

Report

A Year of Lockdown: The Impact on Muslims

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**MUSLIM
CENSUS** ✓

**Muslim Census is an independent research organisation that
aims to support the growth of the Muslim community.
Specialising in quantitative and qualitative research around
issues impacting UK Muslims, we aim to gain a better and
reflective understanding of their thoughts and feelings.**

Introduction

March 23rd 2020 - the day the entire nation sat in front of their screens to hear Boris Johnson announce a nationwide stay at home order plunging the UK into its first coronavirus lockdown. What followed was two further lockdowns, several U-turns and an all-round chaotic state - all of which has severely impacted the people living in this country.

The people of the UK have been hit hard with the following statistics capturing the impact across health and employment.

- Over 150,000 deaths due to COVID-19 ¹
- 693,000 payroll jobs have disappeared since the initial lockdown ²
- 80% of young people agree that the coronavirus pandemic had made their mental health worse ³

However, many researchers point towards the disproportionate impact that the effects of the pandemic are having on ethnic minorities within the UK. With this in mind, Muslim Census embarked on an urgent study to encapsulate the experience of British Muslims during the pandemic: 'A Year of Lockdown: The Impact on Muslims'.

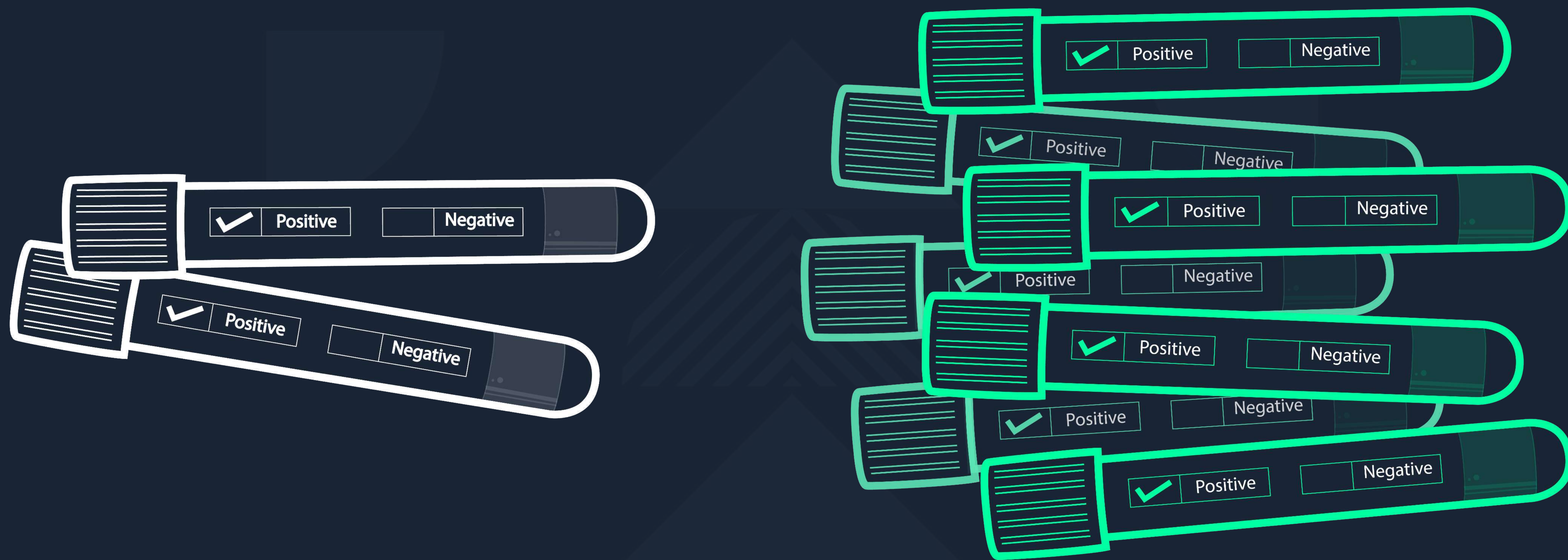
There are over 3.3 million Muslims currently living in the UK, 90% of which are from ethnic minority backgrounds. 50% of Muslims are considered to be living in poverty, compared to 18% of the entire country, with levels of full-time employment almost half of that of the total UK population ⁴. These statistics were all true before to the COVID-19 pandemic and highlight the vulnerability of the Muslim community during the lockdowns.

