places involved in that. So, how do we mobilise? How do we get out to the community? Who is it we need to be in touch with? So, that's part of their preparedness well before, and utilising the faith community. We don't want to become a bit on the side, just say oh yeah, we'll go to them. Because the funding, we can't do anything without funding. Even what we've already done, the funding has come from somewhere, whether it's public donations, or whether it's our own money or whatever, it still needed funding.

I: Yeah.

R: So, if there's funding pots out there, there needs to be a percentage I think that needs to focus on faith communities to say these are the people who mobilise better than...I think we did a better job than that national thing they had. Remember they asked everyone? They asked people to volunteer. Nothing came of that from what I remember.

R4: Yeah, absolutely right.

R: Those are the two I can think of off the top of my head.

R4: What's the question again?

I: Well, just thinking of what were the main lessons learned from COVID in terms of the needs of the Muslim community, or the ways in which Muslim communities were impacted by COVID? And what kind of things would you like to see in place if something like that should happen again? But what would your views be on?

R2: I think the biggest lesson would be, like, for instance, I don't know if this is off topic, but for instance, when someone close dies and how they had...we weren't allowed to have a funeral in a mosque how you normally grieve with your family. And it was just like a Zoom link sent to you to see their face. So, you couldn't see them. And then, just 10 people at the graveyard. I mean, it's a lesson in terms of how much...it's just about, I don't know, I mean, it happened to me. I had three people pass away in COVID, so it was quite hard, but it's a lesson just to say that, you know, how we are with people, how we are with our local community, even with family in terms of whether you know if you're going to see the person or not.

R: Also, how we handle that process better.

R2: Yeah, and how we handled it better. And I'd definitely say doing what we do with the food packs and keeping busy with work what we were doing definitely mentally kept me busy, too.

I: Yeah, okay.

R3: I think just touching on the food packs, the food security activities that we all did. I think not overlapping, somehow coming up with a system where we're not overlapping our areas, and we're not overlapping houses or we're not able to let anyone misuse...there's not a lot of those cases, of course, but I think better organised. Because I was working for a foundation before the first lockdown happened, and we turned up to houses with food packs, and they were like oh, I've called two organisations, someone has already dropped one off. So, if there was a central database, or central system where we can, okay, this organisation, you cover them and that's it, or this is the central call centre, or something like that where we can better manage.

Some people weren't getting anything, some people were getting three food packs a day. So, something like that, and definitely not forgetting dealing with the pandemic was a shock to the whole world, but I think we can...the professionals should come up with a better way of dealing with other situations whilst there's a pandemic going on because my friend that passed away, it just happened from nowhere. He was a good guy, and he was all fine, but COVID, he couldn't speak to no one. He's a grown man, he was 27, 28, and he committed suicide. So, those kind of things I think we should be investing in and seeing how we can prevent this from happening if there was to be a part two of COVID, or any other pandemics.

I: Yeah, sure. And what would your views be about the main lessons learned?

R4: So, I think just going back to everything we spoke about from department of health, a few things to note down. One of them is really important, it's about diversity and inclusion. It's really important that we have a proper representation and policy-making part of it where people from the community are sitting around the table to make those policies, to make those decisions, to make those guidance together. Right now, what was happening was that they were made for us to say here you go, and it comes Eid, you can't do Eid, come tomorrow Christmas, you're having Christmas, for example. And that's really what diversity and inclusion actually does involve practical examples and practical settings where people around the table who actually make the policies represent the communities that they are doing it for. In Birmingham alone, and I think we spoke about this a while ago, it's effectively a 30 to 40 per cent representation is from the Muslim community.

And if you go further on, the BAME community is even further within that, and what happens is people at the top, there's no representation from the community at that point. And just from that, and it was the likes of XXXX XXXX Masjid [one of the largest Mosques in the city, in Small Heath], the whole trust sat on the table to help those policies changes. It shouldn't have come down to the faith organisations. It should have come down right from the top, from the policy-making team itself. So, that was something that was really important from my side. Really important point made here about the funerals, and actually, one of the first points I made on funerals was about this one actually. The funeral is a really important point right now. One of the things that happened during the funerals was the ability for us to very, very quickly, and if you have anything to do with the faith you realise that when people die, we want to get them buried immediately, like now, today, immediately, right?

And since the pandemic has finished, we've reverted back to the worst timeline for burying Muslim people ever I have witnessed in my time in Birmingham. It's never been so hard, so difficult. I've been banging around this for some time now. Again, I think it stems

down to people around the room who make these policies and changes have to have representation from the Muslim community to talk about this. Right now, if someone passes away at their home, unfortunately, even he or she would have had illness for the last five years, but because this person was not seen by her GP for the last 14 days, you have to wait 10 days before a coroner decides to give one person to allocate for that death. It's unacceptable. That's just not what we need to do.

And the last piece, I'm really sorry, I've got all these things. Yes, the last one is about health inequality, and I think we still haven't moved on from the actual piece around health and equality. Again, you can't have someone with an Asian background, someone who is exactly like me with a white Caucasian population, but we're giving the same funding for each other. We can't have that. Our diabetic structure is different, so we'll have diabetes before a Caucasian person. That person might not even have diabetes. I'll die early, I'll get cardiovascular elements before anybody else. Yes, there are other issues with the Caucasian population, but about these very important topics of health inequalities have to be addressed now. And it goes down the pandemic as well, more people died within the Asian community. It just shows you, it's there, stark in front of you, and the numbers can't lie there actually. So, you need to address that really quickly. Sorry, guys.

R5: Obviously, they've all touched on everything. I was more on the mental health side as well. It wouldn't be difficult for everyone in lockdown to have a hotline number or something, but something needs to be in place for that, for COVID or anything else, to be honest.

I: **Okay.**

R6: Yeah, we've pretty much covered everything. The Muslim community pre-COVID got neglected in many ways, you know, in terms of Islamophobia, this country from the government, from the top down, it's felt in the community. COVID was an opportunity to show faith connection, what Muslims are capable of doing, and how Muslims are willing to and have the capability to serve the wider community. It was proven, it was shown for everybody to see. And it was showcased, the lessons from it and the continuation of that would work, and being supported by the government, we haven't seen that by the council etc.

But we know what we are capable of doing, and if the powers that be would look at COVID as an example, as a case study to show the strength in the Muslim community, the capabilities within the Muslim community, they would utilise it for the betterment of the whole country. But there's that sense or that feeling that the reason why we're being ignored is deliberate, and whoever is ruling the country. We still do not have a definition on Islamophobia which is accepted by this government. Just recently, the leader of the [a National Islamic Governance Organisation] was, you know, they used her, what was the conservative [MP]?

R: XXXX XXXX.

R6: Yeah. Slandered her by saying she met with the leader of [the National Islamic Governance Organisation]. So, this and XXXX XXXX, she should be like a beacon of light for this country to show a Muslim woman, head of [the National Islamic Governance Organisation], celebrate her because there's a lot of talk about empowering women etc, but you put a Muslim woman there as head of [National Islamic Governance Organisation], that should be celebrated. Why is she being used as a tool to slander or to demonise a conservative candidate? So, there's something deeper than health and equalities, and everything we're talking about here. It's how is the Muslim community treated in general? How are we seen by this government?

And their way of communicating things about the Muslim community in the media that supports the government, you know, how that's seen by non-Muslims. So, we do a lot of work to invite non-Muslims to see what we actually do, to open our doors. We had three non-Muslim ladies here earlier as part of the Key to the City project, opening our doors, and I think everybody here sitting around the table and all other mosques are very open. So, we're trying to battle that government narrative or the media that supports that narrative by showing what we really are, and what we're capable of. And I think we found that the biggest lesson is we saw what we're capable of doing. It's just a case of it being recognised.

R4: Absolutely correct, well said.

I: **Alright, well thank you all for your time. Greatly appreciated.**

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]

Focus group 3

Date: 12/09/2022

Duration: 01:52:44

Participant characteristics: all participants are female, R1, R2 and R4 have community engagement roles in an organisation which supports families of incarcerated individuals; R3 and R5 are community members visiting the organisation.

Number of participants: 5

I = Interviewer

R1 =Respondent 1

R2 =Respondent 2,

R3 =Respondent 3,

R4 =Respondent 4,

R5 = Respondent 5

s.l. = sounds like

I: Okey dokey. So, thank you for taking time out, it is appreciated. I think what will be useful to go around the room and just give a quick introduction to each of you to explain the roles that you have here in home and also kind of what that might mean in terms of how you support the community, essentially?

R1: Yeah, so I'm the Family Outreach and Engagement Officer in my area and I'm also a Social Researcher, so I have a lot of direct contact with our service users and the majority of them come from Muslim background just because of the demographics of the areas that we support.

I: Okay.

R2: So I'm [R2] and I'm a Director and Website Manager for XXXX XXXX [organisation which supports families of incarcerated individuals] and I do all the marketing and stuff like that.

I: Okay.

R3: I'm [R3], I'm a visitor, I just come and join her groups whenever she needs me.

R4: My name is [R4], I'm the CEO and Managing Director of XXXX XXXX [organisation which supports families of incarcerated individuals] and I'm also an MBE as well. I have to throw that in 'cause I'm allowed to now.

R3: How many years?

R4: 24 years. I've been working 24 years in the community. Basically in and around Sparkbrook, Sparkhill and Bordesley, so mostly within the Muslim communities.

I: So do you wanna give an overview of what XXXX XXXX is...?

R4: So at XXXX XXXX [organisation which supports families of incarcerated individuals] we work with families that have someone that's either going into prison or been arrested, so we support the families, the first point of contact and we guide them through the criminal justice system.

I: **Okay. So, our project is focussed on the Pandemic, the impacts of the Pandemic in the community in particular.**

[Phone rings]

R4: Just put it in the garden.

R2: You know what, I'm tempted.

R1: Can't you turn the volume down?

R2: That's what I'm trying to do.

R4: The only way you can take it off is just pull it out the socket.

R2: Do you know what, I'm tempted to disconnect.

I: **So going back thinking about the Pandemic, we're looking at the impacts on Muslim communities, we wanted to make sure that we have a decent representation of women's voices as well. So going back to the beginning of the Pandemic, what were the first impacts that sort of stood out in terms of, maybe the point that you realised that something...**

[phone rings]

R4: We're gonna start, because I think what happened when we first heard of some kind of Covid was when it reached to like Birmingham in one of the schools where they said two kids have brought it back from, was it Italy?

R2: Italy, I think.

R4: It was like two days before that came out, or two to three days, and we lot were going to Pakistan, so we didn't really think about it at that point, we thought it's nothing's it's just whispers and they're just scaremongering. But we got stuck in Pakistan in the lockdown so we had that experience as well as coming back in the lockdown. And I think a lot of people were saying, when a lot of media was going on about people that were stuck abroad and it's people like us who were stuck in our countries but they didn't realise we're born and bred in Birmingham, so for us the community, it's not our home, our home here in Birmingham. So it was quite stressful because we didn't know how long we were going to be locked, you know, there for, when the flights were gonna open, we literally lived in one outfit for a whole four weeks we were supposed to leave and two days before we were gonna leave the flights were cancelled.

I: **And you were there for four weeks after that? Wow.**

R4: When we came back we obviously were in our fasting period as soon as we arrived, so the timescales was all different, for us it was a lot longer 'cause there we were having our meals at 8 o'clock in Pakistan, it was 4 o'clock here and so we had to wait

another five hours. So I think it was adjusting back and then it was coming back to a new England, it wasn't what we left, it was a massive change for us and we were allowed out for 14 days we had to self isolate. So then we decided that should we go and see what the whole fuss is about that there's queues in the shops and everything, we wanted to experience that as well. So we decided to go out and have a look, it was a bit scary because we'd been away for two months so we come back to something that was totally different.

R3: Isolation for you?

R4: Yeah. And then we didn't get to see anyone, months and months had gone by and it was, it's different 'cause I think, you know, I can go on forever about the experiences we had before Covid 'cause they...

R3: [Over speaking]...because you work in the community and you're so used to seeing hundreds of people every day, you're connected with them through your work as well. And that's seemed, that routine was shocking as well. It was enough for the trauma that they had to go through in Pakistan because they got, she eventually went to get her son married and then they ended up getting stuck. But when they had to come back even that was a mission for them because it was just all over the place, the flights and you're having to pay extra to just get back to your own home. So it was just hard because we were already here so for us it was like getting used to it. I didn't take no notice, I thought forget it, forget it. You go to the shops just normal, like you would normally go shopping and there's nothing on the shelves, what the hell's going on here? Are we that desperate that people are just going and getting whatever they need just to stock up because we're gonna end up being locked down and we can't go out for, was it two, how many...?

R1: Two weeks first.

I: Well initially, yes.

R3: You're just down and my son said to me, "Mum, you just sit at home and pretend nothing's going on, just switch yourself off, the world's gonna change out there outside your doorstep. Wake up." So we had to go out and we had to do our shopping, get some stuff in that we can balance over the two weeks, three weeks. Then obviously, like she said, we had fasting and then we have Eid and we can't go anywhere, you couldn't go anywhere, you didn't wanna go anywhere because you didn't wanna feel that you're going to be a risk to somebody else. And then you didn't want anybody else coming and you didn't wanna be at risk. And obviously I was diabetic and my husband was, "You're not going nowhere, you stay put." So it was like for a whole month after when I turned around and said to him, "You know what, I can't deal with this isolation, I've got to go to the chemist I need some meds and I'm gonna start going." When I start going I got more comfortable, because then you know you'd go to certain shops and there's a queue and they're only letting so many people in and so many people come out.

So you got comfortable with it, you got used to it. When it came to people getting Covid and the numbers was horrendous that were dying, we ended up by having our own family members, and that was even more hard, because you got to a point where you weren't allowed to go to the funerals or you weren't allowed to go to the graveyard. It was just heart breaking to be honest with you, I think that whole year was just, it was just horrendous for everybody.

R4: I think that obviously, you know, 'cause your research you're trying to look at the impact it had on the communities. I think fortunate for us we were able to, 'cause we were serving in the community so we could continue working. So we took that as an advantage, didn't we, so we opened our office, originally it was supposed to open in April then we opened it in June, so we took the month's gap for the fasting because we thought there's no point stressing ourselves out. And then we opened in June and I think it was like we could still come out and work in an office and then go back home and not have such a huge impact on our health and wellbeing 'cause it's not just people out there but it's generally your family, your friends and you're not seeing anyone. Sometimes if you go to the funeral, we were a bit 'cause these are, "You're not going out, we're not going out, we don't care." So we had quite a few deaths in our own family. My father died in Covid as well but he didn't die of Covid it's just for us we felt that, you know, the NHS wouldn't let people in. I think our community found that really hard, they couldn't go to the hospitals.

The impact for us, as a community, we always get together and support each other when someone passes away, we weren't able to do that, we weren't able to go to mosques, we weren't able to visit. Sometimes, even now the policies on the walls in the hospitals, I don't think they're fair or they're working because they say 'you can have one or two people visit when someone's critical', but they're still not, we just had a death last week and when the mother was taken into hospital she was critical and they wouldn't let anyone in. So they let two, for the families who do you choose to go, you know, at the end of the day she's all your mother so who you gonna choose. And then the next thing you know they wanted to make a video call to the family and they said, "She's not giving you consent you can't make it." But then they called them in saying that she's not got long to live and then they said can you give consent for us to take the machines off. But then why are you asking us to give consent when you were saying she hasn't given consent for the phone call. Do you know what I mean?

So it's mixed messages for different different families, different different issues within the NHS. I think it's time the NHS changed their mind and stops people from coming to the hospital. That's one thing I would like to see definitely change within the NHS and the hospitals to stop people suffering 'cause the ones that are in hospitals are suffering and the ones that are outside are suffering. That needs to change 'cause Covid is never gonna go away, every time there's winter and there's gonna be a flu, any kind of flu they're gonna class it as Covid. But I mean I don't know, I don't know if you wanna say something and I can come back 'cause then we could talk about the prison work we done in Ramadan, in fasting.

R3: Have you got another question?

I: **Yeah, well, just thinking about the impacts in terms of that's something that's come up again and again in the project is hospitals, access to family members. I'm interested in your perspectives on the impacts of Covid with regards to family members, either anxiety about family members contracting Covid or experiences of that. And also, what that means or what that might have meant even if not for yourselves as individuals but in terms of women's responsibilities perhaps, within the community or expectations of care and responsibilities, which is a theme that's come up elsewhere in the project so far.**

R1: Because in Muslim communities, Asian communities, the emphasis is that the son would take care of the parents, but now we see wives doing it and the sister's in the background, the assumption is it's the son's responsibility, but generally he's never that active carer during that time.

R4: I think with families, depending on individuals and how much belief they had whether Covid was real as well. That media was saying that it was all made up or whatever, so it was like have you got the guts to go out, is what the question is for people, is how they felt within themselves. Because my mum, obviously when my dad passed away, she's diabetic as well and blood pressure and everything. My brother might say, "You can't come." One day he'll be in a good mood and said, "You can't come." And one day he'd be in a bad mood and said, "There's no way mum's gonna get Covid." Or whatever. But we still went, we just still carry on, didn't we, we used to go and see my mum because if anything happened, you know, we would have missed out the opportunity to be with her when we had the chance. And also my sister lived in Wales, so their system was totally different, if they were caught driving on the motorway they would take their cars off them. She was isolated from us for like a good few months, two, three months or whatever. Then I think they'd done a little lift then she came to, because my dad was ill she came and she stayed the whole, two months, three months till he passed away and then she stayed on because she couldn't go back.

Because her experience, she would have been here, I don't know what happened, her kids were so paranoid about Covid. So she's got one daughter in Birmingham and then a son in Wales that was living with them and if she went anywhere they won't let her back in the house, she had it really rough, it would have been really good if she was here. They were so, so, so paranoid to...

R2: 'Cause they worked in the NHS, Clinical Psychologist.

R4: They worked in the NHS, yeah.

R1: But do you remember the people we came across were also going Covid conspiracies, just go about your normal day-to-day and even getting the judgement for the jabs.

