

Hiba and Hanif's story 24th June 2020

About me	Household	Parents	Community and area
My name is Hiba and I am female. We are Pakistanis and Muslims.	I live with my in-laws, my husband and our two children.	Hanif is my father, he has lived here since he was five years old. My mum's originally from Pakistan so he called her over. My mum has overcome cancer. She's quite strong in her health and she's always motivated to be positive. My dad was a heavy smoker previously, he's slightly asthmatic and he's got a pump. He has a bit of a disability and has had three operations for his ears and lower back. At the moment he is working in a chippy part time.	On our road, there's probably three households that are White but there is no discrimination whatsoever. There's an old lady who lives on her own and during the lockdown my husband used to get her fruit and biscuits from the shop and she used to get so happy. My parents have been living in [town] for 25 years I would say. Three of my siblings are living in my parent's household. My dad's father lives in the same area and I live on the same road. It's a nice community and we're well known. There's a lot of Pakistanis and it's quite busy. We just say hello, it's not like we go to their house every day.

Our life before COVID

In January 2020, the family were fine; going to school, going to college, doing their own work. My mum's always at home cooking for everyone and caring for my father. I've got my children, I go to university and I do my own thing, but I come down to my mum's once a week to see if she needs any help with anything. I used to go to the mosque¹ on Fridays. It's like a five or ten-minute drive there and I would listen to lectures. Since COVID, we haven't been able to go.

My father always listens to the news at six o'clock, so we were getting the information from him. My partner was planning to go to Pakistan in June, but I told him not to book tickets because China is next to Pakistan and the virus is going to go everywhere. As we expected, it got worse and came to the UK. For my parent's household, the lockdown was normal, they had no plans to go anywhere. I had to explain to my mum about COVID, because she was still shopping in February.

Before the lockdown, I went shopping to get hand sanitiser and hand wash so that we could keep washing our hands. My partner was doing most of the shopping for us and for my parent's household. Some people were tempted to shake his hand, Pakistanis, and he was like 'no, don't touch me'. I think our community weren't so bothered at first - they were walking around as usual, still shaking hands, talking really close to each other, and my partner was like 'people are not taking this seriously'. When the death rate went high, then I think they all stayed home.

¹ A mosque is a place where people with a Muslim faith gather together to worship. It is also where funerals take place.

We had my sister's wedding planned. She got married last year but they were waiting for the big party which was on 5th April, when COVID was set to peak. Because of the scenario, she didn't have a big wedding. Before Ramadan², her husband said 'I want to spend Ramadan² with my wife', so he just came and took her, my sister was there ready with the suitcases.

Our Experience of COVID

"My mum was pushing my father saying 'you'll be fine', because my father actually just gave up, to be honest, and I was there facetimeing: 'dad, you need to do this, you need to do that, because at the hospitals people are dying out there, it's really bad there' and then that's what scared him."

My father got COVID from serving customers. It was before the lockdown. He came home and started getting a headache, then chest pain and sore throat, and slowly it went worse. My mum gave him hot lemon juice to get better, but it never got better. His asthma got worse and he said to me 'I can't breathe'. That's when I called 999 and the ambulance came. They checked everything and took him to hospital. He wanted to stay at home with the family, so they just gave him a small infection tablet.

My father stayed in his room for three weeks. Only my mum would go in with a mask and gloves on – she said he was half dead. I phoned 111 for extra support because I was concerned that my father was still bad. But when they heard that he went to hospital and they gave him antibiotics, they said they can't do anything about it unless he gets really bad. Normally they're responsive and we speak to them for any queries, but because of COVID, I think they're concerned about their own safety so tell you to manage it at home.

Two weeks before my dad was badly ill, my sister was really ill and we didn't understand what she had. She had a temperature and was in bed for a week or two. I don't think there was testing at that time anyway, but we just thought it was normal flu - mum gave her lots of fluids and she recovered. I think both of my siblings and my mum had mild symptoms. I had two days of a headache and a cough, and my sons were coughing. I think home remedies are the best, like lemon, turmeric, ginger and red onion. We used home remedies twice a day, drinking these hot drinks and it really helped.

Our life after COVID

Financially, my dad was concerned. He received furlough for about two months. Then after Eid³, when they opened the restaurants, he went back to work. For Eid³, it was just talking on the phone, I wouldn't allow anyone to come over. My in-laws phoned their daughters and told them not to come to the house because they've got children. Overall, I think it was hard for my children because they were missing the other cousins. They were facetimeing them but it's not proper socialising when it's just through internet and phone.

² Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. During this period, people with a Muslim faith abstain from food and drink (fasting).

³ Eid is an important event, which are celebrated by people with a Muslim faith. Eid al-Fitr marks the end of the fasting month. Eid al-Adha (acknowledging prophet Ibrahim's willingness to sacrifice his son).

Why our COVID experience matters

There's about three people that I know who have passed away in this community and that did shock us. I think the local government should be more aware of communities and they should give more advice to them about their own safety. They should outline more that you need to stay home, you need to stay away from people, because the news is not enough. People are hardly watching the news. There needs to be some sort of, police or someone, to say to the people in shops 'stay apart', because they don't understand. At one point, I was driving and there were three police cars and I thought 'that's good, if they see people are gathering, they probably could stop that'.