Muslim Census surveyed 1,000 Muslims aged 18-65+ living in the UK to understand their experiences and the impact that the pandemic has had on the facets of their lives, including employment, poverty, healthcare, compliance and family relationships.

We aim for the findings to build an understanding of the impacts the pandemic has had on Muslims and to facilitate the Muslim community, organisations, charities and the government to coordinate an appropriate response.

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**Muslims have tested positive
for COVID-19 at a rate 3.5 times
higher than the UK average**



COVID-19 Infection Rates

Overall, 23% of Muslims stated that they have tested positive for COVID-19 during the pandemic. With an estimated population size of 66'796'800 and the number of positive tests, as of 28/03/2021, at 4,333,042, this means that 6.5% of the UK population have tested positive for COVID-19.

As such, the rate of positive COVID-19 tests within the Muslim population in the UK is 3.5 times higher than the national average.

Muslims within the 45+ age group showed the highest rate of positive COVID-19 tests at 27% whilst the Bangladeshi ethnic group showed the highest rate of infection of any ethnic group at 27% also. The rate of positive tests within males and females remained the same at 23%.

Such a stark difference in the rate of infection has also translated into significantly higher mortality rates within the Muslim population compared to other religious groups. The ONS concluded in June 2020 that Muslim males and females are at a greater risk of death from COVID-19 related causes than their Christian counterparts. The risk of death in this regard is 2.5 times higher for Muslim males and 1.9 times higher for Muslim females ⁵.

It is imperative to understand the environment that has facilitated and lead to increased risks within the Muslim population during the pandemic. Occupational risks associated with front-line employment is a substantial factor; 22% of Muslims employed within the education sector reported to have tested positive for COVID-19. This increased to 23% for Muslims employed within the healthcare sector and 28% for those employed within the hospitality and retail sectors.

This also translates into increased mortality rates with BAME deaths within the NHS making up 63% of all NHS COVID-19 related deaths despite the BAME community only representing 21% of total NHS staff ⁶. The majority of the Muslim population is from within the BAME community. It's also important to note that the first four Doctors to pass away from COVID-19 were all from the Muslim and ethnic minority populations ⁷.

Geographical distribution and socio-economic deprivation is also a contributing factor with an overwhelming majority of the Muslim population residing in urban areas where COVID-19 rates are higher. 46% of the Muslim population currently resides in 10% of the most deprived local authority districts within the UK. The mortality rate for deaths involving COVID-19 in the most deprived areas in England and Wales was 128.3 deaths per 100,000 population - more than double the mortality rate in the least deprived areas ⁸. Overrepresentation of the Muslim population in deprived areas increases the risks associated with testing positive for COVID-19.

The prevalence of intergenerational households within the Muslim population, and the ethnic minority population more broadly, is also a contributing factor. The percentage of Muslims within 1 or 2 generation households reporting to have tested positive for COVID-19 is 22% though this increases substantially to 30% in households with 3 or more generations. It is important to note that even in households with only 1 generation, the rate of positive COVID-19 tests was 19% which remains alarmingly higher than the national average of 6.5%.

Employment and Income

Muslims have seen worse labour market outcomes as a result of COVID-19 compared to the rest of the population – 15% have lost their job, or a previously agreed job, since March 2020, while employment for the wider population has fallen just 2.5%.

The data suggests retail and teaching or education have seen the highest job losses, which is unsurprising given the nature of COVID-19 restrictions.

Women and young people were more likely to lose their job. 12% of women lost their job compared to 7% of men, and 18-34-year olds make up 68% of overall Muslim job losses.

Whilst the worse effect on young people is consistent with national trends, Muslim women's employment declined more than the overall female employment, which fell by only 0.7%.

In terms of ethnicity, there was a significant divergence between ethnicities with 45% of Black Africans losing their job, followed by Arabs whose employment fell by 21%

It's also useful to look at furlough rates – a key part of the UK government's response.