R3: Yeah, but you know what I found that even though, I think at the beginning I don't think anybody took it seriously, everybody just kept saying it's a scam, it's just one of those things. But then you start looking at the numbers of all the people that's dying of this thing called 'Covid' and then we've not had it but then all of a suddenly it pounded on us. So I don't think it hit us until we actually got Covid, we were positive, stay in for the amount you had to stay in, and isolate yourselves and what not. I got it, my husband got it and my grandkids that live with me and my son, we all ended up with something that kept us locked in the house for two weeks. And then I think we took it seriously that there is something here. And when it came for the vaccinations that was another headache, they just wanna vax you with something, just leave it. But we've gone and had them and even though we've had them we still ended up having Covid. So, I don't know, I think it's come and gone and we've gone and dealt with it the best way we could deal with it, and we're just carrying on now. And it's like she said, every time we're gonna have some signs of colds and flus, you have to test yourself and then if you're positive then isolate.

R3: Take care of yourself.

R4: I refused to test.

R3: Who was it the other day it was in the family...

R1: Got Covid a second time.

- R4: [Over speaking] just come from Pakistan a couple of weeks ago and they had flu symptoms because obviously with the weather changing and everything when you come back home you'll catch the flu. So she thought it was the flu for three days she didn't do anything, then whoever came and visited her and gone back home they've got the signs, so she gone and get the test and she's positive. So I'm trynna go over there to see her and I said to her, "Why don't you tell me that you've got Covid then I won't force myself to come and see you, I'll come and see you afterwards." But you're still catching it and you're still getting positive results but we're getting normal now, you know, there's no queues in the shop, there's no, you know. Since Brexit I believe we've got the problem with lorry drivers coming over and some of the shelves are empty in the shop but it's not because of Covid, everybody's gone back to normal. Let me give you an example, every time I've gone to the hospital since Covid, because I've had my knee replacements so I go in every six months or something they check up. I'd gone in yesterday and every time I'd gone in before whether it's an Xray whether it's just bloods I'm having to wear my mask and use the gel. You know when I went in yesterday and the doctors themselves have got masks on and the nurses, but the patients didn't.
- R3: It's patients' choice though, isn't it?
- R4: No, but they're standing on the door and they go, "Can you wear your..." If I'd go in with my mask I've got to take mine off and put theirs on. But yesterday there was nobody there, there's no desk there with no masks, no nothing, and I scanned in and when I have my Xray, seen the consultant and I've came back out and I'm looking at, he's got his mask on, she's got her mask on, why didn't they ask me to wear my mask, I could come in with something. But you know aren't you supposed to be protecting all the patients that are coming and going.
- R3: It's choice, if they want to wear.
- R4: No, it is choice, if you wanna wear it you can wear it. Like I go in and everywhere I went, ever since I can remember Covid came out, I have been wearing my mask.
- R1: Have you found that the same, because I find if I go no one has a facemask on.
- R4: They're not wearing them anymore.
- R1: No, no, even before.
- R3: Even before.
- R4: [Over speaking] shopkeeper told me to wear it but otherwise I wouldn't wear it. You wouldn't wear it, I find it awful to wear a mask.
- R3: [Over speaking] you know what it is because I'm diabetic and I've got other health issues I was putting myself at risk and I'm putting other people at risk before I got something so I would rather protect myself and people around me until I could. But now sometimes I go out and I have my mask in the car and I start forgetting to put it on because I'm looking around and nobody else is putting it on. But then I'm still putting myself at risk I could still get it. So it's so weird, it's like when you brought the fruit and the veggies at home from the shop I mean my husband's standing, "Can you wash all that." And I'm thinking, I'll wash it when I need to cook it, or make it or eat it. He's like, "No, you don't know who's put their hands on there and who's got Covid." He was really strict, the first few weeks he didn't take note of it, I thought everybody's

being silly and then all of a sudden when he read on it and got all the information about it, he said, "That's it, isolation." So it is hard.

R2: Because working we did emergency outreach where we need to I used to get sprayed with Dettol before I could enter the house and then all the shopping had to be wiped with anti bacterial wipes. But, I'm apparently the guinea pig for the jab so none of my family think it a good idea that I had it and the fact that I got Covid, for them what they say but the first time I got Covid it wasn't bad I work from home I didn't have it, I had like a light cold. When my mum's sister was bad I caught it from them and I think the jab helped me not having so bad when it came to the symptoms.

I: So you had your jab before?

R2: Yeah.

R4: The second time you had it, you were bad.

R2: Yeah, the second time I was really bad and I don't know where I got it from because my mum and sister didn't, and they had me locked in my room I wasn't allowed to even go out.

R3: Yes, that's what we did, we just isolated in the bedrooms and that was it. But the first one it wasn't too bad but the second one was after the jab and that was quite bad.

R2: I remember that Ladypool Road and Whitton Road, going to South Asian shops and things I'd be the odd one out, one other person wearing a mask...

R3: Yeah, they wouldn't wear it.

R2: ...and people were looking at us like we were strange, we were the oddballs.

I: So where do you think that idea of mistrust in the ideas, things we've talked about already in terms of Covid people having questions about how serious Covid is? Where, what do you think underpins that?

R4: Social media.

I: Okay. Go on, let's get into it.

R4: I think social media has a lot answer for because when people were putting stories on that it's all fake and it's this and whatever, so the youngsters believed it. 'Cause if you looked at demographics it was that the youngsters no one was taking the jabs or anything.

R1: I haven't.

R4: They haven't had it. You know, what it was, in our make up of families you get the elder generation living with the younger generation so you've got like, how many generations, grandparents...?

R2: Three or four.

R4: Three or four generations in a household, so there's a lot of pressure because they wouldn't let the elder people have it, the youngsters wouldn't, "You can't have", so there was a lot of issues then. And I think there's so many videos were going around

saying that it's all a hoax and it's all this, there's no such thing as Covid it's all made up. So I think the more that went around the more people start believing it, so I think that social media did have a lot to do with it and why people thought that it's all made up and it's all government-fed medicine, or whatever it is...

R1: Yeah. I remember someone said that there might be nanotech in the injections to attempt to kill anyone who wasn't White. Remember that? There was quite a few things...

R3: [Over speaking] But then you can't look at it like that, it wasn't just us here it was the whole world that was impacted by it. And it was like because my son at the beginning was reluctant he wouldn't have the jab, and he was saying that, "What is it with you guys because..." I mean I'm not gonna be biased here but you know like each religion in its own way of believing whatever way they wanted to believe would say, "No, we're not having it based on Allah or whatever." But then you have to sit back and look at it's the whole world, multi-cultural world out there that's suffering with this and it's not just us Muslims, or it's not just the Sikhs, or it's not just the Hindus. We're all in it together and the way to get through it is helping each other to sort of just help each other to get through it, I think that was the hardest bit that we've mentioned the conflict in the family as well...

R4: Yeah, that's, generational.

R3: The generation gap was causing the conflict between us, when we're believing that Covid is real have your vaccination whereas the next generation or the generation after that, "No, we're not doing it."

R4: I think the same with us lot as well, because...

R3: [Over speaking] and his wife, but my granddaughter 16, she was 16 then, and she refused to have it she said, "I'm not having it."

R2: See this is interesting because I had it and my cousin who works in a care home had it and one of my other cousin's who works in a hospital but then everyone else wasn't.

R3: Yeah, but it was priority for the carers and anybody working with NHS that they had to have it for the patients' safety, isn't it.

R2: But for example my mum never disbelieved that Covid existed, she just mistrusts the jab. So she was always extra careful with everything and every time I work "Do not touch Covid and bring it home." And when I came back, the fear thing, you have no idea. "Have you been where have you been, who have you contacted."

R4: That scenario, say for example if we went out, I'm just saying, and then you've gone home it's you were all gone different who don't who else we mixed with, we come back working together so it's really hard to say that you're controlling or you're not having any contact. And we were saying as well, if you think about, 'cause when [R2]'s dad was in hospital, he had a heart attack, but when the nurses leave from the hospital we don't know where they go, do we? We don't know who they've been mixing with and whether they had Covid or not. But they would come back and work in the hospital, I know they're doing that daily testing but the restrictions aren't the public to go in, they don't have to have huge numbers even one or two people to stay with the patient or help the patient.

R3: Yeah, but look at how many of the staff in the hospitals all around the country have had Covid. You get it. So, it's in the air...

R4: It was just the flu.

R3: It's in the air.

R4: It's just the flu. Covid is just the flu. It was a British flu.

I: **I'm thinking as well, do you feel like the Muslim community or Asian communities or Black and South Asian communities were more impacted in real terms by Covid?**

R3: Yes.

R2: Oh, god, yeah we saw that in the work we did, the panic phone calls.

R3: Plus, we're tight knit, are we, we've got this togetherness so when you've got somebody out, you know, an uncle and an aunt and they've got Covid and you can't go and see them it's heart breaking. 'Cause like I lost my aunt and I've lost two of my uncles through Covid and at the end XXXX died of Covid, and I ended up with a kidney infection. And because I had a kidney infection and Yorkshire was really bad with the Covid that I got ready to go and then I thought, do I risk going and catching something because I've already got a kidney infection and I'm just gonna make it worse. So I couldn't go to my cousin brothers funeral. I saw my aunt within the three days before she passed away and she's been ill for two weeks, I didn't know she was ill, I didn't know what it was. And I lost my aunt, I had to watch my uncle die, both of them, one was in Pakistan and one was here within a space of five weeks. So it was quite an emotional breakdown. Then when her dad passed away, he's my uncle, I was praying for them and after a couple of days I just walked in and I broke down because I couldn't handle the emotion anymore.

Because like for me my aunt was my second mum, she's always been there ever since I was born, as far as I'm concerned she's been there when I got married, she's been there when I've had my kids, when I got them married, everything. So I've always looked at her as my second mum so to lose her in that way and then you can't go to the house because there's restrictions. And then you wanna attend the funeral and then you can't go there for the same reason. So it was quite overwhelming I think, I think we were all quite hurt and whatever. But then you look at it, I don't know....

R4: [Over speaking] From a work point of view, 'cause even though we still had that freedom to walk around and we're coming back to the prison, 'cause that's what work we're doing they were isolating in their rooms for 23.5hrs a day. So if they got up at 8:00am the time they shower if they didn't have it then they weren't allowed, to have a shower they have to stay in all day, their association time is gone, everything is gone. Yeah, then when they were fasting we asked them if we can help 'cause we can provide prayer mats and stuff and books and literature and dates and stuff. And we thought that no one would be interested and the Imam said I'll arrange a Zoom meeting with all the prisons, eight prisons across the West Midlands and we thought only one's gonna say yes and we ended up all eight saying yes. 'Cause they're desperate to get help and support for the prisoners inside, which helps them as well. So I think there was quite a lot of deaths in prison, within the security staff, within the prisoners as well, but it wasn't highlighted in the media or anywhere else as much as

it was the rest of our deaths and all that stuff. So that community was completely left isolated within there all day, didn't, they really.

So it's only 'cause we were doing our funding applications, we were researching and we're looking at, oh my god so many prisoners died in prison, so many staff. Staff gets excluded because they think about prison but they forget that the staff are human beings and they're working. And one of the feedbacks coming in research, the staff security would wear they'd have PPE, is it? The stuff on to cover their faces and their hands and probably looked like space suits but the prisoners weren't allowed to have that so they felt that their life was less important than their life. Does that make sense? Because they were all covered the prisoners weren't, so they felt that their life wasn't valued as a security they were covered. And then I think it looks like then they feel a bit racist because they're all majority like Asian and Black prisoners and the security always are more likely White. There's not that many Asian and Black, they're trying to increase the numbers but there's more White staff, isn't it, so they probably felt that they were more superior. Does that make sense?

R1: I think one of the benefits from like the Asian and Black communities are a lot of them are quite collectivist or live with families, so it's not solo, as they help with loneliness in some ways. My family drove me insane but I would have struggled if I had to be alone. But the only thing about real terms, I know the government put in initiatives to try and help with the financial burden and paying with the schools but the way in which they implemented it wasn't culturally nuanced and it didn't show an awareness of the real term impacts on families and communities.

I: Give some details, there?

R: So we had the issue, remember the laptops. So our families, a lot of them come from quite economically disadvantaged communities, especially Black, Asian, Kashmiri, Muslim. And the government did an initiative where families in need would be given a laptop. Now first, all non-profit organisations in the third sector and schools could apply for those families. We put so many applications in and then they changed the policy because they were getting so many requests that the schools would give it to the families loaned it to the families. But not all the families got it, not all the schools were making families aware and then the government kind of forgot another thing, not all of them could afford wi-fi and data. So it made it null and void and we talked to families where because they had three or four kids trying to ration it so that they all could equally study. Or parents who are studying, like one of our directors, she's at university but she was putting her kids' education first, which meant she wasn't getting her assignments done because they had one computer, or the wi-fi was really slow, right, so they could only use that one laptop. So she was sort of sacrificing her own degree.

I: There's two things that have come up here that I think are really interesting. One is, it goes back to the point you were talking about in prisons where you weren't expecting organisations to come back to you. And that suggests that's something to do with the Pandemic or at least the conditions of the Pandemic might have had something to do with how people engaged with their faith. And there's something else but it will come back to me in a minute. But can we expand on that a bit, in terms of...

R4: I think because when it's Ramadan month, it's really special for the Muslim community and they tend to, if they're not praying regular but for that month they make that effort. So for prisoners that's the only thing they can live on is basically their faith and then they pray. But they pray in prison anyway 'cause they've got

nothing else to do so they start going more into their faith and everything. And then having the books and the prayer mats and that were they can actually focus on their faith is really important to them. That's what helps them get through. So I think in Covid times that's even harder because they can't even sit with another prisoner, they're completely isolated in their room, so I think that's where the support, like we gave them a box of dates. So normally, that's what they were resaying, they will get a plate of dates for a week so they got seven dates, they get one a day for seven days, so it's like rationed. Whereas we could be at home and I might say I've had one I'll have another one but they didn't have that choice.

R3: [Over speaking] that togetherness, don't you.

R4: Yeah. So when we gave the boxes that was so important they don't have to ration they can have however many they want. And I think at some point, I'm not saying prisons should be happy go lucky for them but these people still got to come back out and their health and wellbeing, if it's not looked after then we're dealing with those people when they come outside in the community. And I think when they kind of get to a certain category where they have a bit more flexibility they could actually sit together and open their fast together so that was even taken away. So little, little things like that that we take for granted, that they did have but that they've lost everything completely, it's two years. Two years. And even if they did their video calls that they classed as purple visits...

R1: That was actually an advantage though for them.

R4: It was advantage for them but with some of our communities who can't even book the visit online because they don't know how to use the internet and stuff. But they kind of suffered as well because they don't know how to use it, so a lot of people didn't get visits for over a year. But I think the prison, they were a bit slow, but they did pick up on getting these Zoom calls set up and all for the prisoners. And they reckon that was one of the best things that could have happened and it helped also when people were dying or family members were being told at the end of life they could actually do that call so they can see them before they pass away or even if they did the funeral they can actually see the funeral. So for the prison system they found that that Covid thing kind of helped change things for the better. One thing I feel from my own experience that the registry office when they're registering deaths it was all online, even the death certificate, the green slip, whatever they call it. For me I thought that worked well and they should keep that. So what they learnt that worked well they should keep it now and not take it away 'cause I think now they still are collecting the death certificate, I think this that went, I'm not sure 'cause I'm gonna find out.

Because the online death registry, 'cause it works within hours and I think that's, for me during Covid, that's the best thing that could have happened. But one of the things that we've, because of the impact, you know previously people used to die and they used to get the death certificate really quickly. The death certificate takes a while they're trynna improve on that, the burials were fine but now what we're seeing is that people are dying in our communities, we're not getting the graveyard space as quick as we want to. So those are the kind of issues that are needed to look into as well, 'cause for our faith we wanna bury that person as soon as possible. So now you can get the death certificate so easy but we can't get the burial, whereas it's reversed in Covid, it was the burial and the death certificate. We used to get, before Covid the death certificate was harder to get and the spaces to bury was quicker. But it's reversed now, you get the death certificate quickly but you can't get the burial and they do a limit, they do like four, five graves a day and that's it they're gone but

you've got such a huge, we cover West Midlands so those are the kind of things I think it's time to look into.

R2: I remember a conversation about what's it, graveyard getting full and things going around a lot. But [R4] also talked quite a bit to, what do you call them, the Muslim kind of funeral directors? [R4] had quite real contact and the emotional labour and pressure they were under, I think you get that across communities and across religions. I think that was one group, one area worked that was forgotten in the intensity...

R4: [Over speaking] never ever recognised the amount of work that they did put in.

I: And also with the implications in and around cleansing of the body after death and all of that stuff, what were the changes, what were the implications there?

R4: I think, from my understanding, that when Covid first hit and obviously I was in Pakistan and I used to get on Facebook and I used to see that every time I put it on they were telling me, "Stop looking at your Facebook", because I said, "Oh my god, so and so's passed away, so and so's passed away." So from what we were told, because I wasn't here to experience it, but I've been told that the bodies used to arrive in bags and they weren't even allowed to open them. First of all they didn't even shower them with the water, they used to just bury them as they were and then I think, three, four months down the line they started to let them just wash the bag and everything. And I think six months or something down the line when they kind of understood they were actually letting you bathe the body but it had to be by trained people from the community. So they had to have the training and wear the PPE gear that they couldn't go in and wash the bodies, if they didn't have that training they weren't allowed. So a lot of people weren't allowed to wash their own parents, mothers.

R2: But the people with the training they had to keep doing it, and doing it, and doing it. The emotional trauma and the pain.

I: But just for clarification, because it's normally close family members?

R4: Yeah, it's normally the family member doing it.

I: So you would never ordinarily be in a situation where one person is, as you say, repeatedly...

R4: [Over speaking] Yeah, so then obviously the people that had the training they would be the ones that are called in. If you hadn't had the training you weren't allowed to do it whether it was your mum or anyone because we had that with a few, funeral directors, XXXX the funeral guy, his own mum died of Covid and his sister wasn't allowed to go in because she didn't have the training, so regardless if it's your sister the rules were rules and that was it, she wasn't allowed in.

R3: Okay, see you guys.

I: Take care.

R3: Good luck with your...

