

TIPTON COMMUNITIES & THE IMPACT OF

C VID-19

A study into how the pandemic has impacted upon the communities of Tipton and how this should influence the development of community based services in the future.

CONTENTS

0.0	Foreword	03
1.0	Introduction	04
2.0	Executive Summary	05
3.0	Research Approach & Methodology	06
4.0	Survey Sample	07
5.0	Research Findings	10
5.1	Health & Wellbeing	10
5.2	Children & Their Wellbeing	17
5.3	Employment	22
5.4	Household Income	24
5.5	Community Relations	30
6.0	Conclusions & Areas for Development	33
6.1	Health & Wellbeing – Key Issues & Indicators of Need	34
6.2	Children & Their Wellbeing – Key Issues & Indicators of Need	35
6.3	Employment Support & Household Income - Key Issues & Indicators of Need	36
6.4	Community Relations – Key Issues & Indicators Of Need	37
7.0	Concluding Remarks & Recommendations	39

This research project is co-sponsored by:



FOREWORD



Razia Sattar - Chairwoman BWA Limited

Covid-19 – a pandemic was on its way. We all held our breath, as infection rates were reported throughout the world. Governments in crisis talks, societies in turmoil – as death rates rose. What was to be done? How could people be protected? The UK response was to hold people in lockdown, a measure designed to prevent further contagion and to protect the capacity of the NHS, enabling it to continue its vital role in caring for the sick. All non-essential services were compelled to close to the public, along with venues such as schools, and community centres where people were prevented from meeting others. We were only permitted to buy food and essential items and we were asked to 'work from home' where possible.

This report was commissioned by the Bangladeshi Women's Association (BWA), to investigate the consequences of the lockdown on the communities of Tipton, and how community spaces can be better utilised to meet the emerging community development needs.

As the research was questionnaire-based it enabled researchers to obtain feedback from the respondents themselves and some of the comments are devastatingly honest, poignant and searing – from a mother unable to buy baby milk, to parents unable to help their children with home-schooling as they don't have access to a computer – with many, many more individuals and families expressing a desperate need for help and support with finances, employment, health, children's education and advice. The additional socio-economic impact of the pandemic and lockdown on the residents of Tipton cannot be underestimated.

The closure of businesses, retail and hospitality venues, service providers, places of worship, schools and colleges has plunged many people into an abyss of financial hardship and deep emotional and psychological distress. The lockdown has led to many redundancies or a reduction in working hours for many Tipton residents, and as a result, some people are barely able to survive the daily battle of providing food and security for themselves and their families. Additionally, there has been a toll on their health and wellbeing – both physical and psychological- affecting relationships within families. Moreover, the impact on many children has been severe, unable to attend school or college, many have been unable to continue with their education, damaging their long-term life chances and opportunities.

Having gained valuable insight into the impact of the pandemic and subsequent lockdown measures, the BWA has clearly identified the challenges that lie ahead for the community at large and for the organisations assigned with the task of providing assistance and support, whether in terms of advice and guidance, job search, health and fitness, English language classes, computer access and tuition, or youth service provision. The BWA has always endeavoured to serve local people according to their needs and desires. However, the research indicates that in the aftermath of the pandemic, people's needs will be more complex and require a wider range of support services.

1 INTRODUCTION

The town of Tipton comprises the three wards of Tipton Green, Great Bridge and Princes End and is one of six towns that together encompass the borough of Sandwell. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 in early 2020, Tipton was already categorised as one of multiple deprivation and disadvantage – particularly regarding issues of health, employment and education.

The town has a population of just under 40,000 residents who are spread equally across the three wards. Of the total population, 81% are from a White British/White Other background with 19% being identified as being from a minority ethnic background. Of the minority ethnic community, those from a south Asian background form 11% of the town's population and are found in the highest concentration within the ward of Tipton Green (where the Bangladeshi Women's Association is based).

By contrast, the ward of Great Bridge, (the ward within which the Jubilee Park Community Centre is based), comprises a community that is from a predominantly White British/White Other background. In terms of health inequalities, data indicates that the town's residents suffer relatively high levels of poor health. This is particularly evident across the wards of Tipton Green and Great Bridge 8.6% of residents rating their general health as being 'bad/very bad' – placing both wards within the 7 worst wards in Sandwell as a whole.