22% of Muslims have been furloughed, a similar rate to the national average at its peak in May, though this varies significantly between different ethnic groups. The highest furlough rate was within the Bangladeshi ethnic group at 40% - almost double the national rate. Muslims within the Black African ethnic group experienced a furlough rate of 37%. Muslims within the Pakistani ethnic group fared better with 15% being furloughed.

Young people again saw the highest furlough rates with 18-34-year olds accounting for 58% of Muslims who have been furloughed.

With similar furlough rates to the average population but much higher employment reduction, this might suggest Muslims are more likely to be fired than furloughed – consistent with findings from the Resolution Foundation which suggest BAME people overall are more likely to be fired after being furloughed than their white counterparts ⁹.

The differences between each minority's experience, as well as the difference between men and women, suggests there are multiple factors at play and policymakers should do more to investigate the channels affecting Muslim unemployment.

Muslims have lost their jobs at a rate 6 times greater than the rest of the UK



Household Income & Poverty

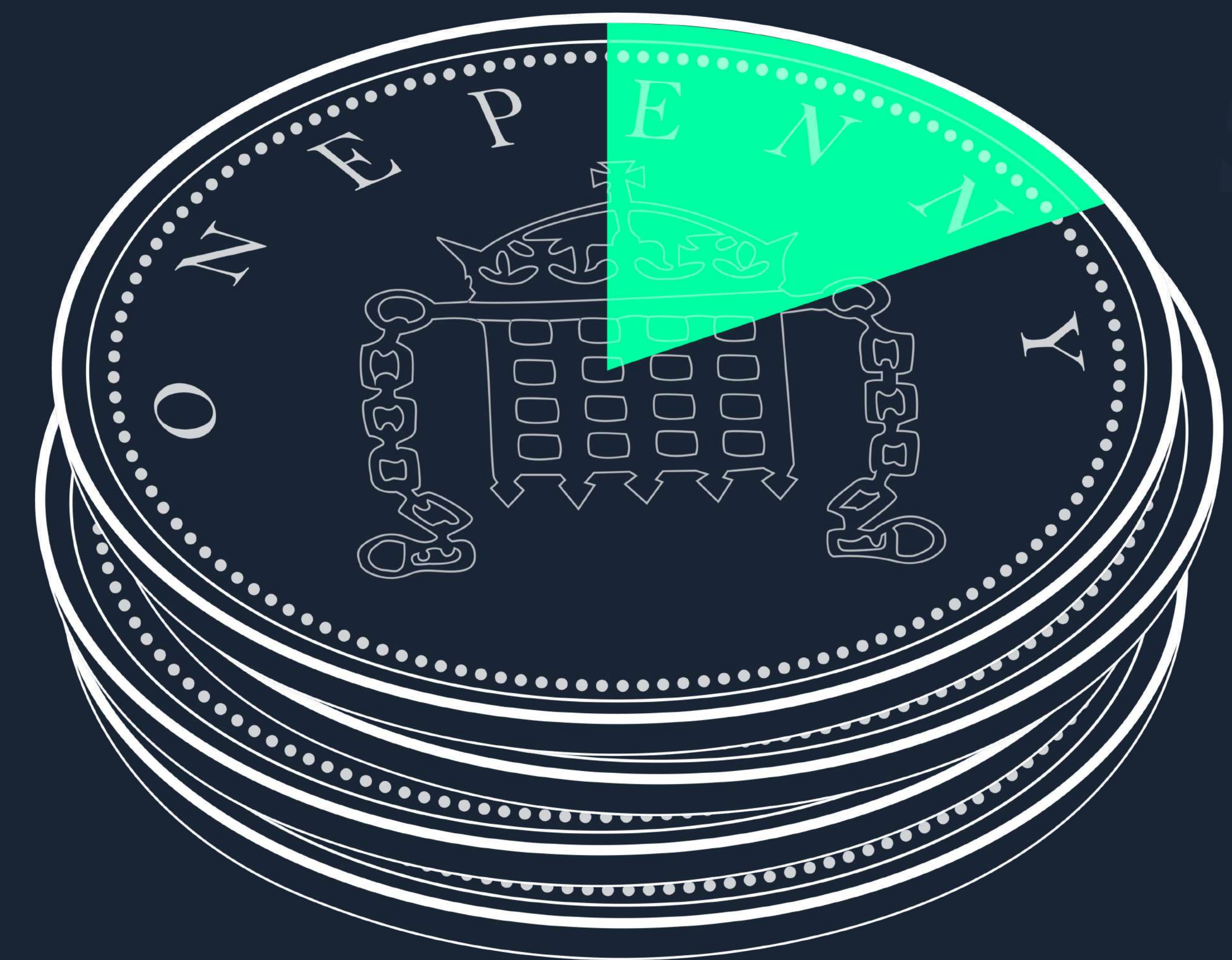
The Joseph Rowntree Foundation states households have fallen into relative poverty when they have less than 60% of contemporary median income. 17% of Muslims said their household income had fallen below £1,000 per month during the pandemic - meaning 17% have fallen into poverty, as defined by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