- R1: Across the religion the funeral directors they tend to the numbers that were coming at certain points and they haven't really been recognised in the media, government, I think they've been forgotten the workforce.
- R4: Within the Black community 'cause they mourn for 10 days as well so they do their mourning period for 10 days and I think they face similar stuff. The way they were the highest in death then it was Pakistanis and then Bangladeshis I think and Indian. They had a huge impact as well in the Black community.
- I: **So when you were talking earlier about, it was a brief thing you said but, in terms of greater impact being in Black and Asian communities or Asian communities across the board that the panicky phone calls. So can you take us through the experience of working in contact with the community at a time where that impact around Covid is happening and what support you were offering?**
- R4: I think all our phone calls, I think what we do is, 'cause we were allowed to go out and I'm the kind of person who likes to be out within the community so I took advantage of that in my role that I can actually do that. But I think when we did that home visit where we got to the door and they said, "Oh, we didn't tell you but we've tested for Covid but we were negative." But we didn't know until we got to the door then I realised that we need to think about ourselves first. So we stopped doing home visits but then 'cause we had the office we did say that they can come in but they obviously would have to isolate and do the hand sanitisers and wear a mask and everything. So I think what happened, the work went on phone calls...
- R2: One of the things was, there's this assumption of digital literacy in the society we live in. We had a coffee morning on, was it Zoom?
- R4: WhatsApp.
- R1: Yeah, they went on Zoom but they had no idea so we tried it on WhatsApp but it just doesn't work the same. And WhatsApp for our clients as digitally engaged that they can get, so this assumption that they'd be able to online and fill out a form, we were doing a lot of the forms. Finding information for them just because they couldn't navigate it and they didn't want to pester their kids or their grandkids, or they were busy. So especially in the groups we were engaging with the issue with access to technology and the wi-fi for using it but also digital literacy. 'Cause some place the 10 year old kids were helping them log on for the... you know the online journal, were 10 year old kid.
- I: **Wow okay. Do you think, given that you do work with, so at what stage do you come into contact with families then? Is it at the point that somebody's arrested or the point when somebody's incarcerated?**
- R4: Depends on when the referral's made so it might not be at the beginning. When we were trying to, you know when you're kind of get into the right time where you can get your work advertised here and there, soon as it was kind of getting ready Covid kicked in and it put you back two years kind of thing. So now we're trynna get back out there, we used to do outreach work in prisons, which has not started back up. We're now in our third year, isn't it. So I think...
- R1: Well we helped two young boys through their court cases while they were being tried. But it can vary, a lot as well is long term so there'll be an intense period, either during

remand or the hearing, and it will go quiet and then you might, just issues intensify again.

I: Did you have any insight into whether or not Covid, there's a lot of stuff that's speculative at the minute, but the idea that crime may have become elevated in the context of Covid?

R4: I think crime was reduced, isn't it.

R2: At the start I'm sure it was to do with Covid, they were saying...

R4: [Over speaking] oh, yeah, someone got shot.

R2: No they were saying that basically because before if you was in gang crime or whatever you were out and about so you wouldn't know exactly where that person would be but when it was lockdown you knew everyone was at home in their house. So in the first kind of, I don't know I think it was the first part I think it was, so there was a little bit more crime because they knew that you were at home. So if they was gonna do something really violent...

I: Okay.

R2: ...they knew where...

R4: To attack the other person that find easy targets.

R1: There's a lot of online fraud as well and fake phone calls. We had so many calls from clients, we got this text message from Royal Mail, if it was not Royal Mail it was Amazon and thank goodness our ones call us before they put any money or transfer anything. But yeah, they were getting a lot of those scams. And some of our clients are elderly and because it was during for example the lockdown they would be with their family members because previously because they were living alone or they just didn't think about it. If they didn't call us they may very well have fallen for it.

I: Yeah. And do you think, in terms of supporting people then, as well, thinking about generationally or as you put it IT literacy and stuff. How does gender factor in in terms of who you support, who you engage with, what their needs are and so on and so forth?

R1: Most of our clients are women. Women don't necessarily get incarcerated, but especially in the communities we engage with it's mostly mum and dad so we often find that it's the mother's, daughters, grandmothers keep coming to us when a male member has been arrested or imprisoned. So most of our service users, is it 98%, 99%...

R4: Yeah, I think it's 98%.

R2: ...it's kind of changed a bit now in Ramadan packs we have offenders contacting us well to provide support for them and their families. But primarily it's women and they're also having to navigate payments and then housework and childcare and assumptions of who's responsibility the stuff in the home is, is still quite deeply ingrained.

I: Was there impacts on that in terms of, I know that you were all working and had the opportunity to keep coming to work. But in terms of your reflections

on the wider community or whatever were there implications for family dynamics as a result of lockdowns or women who weren't in frontline jobs and had to stay in the home or whether a spouse was furloughed and was now in the home, home schooling, what kinds of impacts might they have brought?

- R1: There was tension where there was a partner who was working more before they had to be furloughed and then be in the home and then disrupting the entire dynamic of what was their relationship, so there were those issues that manifested.
- R4: I think we only had most of them that really worked from home. Yeah.
- R1: But also, wasn't it deciding who, when the kids were out of school because it's quite a long time right, which parent would stay home often it would end up being the mother because their income was slightly lower, potentially. So I know I talked to a few people in Aston when I was going around and they would say that we didn't have a choice we had to. They knew it was a gender imbalance, but they spoke to their partners, interaction between two people.
- R4: But I think also that people who, working from home is wasn't for everyone that really could cope with working from home. Some people like to go out and engage with other people and when they had to stay home and work from home I think they found that as a struggle as well. And I think from our own experience carers who would go out and look after other elderly people who ever needed to get care, they were really overworked I think. 'Cause we used to see the carer they were non stop they had to work right through Covid and I think here wasn't a balance in people lives, was there, really during Covid.
- R1: And working from home, you had that balance in a home private time/work, it blurred, especially when I was working from home at XXX [employer, Higher Education Institution], I would sometimes not realise the time it's be 1am and I'd be doing something that I shouldn't have still been doing. That genuinely happened in our industry you know what I mean. I remember talking to friends who did other job they were doing secretarial work or admin at home because of Covid and they would lose track of time and still be working when they shouldn't be.
- R4: When we registered my dad's death 'cause it's all online and the Registrar that picked up the email 'cause they're working from home and I think it depends on how people had the set up, you know sometimes the houses are small and they've got large family and you can't really have a small room somewhere put aside where you can switch everything off, go upstairs and work and come back down. But fortunate for this lady who picked up, she saw the email come in, it was about 5:00pm, 5:30pm just as she's about to switch off and she saw it and she goes, 'oh, I thought I'll pick it up', the email. So they ring you up and they check all the stuff you put on there and they issue a certificate. So when she phoned me and she said I thought if I was travelling to work I wouldn't have been home yet I would have been home at 6:30pm, so I thought what difference does it make if I just pick this last one up. So in that way I think people did save a lot of time travelling, especially people who had to travel far so I think that had a saving time for them.

And some people really enjoyed being home working, they were able to spend more time with their children and work and have time with their children, get back onto the computer, whatever. But for me, when I first set up on my own I did work from home, but now if you ask me to go home and work from home I couldn't do it. I just couldn't, it's just so hard, it's a way, now I can actually switch off from here and go home and not worry about work. Like [R1] said, when I was actually working from home I

remember being up 12:00pm, 1 o'clock and I'm watching my dramas or whatever and the same time I'm typing a bid. And you just don't realise what the time is, it's 1 o'clock I've got to get up in the morning and go to sleep. I think it's back to individual people isn't it, how they coped and how they felt.

R1: For example, because I joined during Covid as a volunteer and I remember [R4] saying as we progressed through Covid the amount of community engagement that had stopped.

R4: Loads.

R1: Yeah because you said that was drastically different, everything was face-to-face, people need each other which meant they could collaborate in community events for the support but that really vanished.

R4: Now I realise when I see someone and it's three years and you think where did I see, from where do I know you from, I really can't remember I feel terrible. Sometimes I had to pretend and say, "Oh, I haven't got your number can you write it down and put your name on then I'll remember who it is." It has been a forgetful time as well.

R1: And I remember when I first had the chance to see some of our clients face-to-face with the Christmas hampers I was just so excited because I could finally see them when I was just hearing their voices.

I: Christmas Hampers meaning it, Christmas, it had been since March essentially?

R1: Yeah. Yeah.

I: Wow. And then so were you able to adapt some of the things that you did, as you're saying it was mostly over the phone?

R4: Everything went online.

R1: I was helping them with online forms, again digital literacy, not on the phone, on WhatsApp, and WhatsApp videos and so we were mentoring some of the kids a lot of it was on WhatsApp video.

I: Oh video calls on WhatsApp.

R1: Yeah. Yeah with the kids that was good with the adults it depended so that was an interesting one.

R4: I think that the Christmas hampers was our first Covid Christmas wasn't it that we did the hampers, froze to death. It had to rain and hailstones and everything the day we decided to go and do our hampers.

R2: Christmas Eve.

I: And so were there other things like that that were sort of distinctive ideas because of Covid?

R4: Yeah, I think the Christmas, the packs...

R2: [Over speaking]. The Ramadan packs and we, I'm sure didn't we get the same...

- R1: [Over speaking] Did we two hampers, ASDAs and the family one. So we had the Christmas hampers and then we had another one, just...
- R4: [Over speaking] We done that...
- R1: Yeah.
- I: So you had Ramadan packs was sent to prison.**
- R4: Yeah, then we gave some to the families and they came back, as soon as we finished then we were like this, thinking that that's it we can't do anymore and we had the funding from ASDA that you could have the, not against the food, we had to pick that container.
- R1: [Over speaking]
- R4: So we had to bring the food home and pack it downstairs and obviously the managers here they're really good because when we were doing something like that they let us have the room free so instead of bringing it up. So we left it there and put it in trays and by that time I think we thought, you know what, we can't do anymore so we got another organisation to help us to take it to their families and whatever and got some people to pick it up. But delivering, our families are not all in one spot they're scattered and when you've got one person doesn't drive, [R2] just got her car, didn't have it then, so it was only me the driver. And then we have to rely on someone that can come and our other trustee she don't even drive so obviously everything falls back on me so if we're gonna do deliveries I have to take the bulk of the work and then I thought you know what, that's it.
- R1: But also, that's another thing, you know the frontline organisations that were helping during Covid we have Sisters XX XXXX [charity focused on the elderly and vulnerable] who were here but they were forced to relocate to the building with all the PPI they have and they didn't have the space and others can't afford to rent more. So that was something as well.
- I: Can I just pick up on something, did you say that you got the funding on those additional, that food from ASDA, what was the time line? Did you say you were fasting whilst you were laying the food out?**
- R4: Yeah, it was.
- R1: Yeah, it blurred...
- R4: The fasting...The prisoner ones we'd done it before the fasting, before Ramadan, so they can have everything before and then we thought now we're gonna start our fasting and then ASDAs, it was a bit late and I thought, you know what I can't be doing lifting all this because when we done all the Christmas one we saw what we went through.
- R1: Yeah, I was like oompa loompa, you know the boxes were so heavy, I was going like this, she's all the way to the front, oh my god, am I gonna make it, am I gonna make it.
- R4: Then obviously we realised how hard it is to find parking then you've got to carry the stuff to the house, which might not be right outside.

- R1: And we did put a lot in those food hampers, with toys.
- R4: It's hard.
- R1: It's for the kids as well. So the food hampers were substantial because the next year we had our families calling to say were we doing it again because they were struggling financially but we didn't have the funding.
- R4: We didn't have the funding and we didn't do it, plus our team's not big enough to take bulk of the work like that it takes a lot out of you.
- R1: It's the same with the Ramadan all of us were here sometimes till 7 o'clock folding the prayer mats, hand putting labels, [R2] was stamping like 1000 books, our stickers run out so we had to print our labels out and put on little bottles and that took forever. And so it was interesting, it was funny though.
- I: What would you have thought if you had to highlight the most significant impacts, which would have impacted Muslim communities more widely in the Pandemic? What are the most significant things that spring to mind?**
- R4: For me I'm gonna say it was the whole scenario during the death of a person. And the second one would be the hospital, the huge amount of restrictions, 'cause like if it was me and say when my dad was dying it was my choice whether I wanted to go in and get Covid or not, that was my choice, so our choices were taken away from us. Because at that time if your parent is dying are you worried that you're gonna get Covid or do you wanna be with your parent that's dying. And then I think that choice should be left to that family member and not the institutes to make decision for us.
- R1: I think this is why a lot of people were so angry when we found out Boris Johnson and them had broken the rules because everyone else sacrificed so much and I remember family members and people when we went to events were just so angry. So, so angry, justifiably. See, I was lucky that I didn't have family members die of Covid or during Covid but I didn't get to see family members, extended family members that I generally see every day like my aunties and that was so strange that I didn't see them regularly.
- R4: And now you think you've seen them which isn't always, do you know what you're not used to it, you're used to that quietness and everything and there are like, it's my kind of dad's auntie that passed away just last week and that's the first family funeral we've had in three years since Covid. It was packed, it was huge and we saw people that we didn't see for three years and some people you forget. who was this, who was this, you know. So it shows it was kind of missed.
- R1: And in a lot of the communities we engage with mourning and celebrations, are a big thing. So even the weddings, I remember for example my brother's wedding, we were fine on our side but his finance they brought two extra people that they shouldn't have, remember when it was 15, I can't remember if it was 15...
- R4: 30, 15.
- R1: I can't remember what it was, that was after. They accidentally brought two people they couldn't so they had to get chucked out and told to go. And I know with other people they really struggled because they didn't want to say...

- R2: But also the same with everything but again with the weddings it was a good thing and a bad thing working especially with South Asian weddings we have very large weddings and they last for like a week.
- R1: Or two.
- R2: So you're spending a lot of money and if it's the first son or daughter in your family then they're more likely to do a larger wedding than if it was like the third child or something like that. So I think a lot of families also found it good that they could just do small ones then you don't have to, it's like if I invite that family, that's the cousin and they're gonna say, "Why have you invited them and not me." We didn't have that worry to say, I'm sorry it's Covid, you just...and you wouldn't get in trouble for it. It was an excuse and I think like our culture not, dramatically, but it's changed as well now because there's a lot more small weddings even now we're coming outside of Covid. And people are still implementing that but then you've got somebody who's still waited three years to have their big shebang of a wedding, so it just depends. I just think now where there's more people having smaller weddings it's not as insulting as before Covid if you was to have a wedding and not invite X or Y there would be a big problem.
- R1: Family feuds or gossip, what happened that they're have this small wedding, do the parents not approve, this or that.
- R2: Yeah, is she pregnant before marriage.
- R1: I think weddings cost a lot because I remember as a kid they used to have the Asian weddings, say, in the school hall but now I think the smallest wedding cost £10,000.
- R2: Yeah, on average.
- R1: So they lost a lot of money because the South Asian wedding industry in this country they make a lot.
- R2: Some of them though still kept their deposits and stuff and didn't...
- R1: There were arguments...
- R2: [Over speaking] I don't think it was fair to do.
- R1: Didn't the big one in XXXX get in trouble for that, the police got involved.
- R2: I don't know.
- R1: Yeah, it's an interesting one.
- I: **So do you think, I know we're kind of, but there's probably three or four questions I'm gonna ask and then we'll probably round up. But are there things that spring to mind that I've not...**
- R4: That's probably [R5].
- R1: Sorry. It's a bit too late. Are you allowed to add another person?
- I: **I don't mind as long as there's a consent form signed.**

R1: Okay, I'm coming down, are you at the back or front?

R4: She's at the back she's got the car.

I: **But I'll ask both of you anyway. But are there things in an around impacts that Muslim or South Asian women might have experienced, which haven't been documented or that haven't been part of the public picture of Covid and its impacts?**

R4: What do you think? I was thinking about our own household.

R2: What about...well, that was documented, when people were coming back and had to, like XXXX, that experience.

R4: Oh yeah, oh my god, yeah. I don't know if it is, 'cause obviously she's Muslim, she's a woman. My daughter in law obviously went for the wedding she got her visa in, we ended up in Covid, she got her visa in Covid and when she came she had to self isolate and that was a massive, massive impact on her.

R2: In a hotel, it was it two weeks, fourteen days.

R4: Ten days it was then, ten days. And she's not been to this country, she had to leave her parents and never travelled before, she had to leave her family and then she was isolated in a room she was scared to come out of so she didn't even come out of that room until we picked her up, the day we picked her up and she broke down when we picked her up. So I'm just thinking that trauma of those people as well that came to this country.

R1: There you go, the late arrival.

I: **Hi, you alright. You gonna take part or...?**

R2: You're gonna need a consent form if you want to take part.

I: **Yeah, if you're gonna take part, are you okay to...?**

R4: We're just talking about Covid and experience of it.

R5: Oh, I'll have a cup of tea. I've had enough of Covid.

R4: I've told him before about your experience.

R1: She did a thesis...

R5: Yeah, actually I've got good stories, so I'll just make a cup of tea [Over speaking].

R1: Get comfortable.

R4: Do me one.

I: **So just for clarifying, your daughter in law was not staying with you when she was isolating, she had to isolate independently?**

R2: Yeah, 'cause she came from abroad she had to stay in the hotel.

R2: And it was her first experience here, so she's never left her family, never travelled abroad, never gone on a plane, it was all first experience all by herself. So if it wasn't Covid either my brother would have gone or my dad would have gone to pick her up, gone to Pakistan and from there brought her back but that couldn't happen. We just about got our tickets coming back so she had to do all that on her own and that was massive for her.

R4: And then she lost her father, isn't it, six months after.

R2: Yeah, so she couldn't go back.

R4: So I think you know like if you look about impact there's so many different ways because a lot of the families, like her sister also was in this country, she was here for five years but they didn't... So when she died they didn't have the injections so they couldn't travel. So that was another thing, so it's like my husband and we had the injections because we've got elderly parents in Pakistan so if anything happened we weren't allowed to travel we couldn't enter the country without having the injections. So a lot of people whose family members had died they couldn't travel for that reason as well. And I don't know how people will ever get over it because my daughter-in-law obviously is not gonna go back yet but whenever she goes back she's not gonna have her dad there, is she. So that's another impact, that if you're looking at Birmingham as a city we've got the highest Muslim community in Birmingham, especially from Kashmiri background, that regularly go back 'cause they've got family there so they're like half of them are there but there was a lot of people that died in Pakistan and they couldn't go.

R1: And companies exploited Covid, the ticket prices were obscene even just one way.

R4: £1,600, £2,000.

R1: It was obscene, it was really obscene.