For the Bangladeshi Women's Organisation (BWA) Limited dedicated to supporting the local people and families in Tipton, the impact and far-reaching implications of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced by the community, is a major concern. This study is a response to that concern and has sought to achieve a clear insight into the views and priorities of local people within the context of COVID-19 and the impact on their lives. The results of the study will assist BWA in evaluating and prioritising the multiple strands of support provided and inform the development of new approaches and interventions that are accurately focussed on responding to the radically changing environment.

Bangladeshi Women's Association: Encountered with multiple deprivation, the association was established in 1985 by a group of enthusiastic Bangladeshi women who wanted to meet the social and economic needs of their disadvantaged peers and families in Tipton. In doing so, BWA provides free access to advice, information and guidance whilst managing two community centres: Tipton Muslim Community Centre and the Jubilee Park Community Centre. Both centres offer good range of spaces including a community hall used for exercise classes, youth clubs, community kitchens, and well-equipped rooms for advice and information on welfare rights and various training on language skills, employability, health and well-being and youth and women's empowerment. On average 2500 residents (55% male and 45% female) benefit from services annually.

Space to Connect: BWA has been awarded Space to Connect grant from a partnership between Co-op's charity, the Co-op Foundation, and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to equip community activists, service beneficiaries and community volunteers with the right attributes, knowledge & skills to analyse local community development needs; design and implement community development programmes; secure sustainable funding and monitor and evaluate results so that the two community spaces in Tipton are better able to meet the needs of the local disadvantaged communities. Funding also builds on the Co-op Foundation's work to strengthen community spaces where people can connect & co-operate.

The National Lottery Community Fund: The National Lottery Community Fund is a non-departmental public body responsible for distributing funds raised by the National Lottery for "good causes". The Community Fund aims to support projects which help communities and people it considers most in need. The fund makes grants to projects working in health, education and the environment and the charitable sector. It funds projects in line with objectives set by the government but does not fund services which other parts of government have a statutory responsibility to deliver.

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A community survey was conducted during the months of October and November 2020. The individual households that participated in the survey numbered 113, comprising a total of 370 residents. After adjusting the sample size to avoid a risk of distortion within the data, the survey focused upon 105 households comprising 348 residents.

The survey explored the impact on the community relating to the COVID -19 pandemic and the government - led constraints and restrictions that have been implemented in an attempt to control the spread of the virus. We selected five themes with which to assess any changes that have occurred recently - over the course of the previous six months from April to September 2020 - and these were: General Health and Well-being, Children and their Well-being, Employment, Household Income and, Community Relations

The results of our survey and subsequent analysis indicate that the impact of the pandemic has affected several aspects of people's lives, leading to rising unemployment and job insecurity, declining household income and a corresponding fall in living standards and a deterioration in general health – both mental and physical – in both adults and children, all causing stress within households. However, our inquiries into the impact on inter-community relations revealed evidence of a resilient community that has avoided the potential for conflict and division that might be expected within a community living with the multiple and significant pressures that a pandemic creates.

The findings highlight that, by far, the most significant issues affecting the community relate to employment and household income which, in turn, have wider implications regarding mental and physical health for example. It is clear that levels of unemployment have increased quite significantly in the period and we believe that our findings give a clear indication that this is a trend that is set to continue, in the aftermath of the pandemic.

Aligned to this, our research provides an insight into changes in household income and the consequential impact on living standards as a result. Nearly half of all households told us that their standard of living had declined and only 1 in 7 saying that they are managing to 'live relatively comfortably'.

Within this environment of growing unemployment, job insecurity and declining income – compounded by the various levels of lockdown measures in place - it would not be unreasonable to expect to see a corresponding decline in mental health within the community, and this is what our research discovered. Over half of all households surveyed were found to be experiencing increased levels of depression and/or anxiety within adults. With regards to children, we found that just under half were considered by their parents/carers to be displaying behaviours that signal a decline in mental wellness.

Overall, our report depicts a community that is facing an interconnected range of challenges which, to a great extent, have been exacerbated (if not created), by the COVID-19 pandemic and the government - led interventions aimed at controlling it. Therefore, within the concluding sections of our report we have set out a framework for the BWA and their partners to build upon, in the development of potential interventions with which to provide targeted support for local people in what is a very challenging environment.

