

The Greater Manchester Covid-19 Pakistani and Bangladeshi Youth Project Report

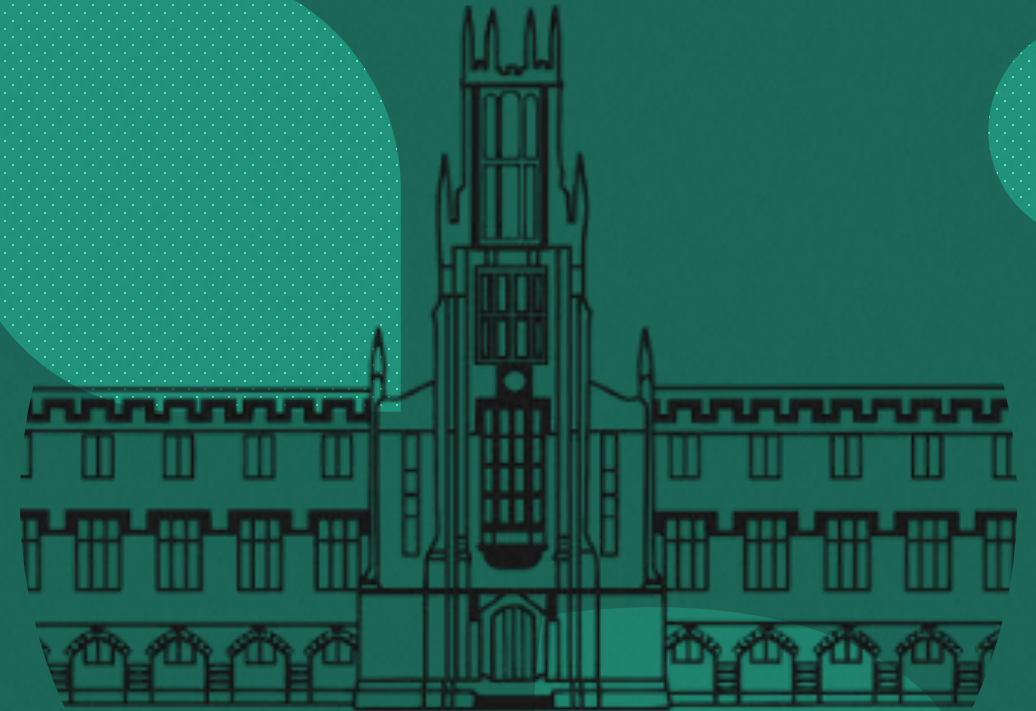


Introduction

The British Muslim Heritage Centre's (BMHC) vision is to be a centre of excellence for learning and development. The BMHC promotes community cohesion in partnership with public, private and voluntary sectors by bringing people and communities from all faiths and non-faith to develop better understanding between communities.

The BMHC wishes to thank the NHS for supporting the establishment of this important project. The aim has been to promote the benefits and uptake of the vaccination programme amongst the young people in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim Communities in Greater Manchester.

This project was established based on BMHC's experience of working with young people belonging to the Pakistani Muslim and Bangladeshi Muslim Community. Young people had shown a reluctance to engage with the vaccination programme, and this project looked at the underlying reasons for this hesitancy and explore ways as to how the vaccination programme might be promoted.



ISLAMIC HERITAGE

What did we do:

Asked young people from our Aspiring Youth Leaders Programme to lead on the Project. This provided an opportunity for young people to gain experience of chairing. Outcomes included: -

1. Empowering young people to lead on the project to gain ownership and encourage contributions from other young people in the webinars.
2. Organised four webinars to attract 70 young people from different parts of Greater Manchester (Rochdale, Bury, Bolton, Oldham etc.) to gain the views of young people and to learn more about their hopes and fears during the pandemic.
3. Involved professionals to meet young people to answers their questions in relation to any hesitancy of taking up the vaccine.
4. Developed a Youth Network (supported by Aspiring Leaders) that would provide an opportunity to support each other after the webinars, for example, having peer to peer support.
5. Trained young people on Heritage Radio to become presenters to promote the vaccination and to hear their views and encourage discussions on Covid-19.