R4: I think when the government were saying here in the UK that they're try to bring all the British people back or try to do this, we're doing this, we've give so many millions, they gave nothing to us. I've got to be polite because you're recording.

I: You don't have to be.

R4: My friend was from Birmingham they interviewed us and sent them a video of her, that went viral.

[Over speaking]

R4: I was on the news.

R2: In Pakistan.

I: You were on the news in Pakistan?

R2: Yeah. When we were stuck in Pakistan she sent a video to the Birmingham Live...

R4: Was amazing, it went viral because ITV used it, I didn't know.

R2: So when we came back and when everything started to go a little bit normal and she'd bump into people they were, "Oh, we saw you were stuck in Pakistan."

- R1: We saw you on the news.
- R2: [Over speaking] my friends were like, "We saw your mum on the news." And I was like, "Did you." And I was like, there was two videos she'd done they were like really bad, just like bad angles and everything.
- R4: The best part was my son when he went to get married his friend was like, "Oh, I didn't know you went to Pakistan to get married." It was really bad, I don't know how many people must have seen it, 'cause obviously Covid was so highlighted and everyone was watching everything.
- R2: And people were sharing these videos, WhatsApp especially and Facebook so...
- R4: [Over speaking] But the tickets were...
- R2: ...and they share and they share and they share so it gets around.
- R4: And then I think the government they put a stop on, capped the price of the tickets, £550 so we all had to buy our tickets again.
- I: You had to buy cancelled tickets again to get back?**
- R4: Yeah, we had to buy new tickets to get back they wouldn't let us in.
- R2: The worst thing was the lockdown started in Pakistan first then the UK done their lockdown. But it happened two days before we were gonna leave. Like our suitcases were packed and everything ready to leave we were gonna go in two days and before you know it lockdown was announced and we couldn't. And then we couldn't even travel around Pakistan either because it was lockdown there.
- I: And so what was it like being locked down in Pakistan anyway?**
- R4: It was worse than here.
- R2: No, it wasn't. I didn't want to come back 'cause I was like, 'I'm not going back to England and I can't do anything or go anywhere.' So I was like I'd rather stay here but because fasting was coming and I was like I can't, it was like 36 degrees and I was like there's no way I could do it. And mum was like, "I'm not leaving you here anyway." So I had to come back with them. But they had the army out so they had rules as well, I think if you were in a car travelling and there's only two people allowed, you had to have masks or the scarf covering your mouth and nose, I think we didn't go to the shops...
- R4: We didn't go at all.
- R2: ...because we were in the village we were able to go hiking and stuff to pass time at least we had that whereas here we would just be indoors. For me I was like I'd rather be here in nature I've got my goats, there's chickens, there's all sorts of animals.
- I: You said something interesting there and I'm only asking this question because somebody mentioned this, I did an online focus group on Sunday with Muslim women and one of the things they made a point of was mask wearing and how it might have had a change in attitudes towards veiling. And I know that's a kind of....**

R1: There was a really good, do you remember that poster, where you would get a fine for wearing the veil but if you don't wear the face mask you get a fine. I loved that one, that was on point.

I: **But that's, so do you have any points of view on that or...?**

R5: Karma.

R4: That was the best answer there.

I: **Let's talk about government responses. What's your general kind of perspective of how the government handled Covid in general and how their response was, or didn't meet the needs of South Asian communities?**

R4: According to, they were too late in doing lockdown for a start 'cause if we're Pakistan, a third world country, but were one of the countries that I think did really well in Covid. They did the lockdown really, really fast, didn't they, they done it straight away, we didn't have hardly any deaths as UK did. But if Pakistan didn't take that action it did it would have been devastating for Pakistan because we do have a lot of people who live in poverty, no jobs, no nothing. And even when they did put lockdown and people who would go out to do their daily work and earn the money and they got money to buy food, they struggled because there's no benefits like there is in this country so they have no food, they have nothing to eat.

R5: And not only that, the people who were the worst in poverty, the beggars, had no money, no income, they used to come to people like us in Pakistan for food and money but we can't give it 'cause we can't go to the banks so we have no food ourself. And then because of lockdown they used to have trucks or lorries that used to come and give you fruit and veg half of it used to be mangy but you know you have no choice but to buy. But it wasn't allowed because they were supposed to be in lockdown as well but some things slipped through the net. So for all these people who were very poor it was very devastating that we weren't even in a position at that point to say we can give you some charity 'cause we became charity ourselves. It was really hard going.

R4: One thing that you mentioned there about, when we went, obviously when you go abroad and you go on holiday you have a budget that I've got this much money and it's enough for me to live off. But that's what we did we took enough...

R5: She spent all my money. She said she didn't, for the wedding, I can't forgive her for that still.

R4: We took enough money, we spent on the wedding we were lucky that the wedding went ahead and two days after our wedding there was a complete lockdown in Pakistan, so we were fortunate that we didn't lose our money and all that kind of stuff and the money and our clothes. But you made me forget what I was gonna say. When money runs out we weren't able to get any Rupees like because we had English money and there's no banks, no nothing, so that was another impact we couldn't get money across from here to Pakistan, so I think that was what impacts, might be little things but they were big impacts on people...

R5: And then the rate changed so whereas we would have had double we had to pay triple for a Pound.

R4: Yeah, so it wasn't easy.

I: **So you said you had some stories for me?**

R5: Stories? My personal story?

I: **No, well, yeah, I mean...**

R5: I didn't go to Pakistan after 32 years of my life. I was very excited to go to Pakistan, I had an opportunity to go with my sister 'cause I'm an outcast there, rebel outcast, left family. So I thought, oh, yes...

R4: I think you better ask another question...

I: **You're a rebel that's interesting, now I'm more curious about the story.**

R5: Obviously I've never had no one to go to Pakistan with or no reason 'cause I was like out, you get it. So she said, "You wanna come?" I said, "Of course." Got ready to go, after 32 years I thought I'd be able to see a bit of the country 'cause when I went before I was a bit like isolation and prisoner not able to go. [coughs] It's not Covid cough.

R1: It's not the Covid cough...

R5: Smokers' cough. So, anyway got there. Only was supposed to go for a month so we ended up extra. Me and her never argue, we nearly fell out 'cause we had to live with each other.

R4: That's another thing, living with each other as well, arguments.

R5: Yeah, 'cause I'm a nanny and a grandmother so I was experiencing that, "Oh my god, what if Covid comes here and we're all gonna die." 'Cause they never explained anything properly about Covid they just had the fear monger thing going on, we're all gonna die with Covid. So you think it's gonna come from the air and it's gonna kill us all and I'm never gonna be able to see my grandkids again. I couldn't sleep, so one night I was in the kitchen 'cause I fell out with her 'cause I was whinging so I got two chairs together and put my legs up and thought this is where I'm gonna sleep. I did not sleep, I just cried and cried all night. And I was suffocating, even though I was in Pakistan, open air, you couldn't have a better place to breathe, even though I had that freedom and open air to breathe I was having anxiety, I could not breathe 'cause of not knowing what's gonna happen. And all the news and everything about the flights are closed and all that and then we were desperate to get back. I don't know if it was worth getting back and catching Covid or staying here and taken the risk. But it meant you were totally isolated, physically, mentally, emotionally and you just didn't know if you were gonna be able to see my children or my grandkids again. She had all her children with her.

R4: So she used to hate me for that.

R5: I used to get cross with her that you're not understanding my situation.

R4: Because all my kids went, this is the first time we went together as a family.

R5: And then obviously the only thing we could do was walk around the mountains, so one day I fell and you saw me fall, didn't you, and I'm still recovering from that injuries

in my ankle, my shoulder. It's gonna be there for the rest of my life, one day I can walk and run next day I'm like this [makes noise].

R5: So literally it takes me a whole two hours, I need this frame like a tin man [Over speaking].

I: **So what was it like pulling together information from, so you've got some information from the UK, you must still be accessing news from the UK, you've got WhatsApp groups going on. You've got information and news in Pakistan, how's that coming together? And what was it like processing information from different places?**

R2: It wasn't coming together.

I: **Oh, it wasn't coming together, okay.**

R2: Because we had some people, mum's got loads of friends and stuff on Facebook so there's loads of people who were in Pakistan from the UK and then you've got the people who are just still at home in the UK. So you'd hear people who were saying, from that had visited Pakistan oh, we've managed to get on this flight how are you not on the flight, there are flights coming through but then they say no there's no flights. We've contacted, we were flying with XXXX [airline company] when we came so we were contacting them, "No, there's no flights until June."

R4: They complete shut down for a year.

R2: And then we didn't get anything from them. So we were like, "Okay, we're not going with XXXX [airline company]." There was no flights and then if there were they were like ridiculously priced and we were like, "We're not gonna pay that." And so it was like, yeah there are flights, no there aren't flights, yeah there are flights, no there aren't flights. "How did you get back?" "Oh, we got back, there's flights..." So we were like, "Well there are flights then because you were here and now you're home." So that was like really confusing then it's like you can do this you can't do that, back home and then, I don't know, it was just all over the place. Even when we were back it was all over the place because I think Boris was saying, "You can do this but you can't do that, but then you can do this", and it's the same thing and it was just, I think I stopped listening.

R1: I don't know if you did, but I certainly get anxious listening to the news, about the Covid thing, so I switched it off and made sure I knew what the rules were at every given week but other than that I just stopped.

R4: What I find strange that you know like when we go to Pakistan and we can live there without a TV, we never have a TV in Pakistan. They have got it, we never put it on and we get on with our life and you have so much stuff to do and you never watch TV. But here three hours, four hours like, TV, what the hell. But our TV broke, that's another story, and we didn't have a TV 'cause my husband damaged it and I said, "We're not gonna get one, that's your punishment." So we didn't have a TV for five months and it's the best five months we had. The best five months.

R2: My brother was so happy.

R4: Yeah, the one who got married he was like, 'cause he used to hate it when we'd come he'd say, "Sssh, sshh, you made us miss what they said." Dramas you really have to concentrate. And he used to get annoyed, so that made you think some

people say yeah, we've had more conversations and stuff yeah. And then my other son went and bought a TV and we thought, "Oh god, it was really better off without a TV." But then the box you have so many free Asian channels we didn't put that back on I didn't let them. So then this way you don't have a TV on 24/7 'cause you have to look for something you want to watch and then you don't bother and it just stays off and it's just on in the evening for a few hours.

R1: My mum's addicted to the Indian dramas, but we don't watch TV like we used to since Covid, it changed a lot in that way.

I: So do you think, in terms of what the needs of the community were, were there organisations, obviously you transferred your support services over the phone, online things. Were there other organisations you were aware of that were doing things to support the community in the Pandemic, particularly with regards the Muslim communities, South Asian communities?

R2: Sisters XXX [charity focused on the elderly and vulnerable] were doing a lot, especially the PPI.

R4: XXXX [rehabilitation organisation] did but I'm not sure how much they really did.

I: So what did those organisation do?

R1: So Sister XXXX work with the elderly, the vulnerable, so for example, they had an office based right down here but they had to move because of all the PPI they had.

R4: The equipment they had to have because they were doing end of life care, I think a lot of the patients they were dealing with was end of life, it wasn't just normal caring so they had to have the whole full PPE, equipment. They had boxes and boxes and boxes that they couldn't store for their staff to have, so that's why they moved. I think there were people who were doing a lot of, you know, hot meals, so they're giving them out to families so that kids are not... You've got to also remember that these kids in the under deprived areas were free school meals so when the schools were closed they weren't really getting that meal that probably might have been their only hot meal or probably the better meal of the day. And then the family impacted more on financially because they had to provide food for the family three times a day where normally they might just have done one or two.

R1: Do you remember the women's XXXX they had a food van and the queues used to be outside the car park.

I: So were there local mosques in Sparkbrook who had any initiatives you were aware of?

R4: I know the XXXX mosque [one of the largest Mosques in the city, near Highgate] did a lot, they did in Covid they used to give, during the month of Ramadan, they used to do food every day, I think they tried it in the month of Ramadan then they continued it. So I think generally, we didn't really pay much attention with that but there were a lot of mosques that they would do something like giving food or whatever, so XXXX trust [the Islamic Trust organisation] they did a lot of food banks so people would give in the food and they would give it out to families that needed it.

I: Was that XXXX Trust or...?

- R4: No, I think they did do something can't remember but XXXX Trust is another one on...
- R1: No, the XXXX Trust, we were sending our leaflet to our clients, they did something but I can't remember what.
- I: **Okay.**
- R4: The majority was food, wasn't it.
- R: Yeah, a lot of it hem was food, food, food, food. I mean like after we did our hamper, we still sometimes do...
- R4: [Over speaking] people were calling us but we said it was..
- I: **What I'm thinking about I guess wellbeing, there's been a lot of themes in terms of people staying home and all that stuff. In terms of your engagement, your roles and how you can enter the community what are your perspectives on the impacts in terms of mental health and wellbeing? Short term, long term and that type of thing as a result of Covid, 'cause you talked a lot about anxieties.**
- R4: I think it will be long term, for some people the impacts will be long term, especially if they lost someone in the first phase where they weren't even allowed to go in and people died alone. I don't think anyone will ever get over that, you can't forget because when someone dies it brings your own memories back. So when I was at my auntie who passed away the other day I remembered they were on about that they called them in, first of all they don't let them in and then they said, "She's gonna die, come in." When you get that call, "They're gonna die." You don't absorb it, we had the same thing with my dad, they called us in but when my dad went in, he had Parkinson's so I think he was getting a bit of dementia but he wasn't all there with it. So when he had the operation, because he fell and broke his arm, they called us in, he was hysterical so they couldn't calm him down so they asked one of us to come in. So I went in, sat with him for three hours trying to explain to him I'm not gonna be allowed in. He said, "No, no, you can come, you can come."
- I said, "Dad, I'm not gonna be allowed in they're not gonna let us in, you know, it's Covid, remember, it's Covid." But then, we will never know, did Dad understand what was actually going on or did he think we just dumped him. Does that make sense. So for me even talking to her that day I started crying already it was emotional that we will never know how dad really felt towards the last days. And then we brought him home and he was kind of out of it so he didn't really know, he might have thought that my kids I did all of that for them but they left me in hospital to die. 'Cause he used to say, "You left me here to die, let me die", when we were doing a couple of Zoom calls. So for some people who couldn't even see their family member I can say that they would never get over it. So that mental health is long term. And then there will always be people who get over it but they're either not dealt with their feelings, emotions and how to get over things and it's all kind of blocked and there'll be a time when that trauma hits them for whatever reasons. So I think mental health will be huge. And then when we look at the prison side, for when they come out then their mental health will be at another scale.
- R1: We've talked to, because when we started going back to the prisons for certain days and talking to the chaplaincy teams, the prisons do make a record when someone reports self harm or they're struggling mentally, but that doesn't mean they

immediately get help. That's one of the problems and I don't think the government always acknowledged that in the initiatives they did.

R4: They say that self harming's really high.

R1: Yeah, self harming, but just because they write it down does not mean that person has gone into therapy or even getting the help, it just means there's a record somewhere on file saying that they self harm or are at risk. That's one of the big problems. And also the ripple effect, a lot of our families were feeling anxious, and even the kids, one of our kids we were mentoring because she was struggling with the lockdown meant it had become part of her routine to go see her dad in prison. When the lockdown came in effect and the prison visits stopped it totally destabilised that for her. And they were struggling on the outside as well, they didn't know what was happening, because each prison has slightly different policies, especially when they were coming out of the lockdown, there's common restrictions but each prison's different.

R4: I think they had the fear.

R2: But even when they went to visit some prisons would say oh, when they started the visiting back up, 'you can hug them', some would say 'you can't hug the prisoner' that was like a problem as well. So it's like you've been two years and you haven't seen the person then you go in and you can't even touch them.

R1: Including the kids.

I: I'm gonna get towards the end now I think, but do you think Covid exposed or exacerbated or made worse any pre-existing inequalities, or draw attention to pre-existing inequalities? And they can be health inequalities, across race and gender, religion.

R1: I'm just thinking about, I had a lot of friends talk about trauma during giving birth in hospitals and they felt there was a racial component to that but it was also exacerbated by the Covid rules and stipulations. So, because I have friends who gave birth in the first lockdown in hospital and they still they have visceral reactions to what they went through.

I: And what kinds of experience, that you can share? And context as well, 'cause what, is there...sorry, go on...

R1: Because they were really, I think if they talk to you, but one of my friends she was told that her partner couldn't stay with her in the ward. And they went, "No, no, he can't stay." And they were adamant and she was quite anxious because they said the baby wasn't turned right. So she was really stressed out but they went, "No, sorry he has to go home, he has to leave." So he went home, she was taken up to the ward and there's a ton of women and if I remember correctly I think she said they were all White, that had people with them. So she was not happy and she was stressed out and she was feeling like her skin colour was the reason why she was getting different reaction. And then a few of my friends talked about the fact that their concerns weren't taken seriously and they were treated as overly anxious mothers could be and then they were released because of Covid. One of my friends, they want to get you out of hospital as soon as possible, so it was just give birth and booted out. And then her midwife came a few days later or a week later and noticed an issue with the baby that she said, the midwife said, should've been picked up at the hospital when they do the check up before they release you, but it wasn't

because they wanted her out. So there were a lot of stories like that, previously I rarely heard that, but during Covid I heard that from a lot of people. I don't know if you did.

- R5: There was a lot of scepticism going on as well, especially in our community 'cause obviously the more control and everything. But in the hospital when one of our peers had to go in and they would be sceptical that they were basically injected with God knows what and they're killing old people off. There was a lot of that going on, people didn't wanna have injections. I for one did not want to have any Covid injections but I was pressured by my daughter because she was a mum to be, she had a baby and her husband's father he was very anxious, he did not even let the mother-in-law touch that baby until about two years. So they used to go and stay away and just look at the baby, no touching, no hugging, no picking. What kind of life was that for a baby as well. But I was having to have that injection because of her in-laws that they are so anxious, so basically if you don't have the injection you're not protected and then you can't come and mix with them. I did not want to have no injection I'd rather die naturally. I believe people should be able to die naturally, never mind if there's Pandemic, whatever there is, if you gotta die you've gotta die, the world ends slowly.