At the time of writing (January 2021) it is clear that this challenging environment will persist for some considerable time and, looking towards the longer term, it is clear that once the pandemic is eventually beaten, the impact it has had on local people will persist long beyond that time. Consequentially, we do not see our recommendations as in any way short term interventions but as a basis for service development and planning by BWA and their partners for the long-term.

3 RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

The Bangladeshi Women's Association (BWA) has been serving the community of Tipton for nearly 40 years' and, as a result, has amassed considerable knowledge and experience of the issues of local people, families and the diverse issues which affect their daily lives.

The objective of the BWA's decision to commission this original research was to achieve a wholly independent analysis of how the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting the lives of local people and to apply this learning in the development and delivery of targeted responses to the needs highlighted, by the research.

The BWA selected the John Paddock Consultancy (JPC) to undertake this research project. JPC is an independent consultancy specialising in the delivery of wide-ranging professional support within the third sector with a long track record in organisational and strategic development. The major focus of the research was placed upon the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on local people and the implications of the associated, Government-led control measures over the preceding months from April to September 2020.

The research was conducted between the months of October and November 2020 – a time of continued uncertainty with numerous constraints placed upon the lives of individuals, families and communities. In such an environment, great care was needed to ensure staff and local people were not exposed to any additional or unnecessary risk by their participation in the survey.

Therefore, it was decided to align the conducting of the survey with the core service delivery of the two delivery centres led by the Bangladeshi Women's Association (BWA). Through this approach, clients of both centres were invited to complete a questionnaire as and when they came to access the information advice and guidance services provided by the BWA.

The core of the survey was questionnaire-based and comprised 14 questions across five themes:

- **Health & Well-being** (respondent and household members)
- **Children & their well-being** (home-schooling, mental & physical health)
- **Employment** (changes in employment status)
- **Household Income** (the impact of any change in income)
- **Community Relations** (a measure of how communities have responded)

To enable an analysis of how the pandemic and associated control measures had impacted upon particular ethnic groups, demographic data was also collected and cross-referenced in order to highlight any notable variations within the wider communities.

Under normal circumstances we would have tested the subsequent results through a sequence of face-to-face focus groups. However, it was agreed by all parties that this was neither practical nor desirable in the circumstances. Instead, we elected to incorporate a series of open questions as a practical contingency to obtain a representative sample of qualitative input from respondents. This had the added benefit of respondents being able to discuss their thoughts and responses in a safe environment, supported by centre staff experienced and skilled in encouraging clients to explore and discuss their experiences and feelings independently and without influence.

4 SURVEY SAMPLE

Despite the constraints, we were successful in obtaining 113 completed questionnaires which, taken together, comprise a survey population of 370 household members. It is important to stress that the people who agreed to participate in the survey comprised those who, during the data collection phase of the research, arrived at the BWA premises to access one or more of the services provided and freely took the opportunity to complete the questionnaire during their visit.

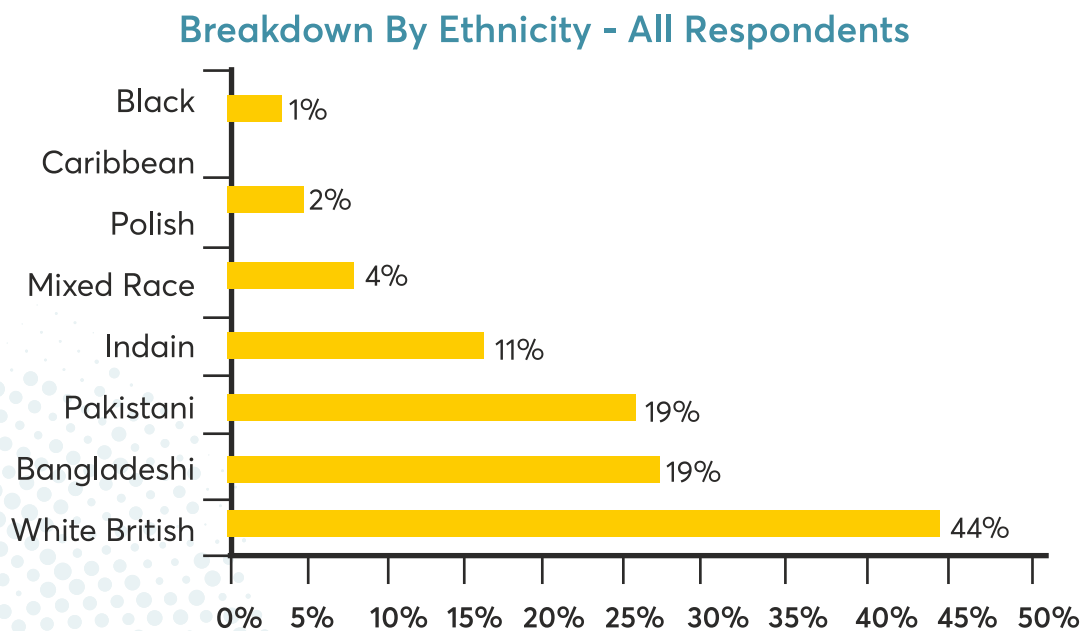
As such, all of the people who chose to participate did so freely without any undue encouragement or coercion. Consequentially, we are assured that all of the original data collected for this research has been sourced from a fully representative and unbiased sample of the community that the BWA supports in Tipton. In the following section we provide a summary of the key demographics of the 113 households and 370 household members engaged in the survey.