To contextualise these findings, counterfactual analysis from the Legatum Institute finds that the COVID-19 crisis has led to an increase in poverty in the overall population of just over 1% - using the definition of poverty previously defined ¹⁰. One measure that has counteracted a larger increase has been the £20 increase in Universal Credit and other benefit increases. However, this seems to have not translated into protection amongst ethnic minority groups.

Black Africans fell into poverty at the highest rate – 29%, while Bengalis and Pakistanis fell into poverty at a similar rate of 16% and 17% respectively.

Prior to the crisis, the Government's Social Mobility Commission found that 46% of Muslims lived in the 10% of the most deprived local authority districts ⁴. The COVID-19 crisis has only exacerbated Muslim poverty. Any anti-poverty policies need to consider the inequalities that already exist to make their strategy more targeted.

**Almost 1 in 5 Muslims
fell into poverty as a
result of the pandemic**



Job Satisfaction

In March 2020, with the implementation of new social distancing rules, many found themselves leaving the offices and working from home. This shift undoubtedly impacted many. Research by Cigna Europe has indicated that working from home during lockdown has increased overall job satisfaction, improved work relationships and has reduced work-related stress among UK workers ¹¹.

However, from our survey, 38% of Muslims reported that COVID-19 has negatively impacted their job satisfaction whilst 29% reported that they noticed no significant impact and 22% reported that COVID-19 had positively impacted their job satisfaction. From the data, the most common response was that the pandemic has negatively impacted Muslims' job satisfaction.

Concerning the different ethnic groups within the British Muslim population, the Bangladeshi ethnic group reported the highest rate of decreased job satisfaction at 42%. This number stays fairly consistent across the other ethnic groups. This is also the case across the age groups though Muslims between 18-24 reported the highest level of job dissatisfaction.

It is interesting to note that the high levels of job dissatisfaction are mirrored by an increase in working hours during the pandemic. Of the 1000 Muslim respondents, 36% reported that their working hours had increased during the pandemic compared to 30% of the overall population ¹².

**38% of Muslims say
that COVID-19 has
negatively impacted
their job satisfaction**



Young and Lonely

The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly disrupted the fabric of our society; we have had to adapt to a new reality centred around social distancing restrictions and isolation. Therefore, the impact this pandemic has had on our mental health has been of great worry and importance.

Recent research carried out by Mind shows that more than half of the young adult participants displayed signs of worsening mental health during the lockdowns ¹³. Another study by The Health Foundation reports that 69% of adults report feeling somewhat or very worried about the effect COVID-19 is having on their life ¹⁴.

We feel that the current body of research on the issue of mental health and wellbeing underrepresents people belonging to ethnic minority groups, particularly those of which who identify as Muslim. As a result, we felt it would be of great importance to understand the effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on British Muslims' mental health. In our survey, we asked 'How has COVID-19 impacted your mental health?' More than half (58%) of our 1000 respondents reported a negative impact on their mental health.

Taking a closer look at age groups, 70% of responses belonging to the 18 – 24-year-old age group reported that the pandemic had negatively affected their mental health. It is evident that while some degree of declining mental health is widespread, those more severely affected are young adults.

Of those that said that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively affected their mental health, 57% were women. This corroborates with the general body of research on mental health as an IFS study found that some groups have been disproportionately impacted negatively by the pandemic, in particular young people and women ¹⁵.