People come and go. Do you get what I mean? It should be natural. We were made to have these injections, we don't even know what's in these injections. What have been put into our bodies 'cause they weren't even tested, the injection was not tested before they gave it all out. And now they've got this October Booster, forget that, I'm not having it. And whether my daughter's gonna be happy or not, and say, "If you don't have it you can't see the kids", sorry time come now, my time. I'm not having no more injections, it's so wrong that they made us all have these injections, we do not know what they are. And since the injections we have heard a lot of people had heart attacks, have been ill, blood clots, you name it, now they're all sceptical is it because of the injections? People will die with heart attacks blah, blah, whatever, we've never known how many people in a year are in hospital dying but because of this Pandemic it opened up this world that it suddenly showed how many people were dying that year and they blamed it all on Covid. Was it the Covid that did this to the people or was it natural that people were dying? And now they brought in these figures because of Covid, but we were never told the normal figures when there was no Covid it might have been the same. Do you get what I'm saying?

- R2: When it was flu I think they were saying the number of people who die by like the normal flu was a lot higher than Covid, I think. So there's a lot of comparisons, if Covid has less impact in that sense why are they over spotlighting it basically when we get the flu every year and it's normal we just get on with it. Elders who are more vulnerable they would get the flu jab or whatever but everyone else will just get on with it, which is what we're doing now anyway.
- R5: Yeah, and definitely the mental side of it is when you're going to the shopping centres and somebody will go, "Achoo", everyone looks back at you. You cough, you know with these masks right, they make you worse, they're holding all your air, so you get suffocated and you're gonna cough more 'cause you're drying out your throat so basically I can't wear masks. And people got it into their head it became power, "Excuse me, have you got your mask on?" Do you get what I mean? And I'm like, "I can't breathe, I'm trying to breathe." If I go into a shop like Next or Savers it's so humid and I swear to God soon as I go in, I don't know what it is I can't stop coughing. I cough and cough and cough, and cough, even I think I've got Covid, but it's not, it's just the humidity in the shops. And then you get looked upon. One time I was in Next and was trying to get something for my grandson and I already had the

outfit I wanted to quickly buy it, I had to tell them, "Can you quickly serve me so that I can go out?" I had to go out and cough my guts out and then come back in 'cause it was so hot in there.

And it's just become ridiculous and now when people get a cough or they're ill or the flu, "Oh, it's just Covid, a flu." It's just Covid, no matter you'll be fine soon, so what was it all about two years ago, scaring everybody. Like, oh my god Covid's come and we're all gonna die, so people started dying whether they had Covid or not. Yeah.

R4: And I think the other group that would have an impact, I know you're gonna go but it might give you some ideas of other research. I'd love to see research on the amount of people that died of heart attacks during Covid and before, so there's how many numbers did we have before and how many. 'Cause my husband had a heart attack, never had any problem, no blood pressure, no sugar, nothing at all and he had an aneurism, he had a massive heart attack he nearly died. His friend just died, was it three weeks ago, he was home he was in the garage went up about 4:30 said to his wife, "I'm not feeling..." He's got horses in the farm somewhere so he made their feed, he said, "I'm gonna lie down for a bit I don't feel well." Next thing you know he died of a heart attack. And these people have all had injections so I would like to see someone, and I know the government will never authorise this, is to do research to find out how many people died of heart attacks during Covid and beyond Covid because of the injections and the difference before Covid. I'll never see that happen but I would love to see that happen.

There's a lot of inequalities there. And then the other impact on mental health and wellbeing is like [R5] was saying that when her daughter, they had Covid babies so there's a whole community there that had babies during Covid, the impact on, the anxiety and the overdoing...paranoia...

R5: Yes, they're anxious, because my daughter and her partner they were very, very anxious so when we came back from Pakistan from the lockdown and obviously you've got to do self isolation for seven days.

R4: It was 14 then, when we came...

R5: Was it?

R4: ...it was 14, then it went to 10 and then 7.

R5: Anyway, whether it was 14 or not I wanted to stay with the group that I was with but my daughter was trying to say no, we want to make sure you're gonna be clearly self isolated, no visiting and this and that, whatever. So I had to go into their house and I was treated like a rabies dog. Sorry. So I had to stay in that room for whatever days it was, they used to come and knock on the door and give me my food and sorry [whispers] I didn't like the food. So it got so stressful to the point where I'd actually fallen out with my daughter 'cause she had this, 'cause they were very anxious, paranoid and anxious. They had a spray that I would have to, the Domestos spray that everybody was buying for £4, now it's 50p. And you know you'd spray and when I used to come out the door to pick my plate up, that's how bad their anxiety was, the used to come psst, psst. I went to the toilet and then after I'd been I used to hear psst, psst. Do you see what I mean. They were very strict with it to the point I only lasted there four days I said, "Listen, let me out, I'm going." And I could only see my grandchild in the garden, I'd be sitting and they would let me see the baby through the window.

Yeah, no hug, no kiss, no nothing. It was terrible. I never ever want to experience that again. It was really terrible. Absolutely awful. It broke relationships. And in some cases, I know a friend he, obviously in the lockdown, 'cause they're always working but they were in the house together, husband and wife, and then said, "You know what, it's the best thing that ever happened to them." The lockdown, because they're able to spend time with each other and their relationship grew more stronger, but it's not like that for everybody.

R2: The domestic abuse was going on because they couldn't get away from their partners.

R4: Yeah. So I don't think that was the other part, the kids that were born during Covid and how their parents reacted about, because XXXX the same, just like her daughter she didn't let anyone see that child.

R2: For at least a year.

R5: And if I was visiting Birmingham, I've got grandchildren in Wales, I would have to have a Covid test or I'd have to self isolate for seven days before I was allowed to see my other children. And then if I was coming there 'cause I've been with these children I'd have to self isolate in the middle of nowhere to be able to see this child. It was just totally nonsense, crazy. Live and let live.

R4: That's why she hides in my house because she could do whatever she wants.

R5: Yeah, sleep when I wanna, eat what I wanna.

R4: [Over speaking]. It is true because we thought it was better that when we came from Pakistan we all self isolated together because we were together so, actually one of our sons came back, one stayed, there's four of us. And we loved it, we were saying that because it was our fasting month it was the best fasting that we ever had because we didn't...

R5: Touch wood we haven't had Covid.

R4: Yeah.

R5: Don't think we will either, 'cause I've had the worst cough and flu and I myself thought it was Covid so I went to have the proper NHS test, it came up negative, what does that mean then. Some people don't have a cough, they don't have a flu, they have nothing and they do a test and it comes up Covid, positive, they've got no symptoms. Explain to us what is this Covid, government, please.

R4: For me I'm not gonna say it, I'm not gonna speak for [R2] but I think she feels the same, if we think we've heard someone's got Covid or whatever we don't do the Covid test, do we, I refuse to do it. 'Cause I actually went to, one of my Somalian friends was leaving to go to Liverpool and so she did a leaving do and we went, there was quite a few of us. And I don't know what, she text me she goes, 'I've tested positive, test yourself'. I said, 'No, I'm not because I've got no symptoms so I'm not testing myself.' Then next day her son's got it, she goes, 'I'm telling you, test yourself.' I say, 'I'm not testing myself because I've got no symptoms, why should I test myself.' I was saying to my daughter, "Shall I test myself?" Then you've getting that paranoia that, because she's got it doesn't mean that I'm gonna get it.

I: You were just gonna say that about when you were isolating and it was best fasting that you had, what made that...?

R2: Yeah, because my dad and my other brother weren't there. It was just me and my mum and my big brother, so we're not fussy eaters, when it's Ramadan we'll eat like whatever, I don't know whatever's easy. But like say for example if we make like, I don't know, fried chicken for example or something my dad would still want a curry, like he has to have a curry. And then in the morning when we get up before sunrise, you know, when you close your fast my dad would have to have like paratas. So my mum would have, even if that's normally like 2:00am, 3:00am that's what he'd have so my mum didn't have to do that. I just did my own thing, my brother made his own, we just have egg sandwich, that's it, done. In the evening it wasn't a big deal I'd say "I want this." They were like, "Okay I'll make it." And that was it. And I always clash with my other brother, the one that wasn't there, in Ramadan we always clash even more. So, we just had peace and we had no like bother, no headache, it was just wake up, close your fast, chill, do whatever you wanna do, open your fast that was it. No, "Why did you make this, I want this." Whatever, even though that's not what you're supposed to exercise during Ramadan, but it still always happens.

R5: 'Cause obviously when you're hungry then you do get a bit cranky, it happens so that's what it was.

I: Yeah, of course.

R2: And they said it was the best for them as well, that we weren't there. Why don't you practise something more wholesome I wanted to say. But then my brother was jealous because I think the cost of all the meat and stuff went up as well so they couldn't afford to have like chicken and meat regularly so they were just eating vegetables and he was just getting fed up. So I was like, "Oh, I made this today, we had this today." And he was getting like, he was getting a bit stressed there, he was like, "All we're eating is pakoras and chips."

R5: Yeah, and dahl. They've got this cultural thing, my auntie in Pakistan, they've got a thing about seven different lentils, yeah, so that's what they used to have, they used to have the white one one day, red one the next day, the other one next day the other one next day.

R2: It's cheaper.

I: Okay. So yeah, is there anything that I've not touched upon that you want included, anything I've missed or that you'd like to be reflected on?

R1: The short term Covid funding that non-profits had was good but it was too short term.

I: How long was it in your experience?

R1: Six months.

I: Six months for a project to run.

R1: Yeah, because for example when we were filling in the bits for my role, is also has to do with mental health and wellbeing, right, but it was still six months.

R4: I think the first phase, 'cause they thought that Covid wouldn't last, so they gave emergency funding for six months but they did let you have extension, so we did get

an extension but the funding sometimes were like they threw the money at you but they didn't plan what you're really gonna do with it.

R1: So there was a lot of that. And also BAME is the buzzword, so we all get BAME in our applications for minority groups that's what they're funding but we never use it, if we used that with our clients they'd be out the door

R2: Yeah, reach and communities funding.

R4: Our reach and communities funding was based on, our projects title is BAME Families of Prisoners, but when we done our launch we had another organisation and they were like I hate that word and this and that. I said but what can we do that's how we get the money so we have to use it to get the money and even our report I don't, has to have BAME on it because that's what the funding was for. We got a little paragraph on there, we're gonna highlight the fact that we were forced to use it and again we're talking that so for example we were classed as South Asians but we're not really Asians because we're Pakistanis, does that make sense. So we're forced to use that South Asian label but I'm not even a Pakistani because I'm labelled as Kashmiri, then a Pakistani. So, we like to use that Kashmiri. So I went to the opticians the other day and there's a young girl there and she says, "What's your ethnicity?" And I said, "Have you got 'Kashmiri' box?" She said, "No, I haven't." I said, "Okay, tick 'Other' and then put 'Kashmiri/Pakistani' because I don't wanna be Kashmiri Indian 'cause I'm Kashmiri/Pakistani. She goes, "Oh, you're just like my dad, my dad says well you've got make sure you highlight Kashmiri and all that stuff." So, yeah, 'cause we're not all Asians, 'cause Asia is quite big.

R1: That identity politics, the Kashmiri side, I did not become fully aware of until I started here because we technically are Kashmiri Pakistani but my family don't use the Kashmiri so until I came here I didn't realise what a big identity category that was. But that's a whole other research project.

R4: You should come to us well give you loads of ideas of research.

R1: And we can all talk, that's the problem, we can all talk.

R5: The food quality has gone down since Covid because when they had lockdown obviously they couldn't get food to supermarkets, what happened to all that food that was stuck, the produce and all that kind of stuff. So every time we used to have food it would be only two day dates so, you know, what do you do about that. 'Cause the fruit was like off as well, veg, everything was off they used to come with iceberg lettuce and it used to be ice, frozen, it wasn't fresh, so we're not even really getting fresh produce either. So even now if you go shopping you pick a loaf of bread and it's got two days date on it, expiry date but now they have decided that they're not gonna put dates on food, as and when, if you see your apples gone a bit twisted, what's it called, the bad apple, what's it called?

I: **Rotten.**

R5: Yes, rotten. Rotten apple, so you're paying for the full price of a bag of apples and there's gonna be one rotten one in there and the rest have gone manky so you probably only get one right out of that from six apples. So now where not even eating food we just put the weight on.

R4: Because you know, we're talking about something we brought up yesterday, is European, all the dates and all that came from Europe, that's why half the food got

dates on, before we never used to have any dates on food, anything after...Chapati flour, how's that gonna get old, I just don't understand how that's gonna get old.

R1: Right at the start of Covid, I don't know if you found that, some of the places tripled the price for the Aftar it was ridiculous. So they got reported and then the cops came to XXXX Road but I don't know if that happened here. Did anyone...

R4: I'm not sure, but we weren't here for the first half.

R5: Yeah, people upped their prices.

R4: So I think people had a lot of challenges to deal with, to be honest.

I: Last thing I'm gonna ask is because this came up in one or two other interviews and I've never been able to find anything to put a bigger picture together. Were the military ever involved in doing things, to your knowledge, in terms of whether it was door-to-door testing, vaccinations?

R4: Yeah, yes, I had them at my door.

I: Okay. So what was that about?

R4: Basically, I can't remember what happened now because the rumour was that they're gonna come out and they're gonna encourage people to have the vaccine, I think, do you remember? Was it vaccination that they're targeting?

R2: I can't remember.

R4: No, they were doing testing, door-to-door testing 'cause obviously a lot of the Asian community they want test and they won't have the injection so it was to see whether people gonna testing so they came at my door, I remember answering the door, and I refused to have the test and they given Covid tests and leaving them behind. And then normally what they would have done is put it at the door and you can take it and we refused. So, yeah, they came in their army gear, yeah, I remember now.

R5: They did get involved in Pakistan as well, remember, when we were there?

R4: Yeah, they were there to make sure people don't come out. But here they were on about going out and doing the vaccinations, they didn't do the vaccinations, my understanding is they were trying to get people to do the test to see whether people got Covid or not, so they can increase the numbers of how many Covid people they actually have.

R1: That must have been just in this area because that didn't happen in Aston, but this area I heard this from a fair few people.

R4: Yeah, they did, it was areas where people were higher in Covid but they weren't testing so that's why I think that's why they picked those areas. But people have their own theories what that was for but yeah, they did come out.

I: Came on then, what other theories?

R4: I don't know the theories, 'they're actually giving you the Covid'. So you're having a test but actually they've gobbled you down some Covid.

I: Alright, I'll finish if everybody's happy then I'll stop recording. Thanks for your time, I do appreciate it.

Focus group 4

Date: 25/09/2022

Duration: 48:41

Participant characteristics: all participants are female. All participants aside from R7 are female Muslim community members who use the Centre. R7 has a leadership role in provision for women at the Centre.

Number of participants: 16

Key:

DB = Interviewer

R1 = Respondent 1

R2 = Respondent 2

R3 = Respondent 3

R4 = Respondent 4

R5 = Respondent 5

R6 = Respondent 6

R7 = Respondent 7

R8 = Respondent 8

R9 = Respondent 9

R10 = Respondent 10

R11 = Respondent 11

R12 = Respondent 12

R13 = Respondent 13

R14 = Respondent 14

R15 = Respondent 15

R16 = Respondent 16

DB: OK, so to start with, one of the things we are interested in is looking at impact for Muslim women in the pandemic. So if we just throw this to the room, what are the specific things that spring to mind in terms of the impact of the pandemic being Muslim women?

R1: I think its been very difficult for the kids to keep home, or like, not go to the Masjid or the community, or not only the Masjid, you can't see your family, someone is sick or something. We get it, two times the Covid-19, no one, its so difficult and you know something [is wrong] and no one help you. When you call they say 'if you need help...' but its like, not really there.

DB: Any other impacts? Anybody else want to share your experiences?

R2: Just the kids education, that's the most, I had two girls at home, to learning anything, that's the main thing. And not visiting your family, isolation...

R3: The isolation, absolutely...

DB: Are there things particular to, say responsibilities when it comes to things like home schooling?

R3: It was difficult, that was the most difficult

R2: It was difficult. We don't have all equipment, you don't have a laptop you don't have too much computer...

R3: Exactly, yeah

R4: We didn't have the resources to do that...

R3: Or you only have one...

R4: And I think all parents had to become teachers and, we don't know ourselves what to tell the kids...

R5: We struggled with maths, we don't know nothing...

R1: And sometimes the children, they call you, the child is not doing the lesson, and you are running up and down really.

R5: We have to use also you know? We don't have that...

R1: And they say 'we' or the other one...

R4: Kids just want to play with that at home...

R5: You have to be teacher, you have to be parent, you have to be everything...

R6: And you yourself, you're struggling as well

R7: How did you feel when you came to your kids and, with school and education, even just them being at home, the boredom...

R8: I think its very hard because you're not allowed to see your family, very hard having children, work online, they're doing work online...

R7: Did you feel there was enough support available from the schools, the teachers?

R5: Yes

R8: Yeah

R4: Yeah

R1: They tried best...

R9: They did help but I found they did get bored to do it at home, they don't like to do it at home...

R7: That's kids isn't it? Yes being at home... Because they're not in the school environment...

R1: And when they come back, and for me it has affected me and my son, one of my son. When he back to the school, he make this year really I am struggling. He's not behaving ever. From nursery to year 4 - never ever complaining, but this year he get excluded...

R7: Really?!

R1: Yeah. The children when they come in in school, its not my son only, they bad-behave they making lot of, because they forget it that class is stay - because they're not sitting properly, the teacher is complaining its really, I'm taking it very hard.

R7: Do you think this is all the effects of home schooling...

R1: For me I think its big effect, because...

R7: Do you think kids have lost their social skills slightly?

R1: Absolutely

Numerous murmurs in agreement

R1: One of them, the child, she don't like to go outside, always keeping like home...

DB: I think you talked about, you had Covid twice? How was that in terms of impacts in the home, how were you feeling? Especially when we didn't know how bad Covid was going to be. This question is for everybody...

R 10: Felt scared...

R11: Scared, scared...

R 12: I feel the fear because we didn't know how, what was it, because you're seeing everything. Every time you go shopping, or, is like a short of things, especially toilet paper. So I was thinking maybe it has to do with diarrhoea as well, I was like 'what is going on with this tissue paper things?' Because every time you go to the shop you will never find the tissue paper, you will have to go to different places. I was like thinking maybe it is something to do with that. So I was scared because, you know, if you have diarrhoea we all know how, you lose your, so that was my fear really. But then I realised that it was not that so, I've become okay.