Ethnicity of respondents:

In terms of the ethnic background of participants, 54% were of Black or minority ethnic heritage and 46% were of White British/White Other heritage. Of the 54% Black and minority ethnic surveyed population, the most significant proportion comprised those of South Asian heritage at 49%. Of the South Asian community, people of Bangladeshi or Pakistani heritage formed 38% of respondents with 11% being of Indian background.

While this distribution is not necessarily in proportion with the demographic profile of Tipton as a whole it is (as demonstrated earlier), representative of the population of the area who typically access the services provided by the BWA.

The chart (below) gives the breakdown of respondent households by ethnicity



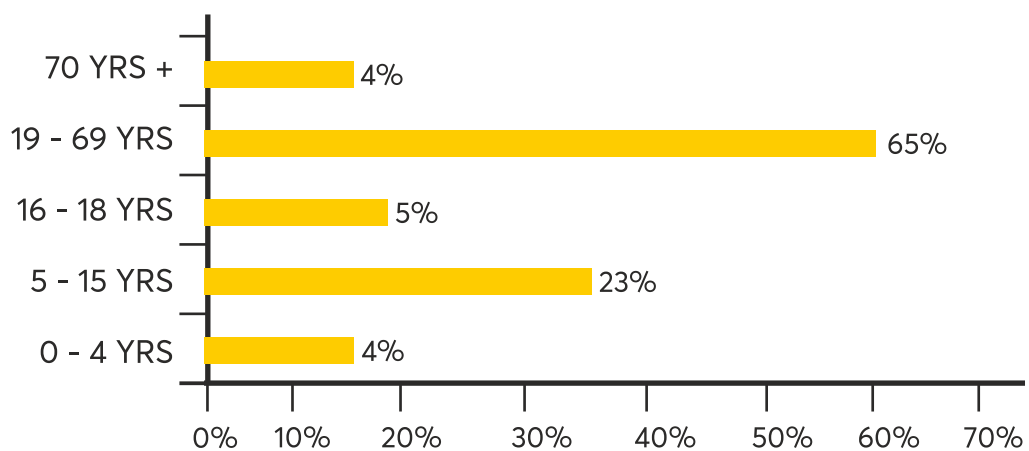
Gender:

The gender balance across all households participating in the survey was almost exactly 50/50 across all households surveyed regardless of ethnicity. This equal gender balance is consistent across all respondents -regardless of ethnicity -with only a relatively minor variation in those of Bangladeshi heritage, where the balance was found to be 60/40 female/male.

Age profile:

In terms of the spread of age groups across all households surveyed, 31% (totalling 117 individuals) comprised children and young people (<19 years) and 69% (totalling 253 individuals) were adults (>19 years). The chart (below) provides a full breakdown of the age profiles of the 113 households within the survey.