Another key aspect of our mental health section is loneliness. Social distancing restrictions and long-lasting lockdowns have forced many people into social isolation, which may lead to the subjective feeling of loneliness. Research by the Health Foundation shows that "the proportion of people reporting they feel lonely often or always during lockdown has been similar to pre-pandemic" (around 5%) ¹⁶.

Our results show a drastic difference. We asked our participants 'How often have you felt lonely during the pandemic?' with options ranging from Always, sometimes, hardly ever and never. Of the 1000 responses, 59% of Muslims said that they felt lonely "Always" or "Sometimes" during the pandemic.

70% of young people said that the pandemic had negatively impacted their mental health



Dealing With Death

One of the key factors that have undoubtedly contributed to plummeting mental health is the loss of loved ones. With the UK having recorded over 150,000 COVID-related deaths within the span of a year, many have lost friends, families and loved ones.

Muslims in particular have been disproportionately affected by this pandemic. A recent study by the ONS shows that “the risk of death involving COVID-19 varies across religious groups, with those identifying as Muslims, Jewish, Hindu and Sikh showing a higher rate of death than other groups”¹⁷. In our survey, we asked participants whether or not they had experienced the loss of a loved one since March 2020. From our survey, 38% of participants recorded that they have lost a loved one with Bangladeshi and Indian respondents reporting the highest at 43%.

Of those responses, 73% reported that their grieving experience was “very difficult” and “numbing”. Many felt that they could not grieve properly without the support of friends and family which has been limited due to social distancing restrictions. We can conclude from some of the responses below that the year in lockdown has been challenging to say the least.

“I lost my dad way too early. To make it short and easy to read... My dad was only 59 and like many other BAME individuals was taken too early. I'm doing things I never thought I'd had to do so early in my life. Allah knows best” – Response 655

“It doesn't feel real, because we haven't been able to grieve with relatives, attend the funeral or visit the house of the deceased to pay our respects” – Response 113

**73% of Muslims experience a
“difficult and numbing”
grieving experience due to
limited support**



Understanding and Compliance of COVID-19 Rules and Regulations

To assess levels of compliance with the rules and regulations imposed by the government to circumvent and mitigate the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is first important to establish the levels of understanding of the restrictions. To this end, we asked Muslims in the UK to assess how far they agreed with the following statement: 'I have understood the lockdown restrictions and guidelines during the past year'.

Overall, 80% of Muslims reported that they either 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' with the statement above indicating considerably high levels of understanding. This compares well with the national average, according to the UCL COVID-19 Social Study, where 74% reported that they broadly understand the rules as of January 2021 ¹⁸.

The highest levels of understanding within the Muslim population is amongst Muslims within the 35-44 and 45+ age brackets where 87% and 86% of respondents reported to either 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' with the statement above. Similarly, Muslims within the Arab ethnic group displayed the highest level of understanding with 83% reporting that they agree with the statement above on some level. Muslims within the Bangladeshi ethnic group followed closely with 82% reporting the same. Both Muslim females and males reported higher levels of understanding than the national average with 78% of males and 81% of females indicating that they 'Strongly Agree' or 'Agree' with the statement.

The higher level of understanding of COVID-19 rules and regulations has translated into increased rates of compliance with the COVID-19 restrictions within the Muslim population when compared to the national average.

94% of Muslims reported that they wear a face mask in places where the COVID-19 regulations specify they must. This compares to the national average, as reported by the UCL COVID-19 Social Study, where 93% of the population complies with the requirement to wear a face mask ¹⁸.

Furthermore, compliance within the Muslim community is above the national average across all age groups with 92% of 18-59 year-olds adhering to the rules at the national level whilst 94% of 18-44 Muslim reported compliance. Likewise, 97% of Muslims aged 45+ reported compliance compared with 93% of people aged 65+ at the national level.

Trends between the genders within the Muslim population mirror those at the national level with females reporting higher levels of compliance. 93% of Muslim males reported compliance compared with 91% of males at the national level whilst 97% of Muslim females reported compliance compared with 94% at the national level.

Similarly, compliance within the Muslim population with the rules relating to meeting people and mixing households closely follows the trends identified by the COVID-19 Social Study. This means compliance in this area trends upwards through the age groups as it does with compliance with the obligation to wear a face mask.