What is worrying young people

The general issues emphasised by young people related to their health and wellbeing were anxiety and depression. Several other areas that contributed towards their mental health and wellbeing included:

1. The stress of not meeting their friends and loved ones.
2. Misinformation and confusing messages on social media regarding the vaccination not being safe.
3. Worrying about their elderly parents catching Covid-19.
4. Stigmatisation: media reporting that Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are most likely to catch Covid-19 due to them not following rules and guidelines.
5. The lack of meaningful information for young people to follow or seek help “everything seems to be targeting older people” as one young person indicated.
6. Worrying about the lack of career opportunities and educational attainments due to the lockdown. Examples given were some young people had started work before lockdown but were made redundant.



6. The increase of racism including Islamophobia was a concern. Young adults provided number of examples of comments that they found to be racist on social media such as the way they look (particularly young women who wear the hijab and young men wearing traditional clothes during the month of Ramadan, Eid and young people supporting people in Palestine etc.).
7. Lack of identity as young Muslim adults - most of the media only reported the negative stories of young people rather than the good work many have been doing such as helping as volunteers with local charities giving out food for the homeless, and raising funds for the vulnerable during this difficult time of the pandemic.

Heritage Radio and Heritage TV Channel has promoted young people views and discussions on Covid-19 targeting young Pakistani and Bangladeshi people from their respective communities. Heritage Radio provided an opportunity to discuss issues around Covid-19 including why there is a hesitancy from people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds to take the vaccination.



Why young people are hesitant to take the vaccination

1. Lack of credibility and trusted information available.
2. The vaccination is not halal (lawful) and therefore should not be taken.
3. Many were concerned that the vaccine was not safe and felt that the speed with which the vaccine was developed had compromised its safety.
4. The mistrust in the very people that were telling them to have the vaccine. Also, various online videos and social media were telling them that the vaccine was harmful or that there was malicious intent behind the production of the vaccine.
5. Some just did not believe that coronavirus was a credible danger, and many felt that the vaccine contained ingredients/elements that they have been told would be contrary to their religious beliefs and practices.



Overcoming Hesitancy

The young people suggested the following to improve the vaccination amongst Pakistan and Bangladeshi communities:

Communication is vital and written communication for the elderly in their community language (Urdu or Bengali) is very important. In some case, the parents of young people are not able to read or write Urdu or Bangla; so for them, the right message has to be communicated via Asian television media and community influencers.

Community Influencers: young people suggested that professionals need to recognise and tap into local community influencers. These could include local imams, women and young people such as Mohammed Ali from Rochdale.

Social media (Twitter, Facebook, Tik-tok, Instagram) were mentioned to reach out to young people with correct message perhaps under the NHS or Government logos so that people know its from a creditable source.

Schools and University can play more of a positive role and encourage young people to take the vaccination.



Keep it simple: provide information in plain English and pictorial message are better understood by young people than worded reports or guidance.

Build sustainable partnership with charitable/local organisations. Long term youth project are needed which are sustained. NHS England has embarked on various COVID-19 vaccine outreach programmes to engage, inform and educate various BAME groups which are welcomed but the question is what happens when these are stopped, and the agenda moves on to something else? NHS messages via podcast and videos in English and English-based content encouraging people to accept the vaccine and to shun the myths are very much welcomed. Some young people had seen them.

Partnership with young people. Young people should be involved in co-designing the communication messages and social media products to ensure they were relevant to young people and reflected the diversity of young people. For example, young Muslims often get left out regarding any positive images or communication.



Role models in the NHS: young people wanted to see more people within NHS staff and volunteers that understands young people from a diverse background including young Muslims who are often portrayed and stereotyped into extremist by the mainstream media .

Stop Scapegoating: A number of young people felt that they were being scapegoated, where number of politician's have focused on young people through hesitancy message implying that they have not played their part in taking the 2nd Jab" while elders' population have. This has not been helpful and can switch young people "off" to the important messages. One young person indicated that he has "stopped listening to politicians and doesn't watch the news anymore as its all confusing and they keep changing the messages".

In conclusion: the main areas where young people felt hesitant to take the vaccination included: number of concerns were expressed about safety including if it was "halal" or not (seems to be mixed messages there from the community and social media). Not enough information was available to young people in relation to the vaccine and number of young people believed that it was not effective. People who have had Covid-19 have caught it again so if it didn't work first time why have the vaccination in the first place.

