



Covid-19, Mental Health, and the Muslim Community



Summary

Ramadan Tent Project and Inspired Minds launched a survey during and after Ramadan 2020 to better understand the mental health experiences of the Muslim community and how important a sense of community regarding mental health is. Data from this survey provide valuable insights into the intersection between mental health in the community, the impact of Covid-19 and how this impacted Ramadan 2020.



Ramadan Tent Project (RTP) was founded in 2013 to help bring together communities to better understand one another. The motto 'turning strangers into friends' beautifully encapsulates this agenda. Through its flagship Open Iftar, RTP has grown into a global community project bringing together people in the month of Ramadan – that is, the Muslim month of fasting. Today, Open Iftar is the UK's largest annual community event in Ramadan and provides free food for anyone and everyone, whilst listening to speakers from a wide range of backgrounds who speak about local, social, political, cultural and religious issues, amongst other topics. Grounded in our community and almost entirely run by volunteers, we have had the honour of organising, for the first time in British history, Open Iftars at Westminster Abbey, Wembley Stadium, Trafalgar Square and The British Library. We've now hosted over 100,000 people from all backgrounds across the UK and the world, in over 10 cities and 4 continents. Instilling the spirit of Islam all year round, Ramadan Tent Project also delivers several other projects and programmes including, The Welcome Ramadan Conference, Leadership Academy, Podcast Channel, #MyOpenIftar, and Workshops and Training Seminars. Thanks to its unique position which bridges the grassroots and national institutions, Ramadan Tent Project has also taken a keen interest in questions of belonging, discrimination, and the mental and physical wellbeing of communities. To that end, Ramadan Tent Project's Research and Policy wing aims to tackle such questions through in-depth research and engagement with communities around such themes.



Inspired Minds (IM) is a faith based mental health charity founded in 2014, that tackles a shortage of the support available for Muslims hindered by the challenges of mental health illnesses. IM provide the necessary and tailored support to those desperately searching for someone to advise, support and understand them. IM also work to raise awareness by educating the masses in regards to mental health, and thus eradicate the misconceptions and taboos which surround it. IM aim to bring a paradigm shift to the public's perception of mental health by highlighting the severity of the issue at a communal and societal level. Based on IM's initial research, it was evident that a large number of individuals faced difficulty seeking help as they feared being misunderstood from a cultural and religious perspective. IM is here to change this and cater for this need.

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Community and collective worship play a major role in most faiths and is a major part of sustaining positive mental health. For many Muslims, congregational prayers in the mosque and communal iftars (fast-breaking meals) during the month of Ramadan are an integral part of their faith and mental well-being. From March, the UK's biggest Muslim umbrella body, the Muslim Council of Britain called for a (temporary) closure of mosques – a situation which lasted until July. This was unprecedented in the history of Islam in Britain. The survey conducted throughout Ramadan on how Covid-19 has affected Muslims and how Muslims are looking after their mental health during this crisis revealed some very important insights.

The Muslim community in the UK was especially impacted by the outbreak of Covid-19. Numerous sources documented the initial and disproportionate impact of the pandemic: according to the Muslim Doctors Association, 56 per cent of doctors dying of Covid-19 in the UK were Muslim. As early as mid-May 2020, the Independent newspaper was reporting that “[r]esearchers, psychiatrists and Global health officials have warned of a looming mental health crisis stemming from the coronavirus – with at least an extra half a million people in the UK alone expected to suffer with a psychological problem as a result of the pandemic”.



Initial evidence by NHS workers indicates that Muslim households are particularly hard hit by the crisis (Independent, March 2020). This is likely due to existing inequalities, which are exacerbated by the crisis (Guardian, April 2020), in addition to cultural particularities (such as the fact that many Muslim households consist of multigenerational families). Amongst the BAME community in the UK, issues with employment, finances and housing has added a mental health pressure on these communities (Mind, June 2020). Usual support systems, such as community groups, mosques and cultural centres are currently inaccessible, due to the lockdown and physical distancing regulations. Moreover, Islamophobic Covid-19-focused narratives targeting Muslims (Aljazeera, April 2020) are likely to further contribute to feelings of isolation and marginalisation. Mainstream mental health and psychosocial support tends to lack an understanding and sensitivity of the role of faith. There is therefore an increased need for faith/culturally-sensitive mental health community interventions for individuals at risk.

Due to the effects of Covid-19 and the lockdown on people's lives, a decline in the mental health of many in the UK is clear. However, specific research into how Covid-19 has impacted the Muslim community in the UK is sparse. Within the Muslim community, 6 in 10 Muslims aged between 16-30 suffered from anxiety, while 5 in 10 suffered from depression. Suicidal thoughts were prevalent in 32% of Muslims. A significant number of Muslims did not access the appropriate help nor did they feel that they have enough access to mental health help (Muslim Youth Helpline, 2019). Mental health issues remain prevalent and common within the Muslim community, however, due to the stigma around it, many do not access the appropriate services for their mental health concerns. This is compounded, in recent years, by the increase of hate crimes and Islamophobia (Samari, Alcalá and Sharif 2018).