The findings draw attention to the irrationality of comments made in July 2020 by the Conservative MP for Calder Valley, Craig Whittaker, who suggested that the BAME population, and Muslims in particular, were 'not taking the pandemic seriously enough' ¹⁹. It is a shame that the Conservative Party's internal QC-led investigation found that Whittaker had not breached the Party's Code of Conduct with his inflammatory, divisive and incorrect remarks ²⁰.

Faith

Muslims generally encountered an increased closeness to their faith throughout the pandemic and the successive regional and national lockdowns, with 61% of those surveyed saying so. A plethora of reasons was given for this pattern, however, respondents overwhelmingly highlighted increased free time to worship, reflect and learn as being the major reasons for them becoming closer to their faith. This is set against a backdrop of only 5% of UK respondents reporting a strengthening in their faith ²¹.

Working from home or being furloughed meant respondents were able to perform their daily prayers on time, as well as allowing them to perform additional prayers. Many respondents highlighted how they usually struggle to pray on time at work, but as a result of the lockdowns, this hasn't been an issue.

Increased free time allowed for not only more worship but also more contemplation, reflection and self-development in various areas, including faith. Some highlighted how they were able to use this time to undertake extra lessons and courses, and with the online nature of learning, many were able to take classes they previously wouldn't have been able to.

Being at home and hence having greater contact with family more was a reason some gave for their increased closeness with their faith. We also found that 66% of Muslims saw an improvement in their relationships with their families, whereas only 12% of respondents reported an improvement in their family relations in a YouGov survey in 2020 ²¹.

Some respondents spoke of the advent of a global pandemic, and even catching COVID, as being a sobering and life-changing experience, encouraging them to take up extra worship and other faith-related activities.

**6 out of 10 Muslims say
that the lockdowns have
helped them to get closer
to their faith**



Organisations

Almost 2 in 3 Muslims felt that Muslim organisations, charities and mosques have supported the community well, with 62% agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.

The vast majority of respondents spoke only of their local mosque's reaction to the pandemic, indicating that for most Muslims their only interaction with Muslim organisations is with their local mosque, as opposed to charities and larger organisations.

Despite Muslims generally feeling that Muslim organisations have reacted well to the pandemic, the responses given were mixed and sometimes even contradictory, indicative of the diverse and varied views and experiences within the Muslim community. The reaction has varied nationally, and the experience of this reaction is subjective.

However, some themes were repeatedly mentioned by our respondents. Muslims felt that their local mosques abided by the COVID guidelines well and that they had reacted quickly and skillfully, with a concerted effort to stay open. Mosques were again highlighted as taking on extra responsibilities such as food banks, vaccination clinics, funeral services, and online classes. However, respondents also mentioned the fact that many mosques did not cater to female prayer spaces during the pandemic.

Two-thirds of Muslims believe Muslim organisations, charities and mosques have supported the community well during the pandemic