DB: and thinking about, what are the changes and shifts in terms of working from home? With the lockdown, whether it was yourselves or other family members who would've been going to work, were there any changes that were challenging around that?

R:13: self-employment was hard, because you wouldn't have any jobs. Like people who do taxis, they'd have that fear to go out and work... a lot of shopkeepers were closed...

R 11: Restaurant workers...

R13: Corner shop people...

R11: I think that because most of the husbands are workers so they were probably staying at home, people who were, for some of the mums here they're having their husbands at home as well, another full time job! Looking after the kids, looking after the husband...

R3: You wake up you see him, you go to bed you see him...

R 14: another thing that we should mention as well, with the husband is working from home and the children in the home, we are actually financially spending more money because then we were, we were feeding them for lunch as well...

DB: So there were financial implications with everybody being at home?

R1: Yeah, a lot

Murmurs of agreement

R11: more snacking at home, more eating...

R14: But not everybody would get their vouchers, because they don't know how to apply to the local, to get the vouchers...

R3: I think the income was a bit tight because, when the kids are at home they only want to eat, they want to have snacks...

R7: eat and sleep, not enough exercise so there was a lot of people putting on weight, a lot of kids as well putting on weight. I know I went to see my niece and nephews afterwards, after the lockdown, saw them they'll put on weight! And I was like oh okay. Because in London they live in flats and stuff, my sister she lives in a flat so they haven't got outside space, no garden. So the kids were unable to go outside and exercise or run around...

R6: Some with depression...

R7: did it affect you then?

R6: Depression, depression, yeah. It's a very, I just felt really low, lonely, lonely no friends, no family, it's lonely, at the same time [maintaining] the house.

R7: I think just the isolation isn't it for people who live alone, only one person at home there's no friends, no family having to text the family as well.

R15: Especially when one member of family stay in hospital as well, they just die, I've seen that...

R3: My father is sick, very sick but I am not [able to get] father home. No, talk to him on the phone...

R15: The thing as well, and in the pandemic, the thing is with the pandemic is the fear to hear bad news of your parents, because sometimes, you know, if they catch it or not, and the just announce that that person pass away. So I heard those kind of news sometimes, it was not nice, we couldn't do anything, so I think this is affecting many people.

R7: I think more concerns of the elderly as well, you don't want them to leave the house because you know they catch easily

R15: no one to help them with the shopping so they have to go them self, so it was a bit, it was not good...

R7: for me, it affected me quite badly because my mum felt ill, so she's elderly she felt it ill in March, that's when lockdown happened and Covid was at the height (2020). Because of my mum's underlying illnesses and health issues, the doctor said we weren't allowed to visit her. As siblings we weren't allowed, so mum and dad are both elderly, we weren't allowed to visit

luckily my sister lives a few doors away, so she was able to go in and out with her mask and not, almost like a PPE, cause she was prone to catching infections easily. For two months I couldn't visit my mum, and her health deteriorated those two months. I felt so helpless, anxiety is just... Off the radar, it's like, really stressful. And then the other problem we were having was the doctor was not visiting at home, and my mum is got really, she's got very bad arthritis so she couldn't walk she was bedbound literally. She had lymphoedema, which means she had an infection in her leg. So the nurses were coming home to dress and undress the dressings, but the doctor was not visiting and it was getting worse and worse. The doctor was saying send us photos and videos, my sister is taking videos and photos and sending it to the GP, sending it to us. But she was on antibiotics after antibiotics, and then eventually three months had gone by, it got worse, and then the nurse had to tell the doctor off saying you need to come home and visit this patient because antibiotics are not working, the infection is spreading. And I had to make that decision where lockdown or not, rules or not, I'm going to visit my mum, I'm going to spend time with my mum and I'm going to look after her because she do to me. So I did that after three months of that separation, I went to visit my mum and that night unfortunately she deteriorated. Then the next morning we had to take her into hospital, she was in hospital for 14 days we couldn't visit her, sadly she passed away. Because the infection had already spread into her blood, so had the GP visited her earlier he actually got referred her to hospital, sent her to hospital that intravenous antibiotics would've helped her. But in at three months it had escalated and it had already gone into her organs and her organs started failing, we didn't know that so it was too late. So for me that's how Covid and the pandemic, I lost hope in the NHS at that point.

R 11: I think a lot of people lost hope in the NHS as well during that time, Because you were scared to go to the hospital, and the GPs, they wouldn't see you as well.

DB: Well let's talk about that so what was the feeling in and around family members all of the ones that did end up going into hospital and what was that experience like?

R8: it's not good.

R9: Scared about our elderly people, my mother-in-law and father-in-law they are living too far. We have to cook for them, we have to cook and drop the food by the door, maybe for two months, we didn't see them. It's very difficult.

DB: And then were there kind of times where, as a family maybe, family members contracted Covid in the household?

R3: I think for me, my daughter first catch it, and they say isolate in the house. And my mother lives there, and I think after two days for children again get it, and I get very sick and I can't cook or anything. They were helping me my sister to come home put at the door the food, or sending the children because I can't move anywhere. For me I cannot move it's just like sleeping, really very sick I'm scared and you say maybe if you go hospital who will look after these kiddies? Because no one can come and visit. But then the other time I get Covid, not sick. The day I get the first injection, they injection me 15th, on the 20th I get Covid-19.

DB: So in times of lockdown did you have access to support? Whether it's the main lockdown or local lockdowns, where did you find support in terms of what ever you might of been going through?

R4: The school sometimes will call you and say do you need anything? That's the main, no where else, just the school

R6: yeah because the school they do the food bank things, yeah, that's the only thing

R8: and the chemists...

R6: oh yeah, the chemist as well, they send a message as well but I've never been in there but, the school yes.

DB: also thinking about lockdowns and how that might impact on faith, what happened in terms of how people were able to engage with their faith?

R7: So the mosques all shut down by the time we had lockdown, so that was very difficult. So we couldn't be at the mosque, at the same time funerals as well. So when somebody had passed away we couldn't even attend the funeral, let alone in the house we couldn't go to the mosque as well, so that was quite difficult. Eid, I think we had to Eid in lockdown. That first Eid was very very very upsetting, very difficult. So it would be like we were doing Eid on zoom, we had zoom but yeah. But the feeling was not the same and even at that time anxiety was quite high anyway because there are a lot of members in the community that we are passing away with Covid, so yeah.

R3: Nothing for the kids as well it was really hard for them, celebrating Eid at home and not being able to go to families houses. So we tried to make it special for them in the house, try and make it special for them to try and decorate, have fun, do games...

R8: My daughter is 14 years old living in the pandemic time there's no school, she have her GCSE. My daughter is a lot revision, no covering, very tiring difficult, extra classes.

R7: It was difficult for you to support her?

R8: I finally see the problem, my daughter have two tuition helping her to take tuition is very support, monies, is very...

R7: Oh so you couldn't afford her tuition...

R8: Tutor, tuition, that was hard.

R9: Did she pass?

R8: £180, two weeks

R7: £180 for two weeks?

R8: for two hours...

R9: two hours! That's a lot!!!

R8: Just one children, science and maths

R7: Did you start the tuition classes?

R8: No I carry on, I say it's her GCSEs...

R9: Did she pass, her GCSE?

R8: No, it's this year...

R9: Oh well that's good then.

R8: Lost a lot time at school is missing, teacher combination is very weak

DB: I think it came up previously as well, children having to catch up going back to school. You mentioned GCSEs, so was there a concern regarding the age children were in lockdown, and having to homeschool at different levels?

R 3: Absolutely...

R7: It's like you just said, you had two girls at that age, it was difficult to support them and you had to pay that tuition fee to get them that support.

R5: Same

R9: Same

DB: Moving forward then, and thinking about some of the hardest impacts, what were your experiences in and around how people were approaching death and burial in the pandemic?

R8: Okay, for me, the experience in Corona time, I know about the online more better. Before I am not use online too much, like shopping, food, shopping I don't know about that too much. But because city centre all the shopping is closed, I learn how to go online and do this. I think it's good side I know about how to do shopping and to order online, and put online, appointments online, before I don't know how to use it, I just called GP or hospital. But now yeah, I know more experience about online, make payment and shopping, this is...

R7: I'm going back to the funeral question, so the experience we had we were one of the fortunate ones because my mum passed away in June. Initially when people were passing away in March, I mean I don't know whether you know, in our Muslim community when somebody passes away we bathe them, we shroud them, usually the family members do that. So the ones that passed away beforehand in March, unfortunately the family could not bathe, it was just one member or two members of the mosque who were PPE trained, they were allowed to do that. But luckily by the time June happened, we had a little bit of a program where they did a bit of training so members in the community if they wanted to train to be PPE people you are allowed to do that. Without even knowing my mum is going to be passing away, we did that. So we were quite fortunate that me and my siblings are sister, my sister-in-law, so we were lucky we were able to bath our mum and shroud her. We had to put all that on, it was really hard, it was really difficult, but we were blessed that we were able to because I know a lot of people who could not, so that affected them. And then again with the burial, we were only allowed 30 people at the funeral, we are a big family, we are 30 ourselves with siblings and the grandchildren! So I mean, it had its advantages because it was nice and intimate because it was just us, but there were a lot of mums close friends, there were other family members who wanted to come and pay their respects but they wasn't allowed to. So that affected of us in that way...

DB: can I ask where you heard about those training opportunities? Because this is something which has come up elsewhere...

R7: It was our mosques actually, and that was communicated to us directly. So as a community they were always keeping us informed, so we had that opportunity...

R11: I think I'm social media as well, I am sure I saw a post from like a Masjid saying do you want to come and do this training, and you know, they were doing the food as well so social media yeah...

DB: So then with hospitals, what was the relationship like between hospitals and the mosques? With regard to facilitating funerals and so on? How quickly were hospitals responding, engaging with the mosques so that funerals could be carried out and so on..?

R7: In that sense though also a lot of positivity. The hospitals were keeping in touch with the mosques, the leaders, even community members, so yeah we had a lot of support from the hospitals at that time yeah.

DB: Okay, so previously you made a good point about accessing things online, so how did you stay in touch with people? Was there ways of doing that online, or WhatsApp, FaceTime these types of things? In times of lockdown?

R3: WhatsApp

Several participants repeat 'WhatsApp'

R8m WhatsApp, FaceTime...

R4: Zoom...

R12: Before, no zoom. Lockdown, zoom. You can meet people on zoom this way...

R3 : And the Facebook for the news. You have news about things...

DB: Were there friendship groups that you found it difficult to stay in touch with, or that you lost touch with during lockdown and so on? Or were you able to maintain your normal support networks around you?

R13: This time, in Corona time, COVID-19, the best things is the social media, the best thing!

R15: No, social media says bad things, and we say bad things when we watch the TV, do you listen "2000 people died"... I don't know if the Corona is fake or true. I don't know because everything you're reading is fake, I don't know why. Because Alhamdulillah, I know a lot of people, nobody died. Thanks for God. But when open the TV, watch the news "today has died 4000 people." Next day 6000 people...

R10: It's very hard, very hard...

R13: The contact for the others, this is what I mean. The good things is contact...

R7: There's advantages and disadvantages. I personally think, because I did a Covid support project so was working straight after, when Covid happened, I did four months of Covid support, that was at my other place where I worked at. So anybody who wanted to phone me, just wanted a chat, if they had any problems, if they needed any help or support I was then referring them on. But a lot of people was saying to me, and me personally as well, that WhatsApp, social media, WhatsApp, zoom, Facebook, if anything they were really happy and they were using this more now and there was a lot of advantages. Because they were at home, because they had time, they were using that and were connecting with family members more now at the time of the Covid and they were before that time. What's the weather at home, I mean I don't know, some sisters they've got families abroad so I guess you are phoning your family a lot more regularly than you would've done in normal circumstances.

R9: It's good that way. Sometimes you'll find some message that's happened that's bad news, that was depressing yeah. Social media is good and bad.

R7: That was depressing but it did have its benefits. Even your own family, I think you spoke to each other more you spent more time with each other, you phone people you wouldn't phone regularly a bit more saying "how are you doing? How is Covid in your area?" My personal experience...

R15: I think if Covid come before this social media is in, how can contact each other? If you know Facebook, and what I'm thinking is the good things, and the bad things...

R7: Depressing side was hearing bad news about somebody catching it, or someone passing away, or somebody being in hospital being seriously ill. But then the advantages are, I think the advantages outweigh the disadvantages in a sense, because it going through so much yourself and you disconnected from your family and your friends, and making the time to actually do that or people connecting with you, you feel privileged you know people out there do care about you and I talking to you a lot more than what they did before.

R11: Even if you have grudges with people you don't talk to, you're still checking up on them!

DB: There's two questions here. Do you feel like Muslim communities were hard-hit in real terms by Covid? Do you think there was a hard impact?

Several participants say 'yes'

R11: I think so. Especially in the media you hear more black and ethnic communities that are passing away, so I feel like there's a bit of a stigma as well. People feel like you know when you go to hospitals, you know the black/Asian community, there's more of them passing away, what's going on? Do you think it's something happening in hospitals, the doctors are they, you know, I don't know, there was a lot of conspiracies going on at that time. So I think like we were more scared to send our elderly or family members to hospital, because you hear that they go in and they don't come back out.

R1: That is the big worry really everyone is saying if someone go, I know a lot of friends, family, they die and they never seen them. They send them to Hospital, I think one of my friends, her mother and her husband passed away. No one visit, only on the phone they say something and no one see them.

R11: And some of them are quite young, or like good health, and suddenly they get the virus, Hospital and they're away. So that made people think a bit, like what's going on? Is it, is there something more to it?

R1: and financial as well...

R8: because most of them are self-employed...

R1: self-employed, and low income

R8: and shop...

R7: it affected a lot of businesses. It was the shops, you've got a lot of Asian people who are taxi drivers, restaurant owners as well so it affected them as well.

R1: Younger children, we have to go to the shop children, really is very hard something like that.

R11: All the prices went up as well! even vegetables...

R7: Yeah the price went up

R8: Before, £5 one litre, now £11, £12 one litre

DB: So do you think of particular impacts on women in the community? Whether things are impacted specifically for Muslim women you think has a fall out of the pandemic?

R11: I feel like they had more responsibility to be honest. There's more pressure on them to look after family members, the kids, the house, the husband, to help. It was double the work, more stressful, so you have to stay healthy yourself, even if you're not feeling well you still have to do everything. So I think it's more stress and more pressure for us.

R7: I think mentally it affected us, mentally affected a lot of Muslim women and there were a lot of cases of depression and, even like marriage break ups as well happened at that time as well. Yeah there were a lot of marriage break ups

R10: Personally, I am depression. I am thinking if I die, my three children, how it's possible? I am depression...

R11: Yeah, like mental health I think I'm really bad...

R7: It was mental health, but it was a physical strain as well of looking after the family, the children especially. I mean the children at home and for those mums have got more than two children, some have five or six kids...

R6: Can you imagine with all of them at home, and the husband not helping, so that is another depression again...

R3: Absolutely absolutely...

R6: It's like when you call "can you do it can you do", oh I'll just do it myself. And I'm sure many women discover their husband as well at that time, you know. It's true! Some women really suffer really, some women really suffer about that, yeah...

R7: Genuinely, it was very difficult for women, I think more than men, it was. I mean I know the men did have the financial worries as well, but for women it was, it was a lot of strain mentally and physically, it was another strain. Because looking after the children every day, cooking and stuff, cleaning it's just...

R14: Tiptoeing around your husband, that sort of thing as well...

R3: Personally, I did enjoy it having the kids at home. I didn't have any stress about that. The only thing is just in the morning. We were not going anywhere, but they were early as like they were going to school, like 6 o'clock like. They say "mummy are you okay?" I say "boy I'm sleeping!" He will say "mummy do you want tea?" I will say "I want to sleep!" That's the only thing that, because they are used to waking up in the morning, so they will go very early. So when they wake up like that and they see you sleeping, they take that as strange. So when they wake up they want you to wake up, they didn't know that you too, you needed rest!

R7: On a serious note as well, there was a lot of physical abuse, violence that sort of thing. So for those women that were already suffering with that, in the pandemic it was worse and it was hard there was no escape. So with the children as well, if they were from a background where there was abuse, they were witnessing that and they were actually themselves going through that as well. So that was very difficult as well. I've also got to realise as well, in the Muslim community, there is quite a lot of people who do live in small houses. So there was lack of space as well, so that was a big problem for quite a lot of people as well.

DB: Let's shift to thinking about government responses. Things like access to testing, advice on hand washing, mask wearing, what are your points of view on how the government responded?

R7: I personally thought we should've had the masks in way sooner when the government put it out there. We should've had the masks a lot sooner. Because we are one of the latest ones, weren't we? The UK was one of the later ones...

R16: My daughter is continue, all the time, all day in school continues...

R7: Hand washing in that, we were given that guidance from the beginning, but I think it was the masks. For me it was, if we had had the masks sooner, to be honest even the lockdown rule, we should've heard that a lot earlier.

R4: What is the UK, it was late. Even closing the border, it was late isn't it? Because people were just coming from those places...

R11: Yeah they were still coming, exactly.

R1: Someone visit someone before, and they get it all of them, they catch it...

R4: It was late, it was late that's why

R11: I the response is probably late, they should've acted sooner, the government...

DB: Then I guess, vaccinations... It's a hot topic...

R1: I think waste of time. That particular measure is not work. Really

R11: There's a divide in the vaccination, there's a big divide!

DB: So let's explore...

R1: I have it already, and really I'm feeling, the hand I get feeling pain still. I'm feeling heartburn, and coughing, getting a lot of things...

R11: How many vaccinations did you have?

R1: Two, yes.

DB: Do you still have that pain?

R1: Yes! Yeah. I went to the hospital, really still is not getting well, some test I didn't get it still.

DB: Was that from the vaccination?

R1: Because the vaccination like 15th, and I get the Covid on 20.

R11: So you got it after?

R1: After!

R7: She was vaccinated on the 15th and then five days later she actually caught Covid.

R1: And really I m coming like, death, really

R4: Oh my gosh! That is not a good experience

R 16: One friend, she has complained, the same you, they told me, I don't know, but she always complain. I have another friend that complain as well.

R1: I'm never hot in my face or anything, but at that time I feel it, still hot for some time. I feel all my body, it is cold winter but my face is coming burning, lot of things...