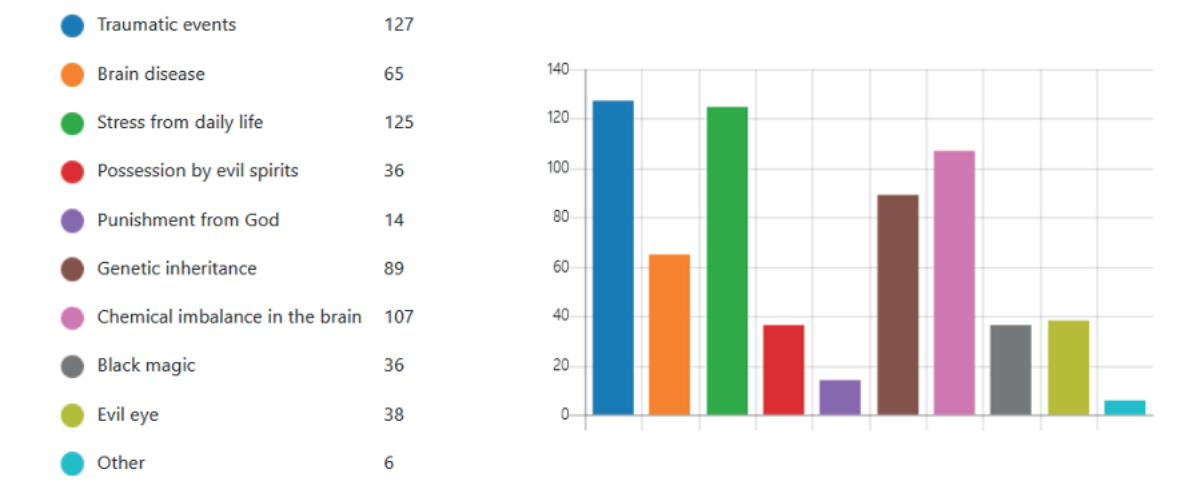
Main Findings

With this situation in mind, RTP and Inspired Minds set out to survey Muslims during and after during and after Ramadan 2020 to better understand the mental health experiences of the community during this period. Data from this survey provides valuable insights into the intersection between mental health in the community, the impact of Covid-19 and how this impacted Ramadan 2020.

The main and initial findings of this survey are included briefly in this report. It is hoped that this report will enable us to get the conversation started on this issue and to expand research regarding the importance of community in dealing with mental health problems within the Muslim community. In total, 130 people completed the survey. Estimating based off of previous survey data we have gathered at our events, most participants are between the ages of 25-35 (with sizeable numbers between 18-24 followed by those between 36-50). Below are the preliminary findings of our survey.



- 9 in 10 Muslims struggle or know someone that struggles with their mental health.
- Mental health issues are widespread and effect people from all ages and backgrounds. In recent years, mental health has been discussed more amongst the Muslim community, however, the stigma around mental health still remains.
- 4 in 5 Muslims said that they would seek help if they were struggling with their mental health. Most people would turn primarily to a professional (57%), friends (21%) and family (16%).
- Those who would not seek help if they were struggling would mainly not seek help due to the lack of knowledge around where and who to seek help from in addition to considering their condition not serious enough to seek help.
- Within the Muslim community, Muslims feel that mental health is not discussed enough. However, Muslims feel that a sense of community is important to help deal with mental health issues.
- Additionally, Muslims do not feel that mental health is being discussed enough during Ramadan.
- Traumatic events, stress from daily life and chemical imbalances in the brain are amongst the top believed causes of mental illnesses amongst Muslims. Some other less common beliefs of the causes of mental illnesses include: evil eye, black magic and possession by evil spirits.



Appendix 1

Mental Health Survey Questions:

1. Do you, or someone you know, struggle with their mental health?

Yes

No

2. Would you seek help if you were struggling with your mental health?

Yes

No

3. If yes, from whom?

4. If no, why not?

5. If you felt that you had a mental health difficulty, how likely would you seek help from a mental health professional? (1 – not very likely, 10 – very likely)

6. Within the Muslim community, do you feel that mental health is discussed enough? 1-10 (1 – not at all, 10 – a lot)

7. Tick all the boxes that you think can cause mental illnesses (these choices are based off of previous research indicating the factors people associate with mental health).

Traumatic events

Brain disease

Stress from daily life

Possession by evil spirits

Punishment from God

Genetic inheritance

Chemical imbalance in the brain

Black magic

Evil eye

Other

8. If other, please specify

9. How important is a sense of community to helping you deal with mental health? (1 – not at all, 10 – a lot)

10. Do you feel mental health is being discussed enough during Ramadan? (1 – not at all, 10 – a lot)

11. Would you be happy to be contacted for follow up research?

Yes

No

12. First Name

13. Surname

14. Email address

References

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https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/5929/the-mental-health-emergency_a4_final.pdf

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Inspirited Minds

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