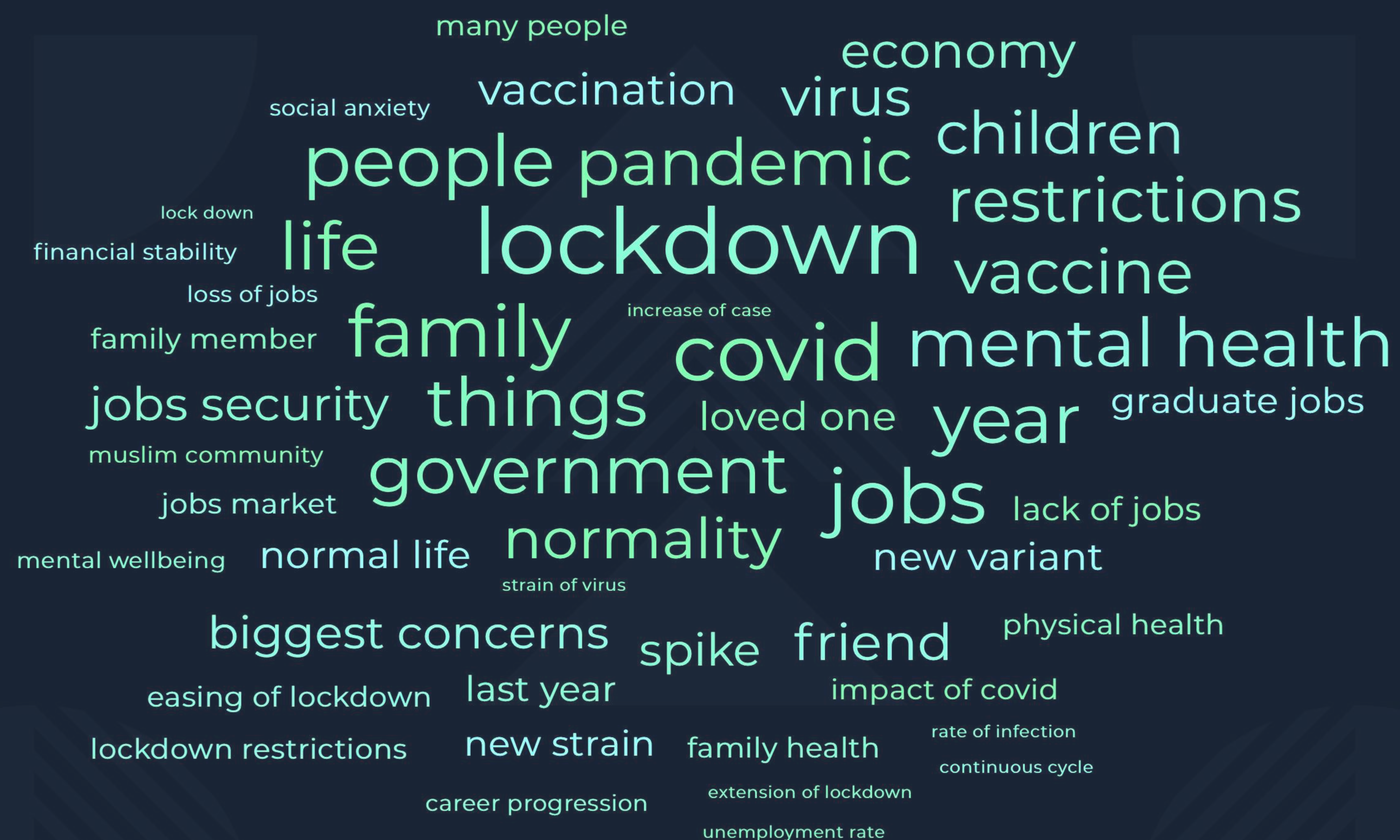


Biggest concerns for the future

The concerns Muslims have for the next year are wide-ranging and varied. Many of these concerns can be grouped into several categories, although this is by no means exhaustive.

Many had concerns which fell into several of these categories. These categories are:

1. Education - disruption to school or university studies etc.
2. COVID - more loss of life, further lockdowns, bad COVID policy, new variants etc.
3. Economy, finance and careers - long lasting economic impact, loss of work etc
4. Personal life - mental and physical health, personal relationships etc.
5. Other, or a combination of the above.



Methodology and Limitations

This survey was conducted gaining responses from 1,000 Muslims currently living in the UK. Each participant was interviewed via an online survey during the dates of 28th February to 14th of March.

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The margin of error varies based on the size of the sample. In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 3% from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

It is worth noting that we did not receive many responses from those of White ethnicity. Thus, we have not been able to accurately represent this group within this study.

Sample Splits

We conducted a weighting of our sample in lines with research standards to ensure a representative sample split. As a result, we are confident in our findings and our methodology.

Age	Weighted Sample (no. of responses)
18 - 24	34% (485)
25 - 34	33% (280)
35 - 44	18% (111)
45+	15% (121)
Prefer not to say	0% (3)

Ethnicity	Weighted Sample (no. of responses)
Bangladeshi	22% (349)
Pakistani	40% (315)
Indian	11% (113)
Other Asian	7% (49)
Black African	9% (73)
Arab	8% (63)
Other	3% (38)

Region	Unweighted Sample (no. of responses)
London	46.8% (468)
West Midlands	9% (90)
Yorkshire and Humber	8.2% (82)
North West	11.6% (116)
South East	10.6% (106)
East	2.9% (29)
East Midlands	4.7% (47)
South West	2% (20)
North East	1.2% (12)
Scotland	1.7% (17)
Wales	0.8% (8)
Prefer not to say	0.5% (5)

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