Age Profile of Household Members - Whole Community



Whilst it is expected that the 19 to 69 year age group is the greatest in terms of percentage (due to the span of years it covers) we are pleased that the survey includes a reasonable number of children and young people



As previously stated, the survey population comprises a mix of ethnicities in varying proportions and the table (below) gives a breakdown of this mix:

Ethnicity	Households (No.)	Households (%)	Households Members (No.)	Households Members (%)
White British	50	44.25%	131	35.41%
South Asian	55	48.67%	217	58.65%
Mixed Heritage	5	4.42%	12	3.24%
Polish	2	1.77%	8	2.17%
Black Caribbean	1	0.88%	2	0.54%
Totals	113	100%	370	100%

The BWA works diligently to ensure that all local residents, regardless of their ethnic or any other demographic status, are able to freely access the support and services they deliver.

It is true however, that the typical client base of two centres tends to be from within the South Asian and White British communities. This client base pattern is clearly reflected in the table (above) where a combined total of 93% of households and 94.1% of household members within the survey sample are from these two ethnic groups. As a consequence of the very low level of data attributed to the groups of Mixed Heritage, Polish and Black Caribbean, there is a concern that this will distort the analysis, comparisons and reporting of the wider findings. Despite efforts to mitigate this concern by combining this data in a category of 'Other', the results still distort the outcome to an unsatisfactory degree.

Reluctantly therefore, we have excluded the data relating to these three ethnic categories (comprising 8 households) and have forwarded the data to the BWA for them to discuss the issues raised with individual clients and explore possible interventions.

The following table provides a breakdown of the remaining, 105 No. households that are included in this research project:

Ethnicity	Households (No.)	Households (%)	Households Members (No.)	Households Members (%)
White British	50	47.6%	131	37.6%
Asian	55	52.4	217	62.4%
Totals	105	100%	348	100%

While the main body of this research focusses on the White British and the Asian communities as a whole, it is useful to understand the composition of the 55 respondents who self-identified as being of Asian origin:

Ethnicity	Households (No.)	Households (%)	Households Members (No.)	Households Members (%)
Indian	12	21.8%	44	20.2%
Pakistani	21	38.2%	91	42.0%
Bangladeshi	22	40.0%	82	37.6%
Totals	55	100%	217	100%

5 Research Findings by Theme

5.1. Health & Wellbeing

Introduction

In an area where the standard of general health and mental health is a particular concern, we sought to explore the extent to which respondents felt their health and that of household members had changed in the preceding six months.

The indicators of happiness, depression and stress were used as the measures of mental health which, while being broad and potentially subjective in some cases, do provide a measurable indication of change.

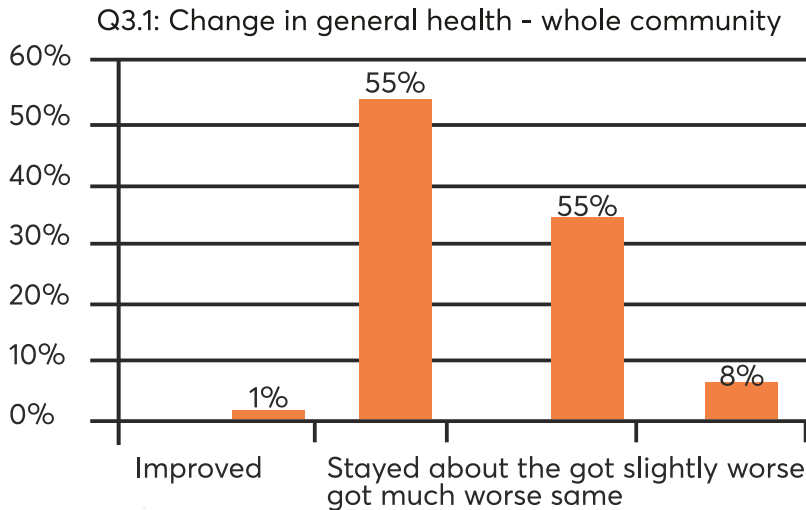
Key Findings

General Health

Across the total survey sample, when asked whether they felt their general health had changed during the preceding six months, 56% of all respondents reported 'no real change'. This is not to say that these individuals considered themselves to be in good health but that they did not feel that their general health had not changed.

Importantly, 44% stated that their general health had 'got slightly' or 'much worse' in the period.