R11: Could that have been from the Covid, actual Covid symptoms? What they call long Covid?

R1: Second one, I get the second one it is coming more...

R4: So which one do you take then?

R1: Pfizer, Pfizer...

R7: For me I feel as if we needed enough research before the vaccination was rolled out.

R11: I do too...

R7: I mean I know we were under a lot of pressure because the cases had got high. So myself, I've got a blood disorder, and it's a chronic blood disorder. So when I was asked to go and have my vaccination I did a bit of research online first. I couldn't find anything. So I suffer with something called ITP, there was nothing on there so I thought 'well, I'm gonna go and have a vaccination. I'll talk to the GP, sorry, the doctor at the clinic first, and then I'll make my decision'. There was a doctor there and I told him my condition, and I said 'I can clot really easily, I can bleed really easily, and my condition is life-threatening. So am I eligible for this vaccination?' And she said 'Absolutely fine, nothing will happen to you, its safe.' And I said 'Have you done testing? Have you done research on this?' - 'Yes, we've done everything, you're absolutely fine to have this vaccination, it is up to you.' Obviously I listened to the doctor thinking she knew what she was talking about, had the vaccination. I had the Astra Zeneca this time and within, coming home, within like 3 hours of coming home I had a banging migraine one side, I had a fever. So I had all the symptoms, they were like the Covid symptoms. But it wasn't Covid because I did have myself tested. So I went back to the doctor and I said 'this is what happened to me', and they said it could just be the side effects, just keep an eye on it for a week.' Then I had this pain that I started at the back of my neck, coming down my spine, then in my shoulder then I lost sensation in my arm. They said 'oh no, no, its part of the...' Then a week later I had this ear bleed, just an unexpected ear bleed, absolutely, like, dripping blood. I go into the A&E, they do the X-Rays, they check inside, can't find anything wrong with me. So at that point, because I still had this banging migraine, I said 'Is this all linked, and is it due to the vaccination?' I had like three or four doctors sitting down having a meeting, and they said - they didn't admit, but they said 'we

wouldn't want you to have the Astra Zeneca for your second vaccination, we need you to have the Pfizer.' So I said 'I just want to know, is this the side effects of my vaccination?' But none of the doctors, they wouldn't admit it. I think they themselves couldn't tell me because they didn't have enough research, they didn't know anything themselves. Then I went for my Pfizer the second time, again I spoke to the doctor and I said 'look, this is what has happened, are you absolutely sure?' And I said 'I need to know, have you done your research? Have you given it to any other ITP sufferers? Have they been ok?' And they said 'look', the doctor said 'I'm gonna be honest with you' it was a different doctor and he said 'I know nothing about your condition and the vaccination. I know nothing of that, we're not trained, we haven't even had enough training.' He said 'I personally would say do your own research, speak to your GP and maybe he can link you up with some more doctors, and because of your condition, it is life threatening, we can't take any risks.' He said 'I personally wouldn't advise you to have the vaccination today.' So I went back to my GP, and to be honest with you I was a bit anti-vaccine. I have got my own reasons, not because of, it was more because of the ingredients inside it. So I didn't know exactly what was in the vaccination that I was going to be putting inside my body, and the effects it might have on me long term...

DB: When you say anti-vaccination though, do you specifically mean the Covid vaccination?

R7: The Covid vaccination .

DB: So you wouldn't be anti-vax...

R7: When I say anti-vaccination, any other vaccination as well. It was after I was diagnosed with my condition I became a bit, I don't really have any other vaccinations often, only if I have to go on holiday when I had to have it, I'd think about it then. I mean yeah. So I went back to my GP again he said 'OK we need to look into this.' So they, what he did was he actually sent emails to people, doctors all over the world. Literally America, everywhere and said it was American doctors that had come back and said 'we have done our research with ITP sufferers, and the vaccination. It is safe for the Pfizer, but not, she shouldn't have been given the Astra Zeneca, that was very dangerous.' Speaking to these doctors, I had meetings with them and they said, you know, it will be safe. The only reason that I went for that vaccination was because I was my father's carer, and I had a lot of pressure on me that 'you're not second vaccinated, dad's elderly, if anything happens to him, you've caught it and anything happens to him you're going to be feeling responsible.' So I didn't think, it was a spur of the moment thing, I made a decision thinking I've spoken to the doctors, they say its safe for me to have the Pfizer, I'll have the Pfizer. So I went and had my Pfizer, lo and behold I got ill again. Ended up in hospital, I had the heart palpitations, I had a lot of side effects from the vaccination. I became very ill myself. The good thing about the vaccination is that it kept me safe for two years, I didn't have Covid! And it was around because my children had Covid, my boys had Covid, I had friends, even at my workplace I had, even XXXX [a colleague] had Covid, I sat with her, a couple of days before we were having meetings together. I sat with her the day she became really ill, I had lunch with her, we even shared the same cutlery and stuff like that. I was protected so I didn't have Covid then, but I mean I only just had Covid in June of this year, and I had it really bad, really, really bad.

R4: Again?

R7: No, that was the first time, but it was really bad to the extent that I was bed-ridden for three months, I lost all sensations in my arms and my fingers.

R4: But you get the injection already?

R7: I already had the injection, I had two injections.

R11: It doesn't really prevent you from getting it...

R7: It doesn't prevent it, but you don't get Covid as bad as what... So basically people were dying with Covid, so what the vaccination does is it protects you from that.

R4: Just a bit...

R3: Absolutely yeah. I get in December, they tested me positive, but I didn't feel anything. I don't have a, little bit, but I don't feel anything because already I get my injection, it helped me or something.

R10: Me I think this, I think it is different with people you know? Some immune system are very low some people are very strong. So when you get Covid-19 so it depends how your body is, you know, fight it, yeah.

R1: And how you know earlier? If you know earlier, you can do lot of things in your house like ginger, lemon, lot of things to make, treat the symptoms.

DB: So I'll wrap up I think, but is there anything that you wanted to talk about in terms of the impacts of the pandemic on Muslim women specifically? Or the community in general? Anything that we have not talked about yet?

R3: Depression....

R7: I think it was the mental, I think when you say women it was mental...

R1: And socialise

R4: Weight gain...

DB: Obviously you are here with XXXX XXXX [A charity organisation in Lozells], but are there other community organisations that you have reached out to within or around the pandemic? Or local Mosques that offered support?

R7: It's usually here! Because we were one of the community centres that stayed open throughout lockdown, all the other community centres closed, yeah. So our door was always open.

R3: The Mosque ask if anyone need food, or if we have someone, if you can't pay shopping, you can't go there, they send somebody like that, yeah.

DB: OK thank you all so much

Focus group 5

Date: 27/09/2022

Duration: 01:04:04

Participant characteristics: all participants are female, all participants except R1 are female Muslim community members who use the services at the Centre. R1 has a leadership role in the centre.

Number of participants: 6

Key:

DB = Interviewer

R1 = Respondent 1

R2 = Respondent 2

R3 = Respondent 3

R4 = Respondent 4

R5 = Respondent 5

R6 = Respondent 6

DB: So if we go back to the beginning of the pandemic in the community what are the initial things, The first sort of impacts for you at the beginning of the pandemic?

R1 (Centre manager): I can remember when we were over at the other centre, and I remember, the first thing we heard, bits on the news, and then all the schools started to close. And because we work with women who had children we had less and less women coming in. And then all of a sudden one day, all the schools were closed and we were like "oh, OK". And then the government said we all have to go home. But we thought 'oh, it will just be a couple of weeks, this is strange.'

R2 (Centre worker): leading up to it we were were seeing more more ladies saying "we are not feeling well, we're not feeling well. We need to be..." So we were having less people coming in anyway. But I don't think we thought too much of it?

R1: No. I can remember just sort of, in terms of staff, being us with our other managers, and sort of sitting there and going "yeah, I suppose we better close the office. And will speak tomorrow..." You know, really kind of quiet, blasé, you know.

DB: So what kind of things were normal provision in terms of the Centre before the lockdown kicks in?

R1: Before Covid we were having up to 200 to 250 women coming through the door every week for classes, English classes IT enquiries, sewing classes....

R3: Asking for classes...

R4: With mask, and cover up...

R1: So this is before that, at the very beginning, before the masks...

R2: We did see, did we see people start to wear masks? Remember we had one lady come fully...

R4: Mask and sanitisers, it's difficult for us...

R1: We thought that was strange, I think we did, we had one lady, I don't know whether she knew before we did...

R2: With the gloves and a mask, this was before anything was announced.

R1: But we were really busy Centre. And we, me and [R2] often laughed because we were like that in the centre bumping into each other, weren't we? It was so busy!

DB: So you noticed that people were less engaged, engaging less and less. But you've also touched upon things like schools closing, lockdown, how did those things impact for women who would use the centre?

R3: It's very bad, because you know kids at home, it's very boring and I no have enough tablet in my kids, because it's, two together they are fighting. One is in another room, one is in a different room - and after coming looking 10 minutes, I'm going back and I look the other one for 10 minutes and come back and after that nobody wants to stay inside. Everyone wants to play outside, and I hear people say outside is no good because it's Corona outside, and everyone crying saying "please mama, open the door" I give him 10 minutes and bring him inside. And sometimes I need help because, my husband before is going back in my country, it's lockdown in my country and it's difficult for me shopping and everything.

DB: Were you here on your own during lockdown with the children then, or was your husband here as well?

R3: Because I am going, first time I pick my kids I'm going shopping, it's very busy. Everyone is doing shopping because it's lockdown [coming]. After [during] lockdown I have big problem because every time I need fresh milk I and bread and everything, not easy for me. It is very difficult. And sometimes I call, I need someone help me, my English is not ready, and how to use computer and, I need someone help me. That's why now you talk about community, Muslim community because more people need help but there's no someone help. How are you call someone, I don't know how to call, which company can help me, I don't know, that's why.

DB: So what were your experiences, does anybody else want to talk about their experiences when lockdown started and what that was like?

R4: I am starting, first I am not taking it very seriously this coronavirus for myself, because I believe Allah, alhamdulillah nothing happened to me. I do its first injection, second one alhamdulillah nothing happened to me. But still, I need to control my children, because they come back from school and this and this and this. I'm not like it, going to different places and bring it, because you don't know who have it, because my children tell me mummy I can't to go to mixing with other people and come into our home. My sister, she is a teacher, yeah she tell me I can't come to you because I don't need to give it, the children something, this and this and this. After starting to have time in the house, I'm starting to make some ideas to make myself busy, and do it like work in the house, little work for everybody. That's it. I'm starting to fight it, to fight it. I'm coming to [the centre] asking for classes you know!

R3: And sometimes people have corona, is call more than 100 times, no somebody coming. They just tell you what to be doing. Sometimes you call you call you call hospital, no somebody take you to hospital, that's no good! Because I see my neighbour call more than hundred times, they say the hospital full.

DB: Were there any other initial impacts when lockdown started?

R5: I can't forget the age of Covid, we have three person in my home me, my daughter and my son. My daughter has a lot of problems, balance problem feeling dizzy, and in one room my daughter and in one room it's me. I come here and there, my English is not well so I don't know how to call GP. I have a lot of relatives but I can't contact, my son is living back home in Pakistan. Can you call me and ask me 'when are you coming home to Pakistan?' I can't go there because Pakistan, after that Pakistan is high-risk. So it's difficult for us, but alhamdulillah, it is all good, we are safe!

R1: What I found, one of the things we did working from home is that we tried to contact as many service users as we could. And some of the things that they said was things like they didn't know how to educate or teach their children, because they're not teachers. They felt the children knew more than them, and the children weren't listening to them anymore because of language barriers, and not knowing how to get onto a computer, not knowing who to go to and who to ask, they just didn't know what to do. Everybody in the house together everybody getting upset everybody getting anxious, everyone getting bored, and worried about not being able to pay a bill, or getting behind. Or somebody has lost their job, not knowing who to contact and what to do. So it was like, lots of problems, one thing after the other, you know? It was a strange time for many families, and sometimes they just want to have a chat because they weren't going out, they were trying to keep away from their families, and a lot of the women who are staying home a lot longer because they were shielding, or they were shielding other family members. You know, because they were the larger households, the older, the extended family, so that was hard. I'm just sort of thinking about some of the conversations, there were tears! It was hard, for a lot of the women, and wondering when it was going to be over. And asking the question, the number of times I was asked 'Is it over yet?'

DB: You did mention some of the impact more widely, things like panic buying, those types of things that were happening at the time. Were there concerns about access to supplies?

R3: Sometime yeah, you are going shop and you're not finding the thing you want because all people take it.

R1: Like toilet roll, do you have a toilet roll? You couldn't buy toilet roll during Covid, you went to the shops and there was no toilet roll!

R4: One person he selling roll of toilet paper to women £100, believe me! One packet £100, £100! In my area. He tell her 100, he take in the car and then stop, and tell her 'this £100'.

R6: Hand sanitiser, it's finished everywhere

R3: Tablets and medicines...

R2: But there's other, pasta, plain flour, staple food that we couldn't find that was...

R3: Yeah, sometimes I'm going shopping, I'm finding none...

R2: Empty shelves, yeah...

R3: I'm not find nothing. I tried to buy from the corner shop, but very expensive in the corner shop, you know?

R1: And then we had women who couldn't get out because they were shielding, so we had to organise food parcels for them. We had, you know, we did quite a few of those. We had,

you know, food being delivered. And you couldn't sort of, you couldn't really sort of say exactly what they could get, but you just hope that they get, they've got something that they liked.

R4: Yeah, but some delivered, not bring anything that you need. They will give you more, or they will give you less. Especially of children need something, I'm starting to making for my children a lot of things, like cakes, some wraps and put it in the freezer.

R1: Because the kids were eating more

R3: Yeah...

R5: The school is helping, give portions everyone is, everyone have free milk come if this helps people it's good, it helps people because Corona time, kids at home is like more shopping, more money. People don't have enough money.

R1: We, we worked with the partners that we knew we could get that sort of support from, and so, the thing about it is, for some of the women, they couldn't go online because they didn't know how to. So we had to get their consent, sometimes it was very long winded even if it was a text to get their consent to have them give us the very personal information to pass on to somebody, to a third-party. So it could be long winded but we were able to order, to get, sort of, or weekly delivery of food for a short period of time, and I would probably use another partner to keep that going. Since then we have sort of got a little mini food bank. It's not anything official, but we work with another registered charity and overall kindly leave us bits and pieces for some families so they can get little bits from us as well.

DB: So how long did lockdown impact in terms of what you were able to do at the centre? When did you get to a point where things would have to change?

R2: We were off for most of the summer.

R1: Most of the staff are on furlough so that was the end of March. And then I started working back, because we thought it will be a few weeks and then we sort of thought oh okay are we going to do something. So we, as management, met online I did some consultation with a lot of our service users, ask them what is it that you need? And a lot of it was just about practical stuff, welfare stuff, and stuff for the children. So we put on a provision at our other base for key workers, for children and for children with additional needs, and the staff worked in bubbles. So if one person had Covid working with a group of children, it wasn't impacting on all the other bubbles, so we did that practically all the way through.

DB: Just in terms of age ranges, is that younger children, nursery age?

R1: So we had some nursery children, some preschool, and then up to about sort of eleven, twelve. And then we did manage to get a class of ours for [women] learning English online, and we also had a gardening class online. We didn't think we could do gardening, but we managed to have a group of women, and we tried to talk to the most vulnerable women. But what we had to do, so we were on zoom, but we had to speak to somebody else in the house, maybe your daughter or son or somebody else, we had to find out who else was in the house. So I will talk to them so I will send them the link, and it could take us half an hour or more, but somehow we managed to get some of our women up online. So we were really proud of that. So we had a gardening and I think one English class, and we had a reading group, and we had a coffee morning online, we just sit and drink coffee and have toast and cake. Digital inclusion was a big area. We already knew it was, so it was one of the things that we did do afterwards, really focus on our IT classes. So yeah, we did manage, but it was

really hard to get people online. For some women, I think with everything else going on in the house, not having, if you haven't got more than one tablet, or if you haven't got, the laptop is in use, and if you're on your phone, you know. But we did get some really good stuff going on online, which worked well.

DB: So were there, changes in, taking furlough and schooling at home into account, everybody is in the home, what was that like?

R1: Most of our women, 80, 90-odd percent of the women that we work with don't work. So, but there's quite large households, I would say. School age children in the house...

R2: For me, I was on furlough, I did come back off furlough, but worked from home for a short while. I found it extremely difficult minding children, home schooling and then, it was quite hard. And again, the whole devices thing, where we, have we got enough devices in the house for each child? And, how am I supposed to manage my workload and, it was hard. I know some people that enjoyed the work at home experience, I didn't!

R1: And I think that's it isn't it? That, for a lot of the women that come to the centre, they like to come out of the home. You want to be with other women, you know? I spoke to some women who weren't having, let's put it, weren't having a nice time, and I'm putting that quite mildly, at home. A lot of the reason women come out, it's not just to learn, but its just to get out the house, get away, have their time.

R4: Free time, yeah.

R1: So for them it was very hard because they couldn't go out, there was nowhere to go.

R4: Me myself, I need free time, and go park. In Erdington, where I'm living before. I'm going to park, I'm sitting in the park, I'm talking with tree (laughs), take it with me tea, take children go way from school.

R1: The park is a wonderful thing isn't it?

R4: One day I'm feeling more and more sick, I'm talking with Allah, I'm asking give me strength...

R3: To go out is good, it helps you. You see new people and talk and, talk in group, and explain everything. And after coming to classes, talk to people and reading and writing, it is good. Because you stay at home, it's nothing, you're you not learning something. That's why I think it's good.

R1: It's about friendships and being social, it's being able to speak with each other. A lot of the women enjoy that, it's one of the reasons they come to class or come to the centre.

DB: So as time went on was Covid something that you became more worried about, less worried about? Did you have concerns about family members, or getting Covid itself?

R2: I think at the start, no one knew what was happening. I think it was that fear of the unknown, what to expect. But as things went on, I think we started to relax a bit more. I mean I started wearing masks for a while, and then I stopped. I didn't take it seriously as I did at the start, because it was just going on and on and you know? It was never ending wasn't it?

