

## Jamila's story 9<sup>th</sup> August 2020

About me	Household	Spouse	Children	Community and area
I am female. I was born in Pakistan and I was 3 when I came here. I work full time as a team administrator for the NHS, working for district nurses in the community.	In our household, it's me, my husband and our four kids. We're of Pakistani origin and we're Muslim. I've got an underactive thyroid, but other than that no one in our household has any pre-existing health conditions. We don't have any caring responsibilities for anyone outside the household.	I got married in 1996 and moved to my in-laws for three years. My husband works for catering in the NHS and in the evenings for a restaurant.	My eldest daughter is 22 and is just finishing university, my second daughter is nearly 21 and works at the airport and my third daughter is almost 20 and has just finished her A-levels at college. My son turns 15 in August.	We bought a house and we're quite happy here. I think our area is more working class. You've still got a community aspect – there's the mosque <sup>1</sup> , a library, the shopping centre. There are three or four primary schools, and a secondary school. My kids all use public transport to get to work or school. I walk to work and it takes just over 15 minutes.

### My life before COVID

I think I first heard about COVID in January from my husband and they were saying it's affecting just the elderly in China, but when it's come here it's affected all ages.

Life as normal was going to work, coming home, cooking, cleaning, just rushing round until about 8 o'clock in the evening. On the weekends, I met with family and things like that. The week before lockdown I went to the mosque<sup>1</sup> in [Road name] to pay my respects for one of my Aunties passing away and I went again with my husband after the funeral. Then I went to a shop in [Road name] to get some samosas. Lockdown happened a couple of days later so the kids weren't working, university stopped, and the schools closed.

### My experience of COVID

*"I haven't really felt any racism really growing up in the UK. But since being poorly with COVID, I did feel racism at work. We do all these equality and diversity training but if they're not going to use it, there's no point doing that training is there? In my case, for someone who's been so poorly and you've pushed yourself to go back, when I really should have had another couple of weeks off, the way I was spoken to wasn't normal, there was an atmosphere and I could tell it was because I'd been off."*

My symptoms first started in the evening with a sore throat and a temperature, that night my body was aching. In the morning I took paracetamol and I cooked for the family, but by 2 o'clock I was back in bed because I was in so much pain. My headache wasn't going, so I kept regularly taking paracetamol. I couldn't lie down because I was really out of breath. I felt like I couldn't breathe, I was coughing throughout the night.

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

My GP told me to ring 111 for advice. It took about three hours to get through to them and they advised me to ring the GP for antibiotics. They couldn't give me anything for a viral infection, so I left it at that. I took some herbal teas and everything, but it wasn't getting better! I rang the GP again 3 days later and said 'I'm not sleeping at all, I've got a constant headache, coughing throughout the night and day, I'm out of breath, I really need something. Please can you prescribe me something?' He prescribed me amoxycillin for seven days and I got a little bit better, but I still had the cough, the headache and breathing problems. I rang the GP again a few days after my antibiotics finished and he told me to call the ambulance. But I didn't want to go to hospital – I read about people going in and then three hours later they're in a serious condition. That scared me, I'd rather suffer at home on my own than in hospital. I remembered using menthol BP crystals to inhale in some steam when the kids were young. I asked my husband to get me that and straight away I felt my airways opening up. I did that for three days running. The pharmacy said it's fine to use twice a day. Then somebody recommended liquorice root and when I Googled it, it did say it's good for respiratory, lungs and things like that.

About a week after my symptoms developed, my husband was poorly as well. He had a headache, pain in his legs, pain in his groin area and pain in his back and his chest. He was getting tightness in his chest and feeling really cold. One of my daughters complained of pain in her legs and temperature. She took paracetamol and herbal teas and got better. My third daughter had a dry cough, and tiredness. She isolated as well, but she got better after.

I had 14 days in isolation and then two weeks of sick note. I think I went back to work too soon because I did feel myself being out of breath and I had to come home and use the menthol crystals again for a few days. In June, I'd sit down and I'd fall asleep. I rang the GP and told them I'm still experiencing these symptoms and they offered 'non-urgent' blood tests. Because I work in the same building as my GP, I was able to get my colleague, a nurse, to take my blood. If I didn't have that facility available I would have had to wait another two weeks and could have been suffering more because the doctors didn't think it was urgent. Around the end of June, our workplace offered an antibody test. We went up to [Hospital] and they took our bloods there. We were both positive, so we definitely both had COVID. But ultimately, I don't think it spread to any members of our extended family as we didn't go anywhere.

### **My life after COVID**

My symptoms still haven't gone away. On Thursday I was full of energy then I got to work at about 10 o'clock and felt exhausted. You can't concentrate with your work because you're so tired. I just had to leave the kids to sort out cooking and cleaning. That's not me, I'm always on the go. My GP said some people are suffering with post COVID depression, or post COVID fatigue but there's not a lot they can do about it.

My managers have been a bit off with me, which really upset me. They thought I was probably faking it and just wanted the time off even though I had a sick note. My antibody test has come back positive - they shouldn't be doing that as professionals. A remark was actually made about me by my team leader, she teased "we're all out in the community and you're sat in the office and you've got COVID". Another Asian girl in my office was contacted by Track and Trace and had to isolate. Obviously, you have to follow government guidelines, but the deputy manager was very dismissive about it. Anybody else that goes off sick doesn't have that - when remarks like those are made, you know that's purely because we're Asian.

### **Why my COVID experience matters**

I just think it's a bit too late, all this social distancing. The lockdown should have happened sort of three or four weeks earlier. The amount of people that we've lost. The current guidelines are ambiguous – you cannot visit extended family, but you can go to a pub. What's the difference in terms of risk?

I have worked since I left school in a deprived area, but I'm not deprived in any other ways. The way they go on about deprivation really hurt me. I heard it on the news - they were saying that BAME groups have higher COVID risk because they live in deprived areas and it's not healthy. It's pure racism. There are white people who have died with COVID, but they're just labelling us black and ethnic minorities. Like they always say, 'most Asians are this, most Asians are that'. I would say 80% of patients are White in the hospital. It's just another label, isn't it?