R1: Yeah, it's true that is. I think I had Covid, which I didn't know I had Covid, at the very beginning. Nobody understood, or knew about that, well there was a few things. I think I

realised I had it when I had this continuous cough, the cough was horrendous. It was very early on, then after that, wearing the masks, and the weather was getting better, so I think that helped, the weather was improving. I can remember thinking, when I used to go to the shops, because that was the only place you could go. The shops became the place to go to get out! It was the new going out, to go to the shops! And the queueing, for the shops, queueing to get in the shops, talking to people there, yeah.

R4: No me, first time my sister, because I have five sisters here, oldest have Covid. First one, she have Covid, her husband, her daughter, same time together. And another one, she have six children and she and her husband, together. And another one she's have it, All the same time. Me, I'm making food, and bring it to the door, tell her...

R3: Same, my relative have Covid, I'm making food but I'm not going in! I've put outside and call her on phone, I tell her 'open the door and take it!'

R4: One day, and put in black plastic on my hands (laughing), and I do (motions a hug) through the window, the glass!

R1: That's true you know, it's missing that human contact, you know? It felt very strange too, I thought it was strange to tell me that I can't hug when it's part of me to hug. It felt very unnatural, you know? And then I watch TV and they're doing something else, and I'm thinking okay, that doesn't make sense, you know?

R5: A lot of things they can show on the TV to do, do that, do that, do that. Some people maybe is have, You have something in the body, you can take it, something like this and you are ok. Me this person. Anyone, anybody coming to me, near to me sick, no I'm not taking nothing. But me, I can't give it for these people, you know what I mean?

R1: I had Covid really bad, my husband was fine.

R3: Same me, every time my husband has a cough and flu, I, me nothing.

DB: Were there any changes with caring responsibilities, looking after family members of they're quite large households and people become ill et cetera?

R4: My children have Covid and everything. But me, I look after my children properly, but she told me, she tell me 'Mummy are you not scared to have something?' I tell her 'me, I'm alright. Nothing happen to me, just think for yourself and you eating properly and this and this.' What I do to make myself safe more and more, I bring it all herbs, Morocco herbs, put it in the pot and close it, er pressure cooker for a time. After, it will be ready and take smoke in the house. I'm starting every morning, and every night. I tell myself I'm feeling okay, any time I'm feeling hot or something I'm going to do it.

DB: What about when everybody's in the house, how were the everyday duties broken down?

R4: I do it everything, I clean, I do it all my routine. After, sitting together, watching TV, have a cup of tea together, and stuff like that. But everybody have special cups!

R1: Were you looking after anybody else in the house? Was there anybody outside the house you're looking after?

R3: Yeah, I think Corona teach me how to become a doctor at my home. Because somebody is sick or something, I was helping. That's why I say every time alhamdulillah because, you know...

R1: Were you helping a relative?

R3: Yeah, I'll give him medicine, see how he is doing. Before he is going hospital, but it's Corona time no hospital. I do it on Google, and how is help like this. If someone have high temperature or something. This Corona time, I think it's teach me more, staying and looking what happened and why. Before if somebody is have high temperature, I'm going straight away doctor or something.

R1: Oh I see, so you were trying to work it out yourself, what to do. A lot of it, in the black community, there was lots of conversations about, if someone is sick don't let them go into hospital. It was the fear, a lot of fear in our community about not allowing, keep them at home, don't let them take you away because you won't come back. Do you know? That fear of being treated differently because of the colour of your skin and what we were seeing. There seems to be more people of colour who were going into hospital, not coming back, or getting sick compared to other communities. And when there was talk of the vaccine, I remember there was a lot of "there is no way, I'm not having it. This is what has happened to us before."

R4: My children especially tell me 'mummy, you are 35 maybe is give you this injection.' Because people, you are 50? Give you injection. I tell her 'me, I'm not going to give injection, whatever, I'm not going to hospital to give me injection' its something like this. I'm tell her I'm sitting in my house and do it what my mum she do it for us before. She put herbs in the pressure cooker, you have everything, you put it herbs, lemon, thyme, something like that. She put it in the pot, and she close it, and she is making steam in the house.

R3: Do you know Covid time, someone is drinks orange juice, lemon juice, it's very good. My kids have fresh orange and lemon, and give them fresh fruit, alhamdulillah not someone is having Covid at my house. And I put it, you know this in my country, all Africans have different thing. You have to look but I have this at my house Corona time (shows picture of a herb on mobile phone), you know inside it is smoking. After that you close the room, and after that open all window. Someone before has coughing or something, everything is going alhamdulillah, this is good.

R4: Open all window, fresh air, like 5 o'clock in the morning.

R3: And this one (gestures to picture on phone), in the shop after Corona everyone is take it.

R4: I think because you keep the house closed. Window closed, not opening windows and stuff this very, this kill each other. But open windows, and come in fresh air, have showers as well...

R3: I know in Africa, in every country, every people have something you drink if you have flu, you have anything. Everything fresh, but you just put in and it have vitamin inside...

R4: Because here, here, a lot of things that you have here, herb, lots of herbs you have here. Like olive oil, no I mean it olive olive, this one you put it in the water for boiling and take it, just water from this boiling drink, believe me this one very very good. Drink this, very good for your heart. Clean your body, clean your blood. Some people are use herbs for decoration and things like that. I'm seeing a lot of herbs this way and I'm thinking this herb is not just for looking like this, you can do this and this and this. Because me, I'm work in beauty in Morocco and stuff like that, I do it like this before in Morocco if I'm looking after people's face, hair, body this and health.

DB: So what was the general feeling about the testing and vaccinations?

R1: I personally had concerns. I didn't want to have the vaccine. I did have it in the end, and that was only because I've gone to see my daughter who lives in Bedford, and she just had a baby. Literally I came back and she was ill and I thought oh gosh I've given her Covid, because they were like Covid police her and her partner. They hadn't been mixing, but she'd got something else, So anyway I've gone and booked it myself and I'd had it. My frustration was, at the time, was that the media and the government didn't understand, I felt, the suspicions about the vaccine. And they were, particularly wanted the black community, who they thought were more susceptible to it, to getting Covid. And there was no mention in my opinion about the reasons why, and about sort of historical testing without peoples' permission and all of that. Even though we wouldn't have had the Internet at those times, things still trickle down. People, messages, so I think there was a lot of mistrust, there was a lot of mistrust in the community, and they weren't recognising, I think if they had recognised where the mistrust had come from, and why that was, I think people would've been more open rather than just saying 'we're trying to help you and you're not coming forward.' So I think everybody, I don't know, it was sold as a way, the vaccine was sold as a way to get out. Have the vaccine and things will go back to normal, but I had friends, there was no way, from different backgrounds, that they were going to have the vaccine and they can still sort of more or less do the same things as I could. There was no benefit, maybe medically, but...

R2: I think for a lot of people in this community it was the fear of not being able to travel abroad. That's why a lot of people had it done.

R1: I would never have projected my thoughts, I never, I made sure that I never projected my thoughts on anybody else, I thought that was important. And I respect people's rights to not want to have it, but even when I had it I wasn't really, wasn't happy. It didn't make me happy to have it. But then I'm coming from a place where I don't take tablets or anything if I can avoid it. I think it was sold as a, get the vaccine and we'll get through this, on when they, I think for a lot of the community, there was lots of them set up shop, vaccine vans in the community, didn't they? In this community as well, there's a lot of suspicion, there is a lot of, conspiracy theories.

DB: Tell me what kind of conspiracy theories?

R1: I mean I heard it was sort of, a culling of people, I've heard that. How old is the New World Order stuff, do you know? Because to vaccinate and you're showing a pass, and that's the start of a showing a pass, and people know, they can see where you're going, I can see we have checked in to. Very difficult not to go, oh actually that sounds a bit crazy but actually yeah, someone does know exactly what I'm doing when I'm doing it and that's uncomfortable.

R2: Also people having all these reactions to the vaccine.

R5: It is doing nothing, not doing nothing because, you know, someone is taking three and have Corona.

R1: What they say about that is that you'll have it, but you won't have it as bad. If you have the vaccine you won't have it as bad. I do know people who have had it really bad...

R2: I had it and it was really mild. And I've just had it again recently, felt worse this time around and I had two vaccinations.

R5: I take it too, but this, I'm not happy. I don't want to go, my brother is push me hard...

R1: It has split families. I know families where different people haven't talked to each other because this whole thing around the vaccine and, you know...

R5: But it is sometimes important, because my brother is working in France, he is going and they say 'no' because you're not taking two. He gets one, he's come back and after take it another one and going.

R1: So it is about, a lot of people feel out of control, that we are being controlled...

R4: In other countries people finish with number two. Do you hear it in the news every day, go get to number three go get to number three

R5: I say never, don't want. You can call me more than 100 times, I say two enough...

R1: Yeah, I think, they didn't seem to have balance with it because, no one talked about what we would also recommend is that you walk more, you eat more fruit, you do all these healthy things to protect, they didn't talk about that. Maybe what will do is will give each family a bag of fruit at the supermarket. They didn't talk about those things, they didn't mention it as if all this five a day and all of that stuff didn't seem to matter. Why weren't they promoting healthier, to keep away the cold, to make you feel a bit more fit. I just didn't, I could understand the conspiracy theories creeping and gaining momentum because there were lots of things. They didn't talk about mistrust and why communities have mistrust. They didn't even mention that. If you're open, and say "we understand why are you feel like this," but this is this, this and this. If they had those kind of conversations, I think more people would've been open or considered it. They just didn't have those conversations, they didn't have the conversation about being healthier and maybe not saying to people like a nanny state we want you to eat this but why don't you try this instead in addition you could have this. So I just think there wasn't any balance. I think during Covid, did you watch the news a lot? I think I probably watched it too much. I think that when I watched governments, people in government shaking hands and hugging and there was the parties. I thought if they're not scared, they're really putting fear into us scared. So it's not like a conspiracy, because it's facts isn't it? They're having these parties when we were on lockdown, and that's proven. So why weren't they scared like we were scared?

R4: Because we are crazy!

R1: They made us crazy! But we were scared, but they weren't scared. I couldn't come to your house, and you couldn't come to my house. It was, they told us that we couldn't.

R4: Yeah, but you can come into my house and I can come to your house...

R1: Yeah but they were having parties, but they were telling us you couldn't have a party.

R4: Mmm subhanallah

R5: No go to someone's house, no do nothing, but you do it? How are you teach me you not do nothing, and you do it?

R1: So this is why people, the conspiracy theories are given a life. Some of them are really, those bits of them I think okay, but they gave them life. It's like fire.

DB: Okay I'm gonna ask two more questions. So I'm wondering if in your experience the pandemic has any impact on faith? What role did being Muslim have for you in the pandemic?

R4: Like to be close with your, with God. Yeah. You know why? Because we, in the normal time before, I'm not thinking for Fajr (morning prayer) like routine. Now, I am praying in the routine and that's it. I've not lost my prayer time. But, you know why because I'm thinking if this worth, everybody needs to do it in a routine. Everybody need to wake themselves up, you know? But I try to, what does it mean, me? To do me first after I am thinking, I'm thinking for others, I'm giving respect to everybody, but I need to look after my family because nobody give me a time to come and give me a time for, for give us in the family and look after me and my family, do you know what I mean? I put in, to give it routine for my family, I put in and I take my children to Islamic school, show them this show them this, this what mean this Haram, this what mean this Halal, this what Allah has said, what with this what with this. I don't need my children every time from school we go house watching this on TikTok or whatever, I'm not need to like this, I need to remember my children what happened, how. I'm telling my children how I'm grow it from my country. How I'm grow it. I'm starting showing pictures, I'm starting showing videos for my family before, how I'm grow it, so your family see how your grandmother she come into this.

R1: I think it makes you think about, I think it makes you think about faith, I think. Or the simple things in life and bringing, I've never, I felt like I had stopped for the first time. So although Covid was really difficult in lots of ways, and terrible for some people, it might sound a bit strange, but I kind of loved it. I loved being at home. I mean, I didn't get to see my family, there was just me and hubby, but we kind of looked at each other and said 'oh my God we love this!' And it was because we could be still. I could just be, I could be still. I hadn't got to do that, I hadn't got to go to that appointment, and I didn't realise how much my life was like this! When I stopped I actually thought, I had that feeling of like, this is... It is horrible what is happening, people dying, but I had this guilty, it felt great. I felt good, because I could stop, I could appreciate nature. I went for a walk. It was just, yeah. It was just like I saw things for the first time, it sounds a bit, but it was really like that for me. So it did bring me closer...

R4: Some family with children, living in the, you know what I need to say, like living in the dream, you know? I'm do this before and do stuff, but why you no here for your children?

R1: What about you (R5) did it bring you closer to your faith?

R5: You know I see, every Muslim is here, is look different. Because you know some Muslim, they see your colour, this not helping. And some Muslim is good, alhamdulillah, is good, is help and talking nice and some is different. That is why I teach my kids help everyone, teach them help people and no lie, never ever. Do something and say I do it. And teach them if someone want help, you help them straight away. You no look their colour, you no look they Muslim not Muslim, any people want help, help them. Before I tell him help charity, every time is night-time I tell him like this. I tell him maybe sometime, maybe I'm die or something I tell you this, in future after you come bigger, is doing this this this. Because here you see, people is, Muslim people is not all same. Because someone is looking, you coming from Africa. You say 'I'm Muslim', but he is not look at you Muslim, and not help you. Sometime, before corona time I am going shop, I have something and need help. I'm going, 'I'm need...' asking but I see scared. I say 'why? Because I'm..? Say why, why you scared? Like you see something scare you.' He say 'You come from Africa' I say 'what the matter? I come from Africa but you Muslim?' He say 'yes.' I say 'you're not Muslim.' How someone Muslim is want help no Muslim. Everyone who can help you will help you, Islam teach you. You teach people, its something good. Why is different from Muslim people and not Muslim people? Muslim people, you help, and you tell everything, you no liar, and do everything good.

R1: (R2) did Covid how did it make you feel? About your faith?

R2: I know a few families, they came together, they prayed together, so it brought them all closer. I'm in my sister-in-law's family they, the mum, and dad, the children, they prayed together at one time. So that was nice for them. But I think with all of the running around and the schooling and, it was quite hard for some people.

DB: And then I think the last thing I wanted to ask was, what do you think the lessons are that have been learned in terms of what the pandemic might have brought attention to as a result of the impacts on Muslims, on Muslim women?

R1: I think emotional well-being, for women. I think there is an awful lot of responsibility for women generally, but I think particularly for women that come from maybe a traditional Muslim background, you know? And particularly if your first language isn't English, if you haven't got a high level of English, and the job centre is on your back and you're trying to do all of these different things but. I think if you can, you give women more opportunities in different ways to improve their English, to improve their IT skills, not for the job centre, not for anybody else, but for you, as a person. You do it for yourself, you know we have women who come here who say 'oh the jobcentre sent me and they've been on my back' and I said 'ok, lets maybe try and look at, think about that differently, think about doing it for yourself. Because then when you've got small children you can help them, you know? And I just, we knew that women in our community that we work in are isolated. But we also know that this Covid, women took five steps forward before Covid and then ten steps back. We were working with women around their confidence and about how they felt about themselves, getting women to join in new experiences, and all of a sudden all of that was taken away. And Centres like this, is often the only place that a lot of our women can come to. They're not allowed. So one of the things we did was we opened up the centre even though there weren't classes, we had appointments. So we had women who would ring me and say 'have you got an appointment, don't you want to see me?' And I would say 'yes, come in on Tuesday at ten o'clock' so they could come and just sit. They didn't have to talk, or they could come and have a chat, or we could go for a walk. So we opened up the centre three days a week, and we just gave appointments to women who wanted to come. And those appointments were full every week! So its about women, they do so much but you also, what I, women, well everyone, but in particular I think women need that time, that hour, that two hours where it's yours. Doesn't belong to the children, doesn't belong to your husband, it belongs to you. We looked at the wellbeing aspect of our services, its the biggest part. It was before Covid and its even bigger now. Because if you're feeling a bit better about anything, you can move on, its enough to make progress. So emotional wellbeing is really, is a big part of what we do, but I personally, I think that's one of the most important things.

DB: But also you've mentioned IT literacy and how you focused on developing IT skilling as one of the lessons...

R1: Absolutely. We had one beginners IT class before Covid, we've now got three. We've got, we're trying to do language and speaking in lots of different ways so its not just about going to a class, its being a volunteer, to use your language. It's being part of the gardening programme, to use different types of language. We're trying to find lots of different ways to encourage. It's about buddying up with someone who's got good IT to help you, it's not, we do a little bit of hand-holding, but we try our best to encourage women to do a little bit for themselves. And then we've got a tablet loan scheme, so you can, you can borrow a tablet to practice at home. We've also got, information, so there's, like, data, not everyone has got WiFi, not everyone can afford it so we're doing that. So we're trying to find lots of different ways to encourage women to be part of the conversation, because its not just about coming to a class, it isn't. And all the services that we have on here are the services which the women have asked for. So all the classes that we have are driven by the women, the women have said we need this. So we now have stepping stones. So we have the pre-entry English, Entry One, Entry Two, Entry Three, Higher Level, then we have the gardening, we're going

to have the sewing. We've got the introduction to childcare, we've got all of these different things that the women have asked for, so the women are in charge! And then we do a lot of welfare, lots of queries that the women come with, they come, 'we don't know how to do that, we've had that letter, we don't know what that is.' So we now know that we need a partner to really focus on helping us with that. But women carry so much, women carry so much and it becomes normal, but it's not normal.

R3: Yeah but its this country, very important someone talk to you, and reading and writing. Because you know sometimes, you have appointment, every time you want help and you have someone coming and no-care, they tell you something but who help you? You have small kids going to school, you no have small kids, you no have kids, you want help yourself, that's why.

R1: But we have seen women progress, so we know it works. We've seen women who have just come for a cup of tea and sat, we used to have a little cafe. And they just used to come, never talk to anybody, just sit and have a cup of tea. And then they get talking to somebody, and then maybe they do a food hygiene course one day, or an emergency first aid, and then they do arts and crafts. We've seen women progress and progress and get more confident...

R2: Yeah that's right...

R1: The women get confident, the children...

R3: That's what I am looking for, because every time people, two people sit and come and sit and we talk because I need learning.

R1: Yeah. Okay we need to...

DB: Yeah, that's fine that's fine...

R3: The centre is help all people like, is coming here in class and for different thing, computer and sewing and very good and help people.

R1: We want to keep doing it!

R2: Insh'Allah!

DB: Well thank you all very much.