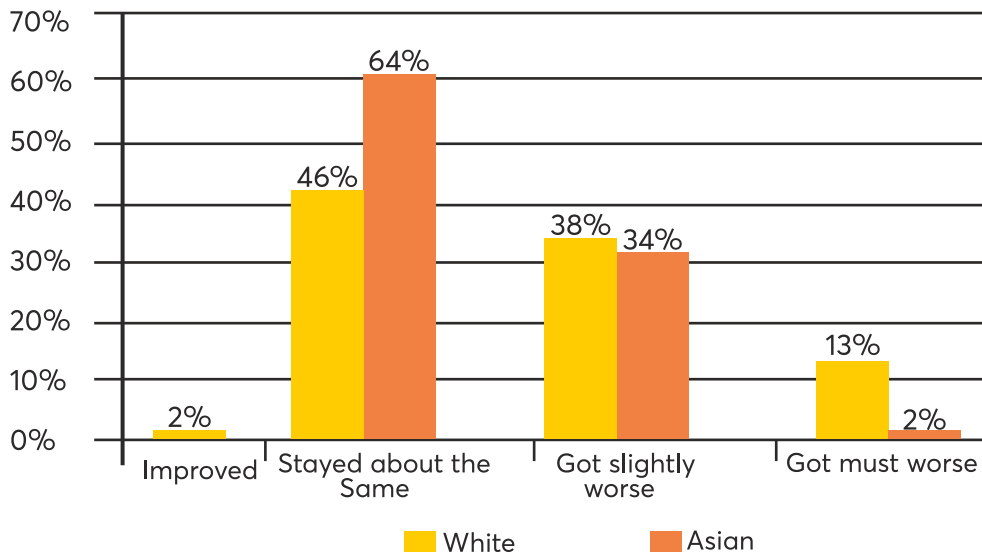
Q3.1 During the past 6 months, do you feel that your general health has:



When we look at how this relates to the two primary communities mentioned, we can see that with regard to this factor, the White British community fared 'slightly worse' than that of the wider Asian community, as we can see in the chart (Q3.2 below), which illustrates the reported change in general health by ethnicity, with 64% of the Asian community reporting 'no real change' and 36% stating that they felt that their health had deteriorated in the preceding six months.

In comparison, 48% of their White British neighbours reported 'no real change' but over half (51%) said that they felt that their health had 'got slightly' or 'much worse'.

Q3.1: Change In General Health - By Ethnicity

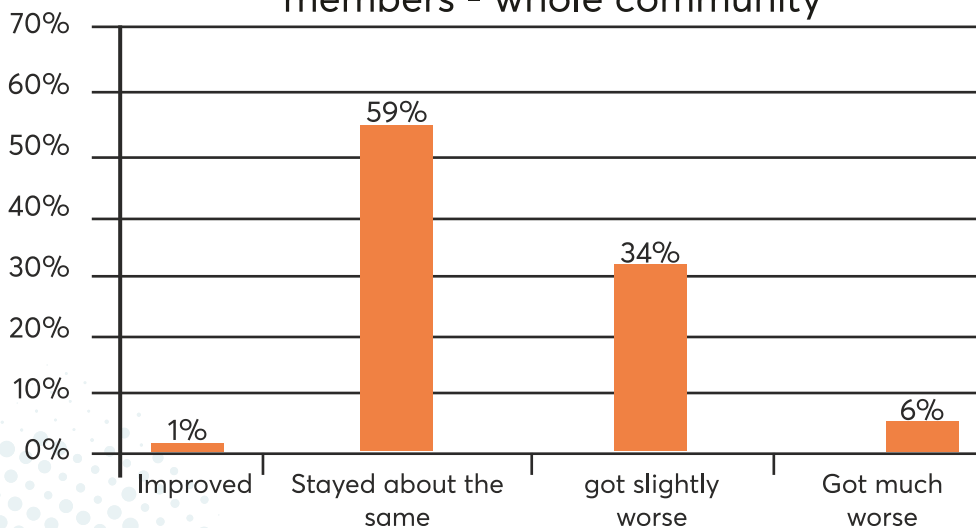


While the White British community appear to have fared less well in this regard than their Asian neighbours, the findings for both groups are clearly a concern.

We then asked the respondent the same question but relating to their family/others who live with them within the household. 40% stated that the general health of others in the home had 'got slightly' or 'much worse' in the preceding six months:

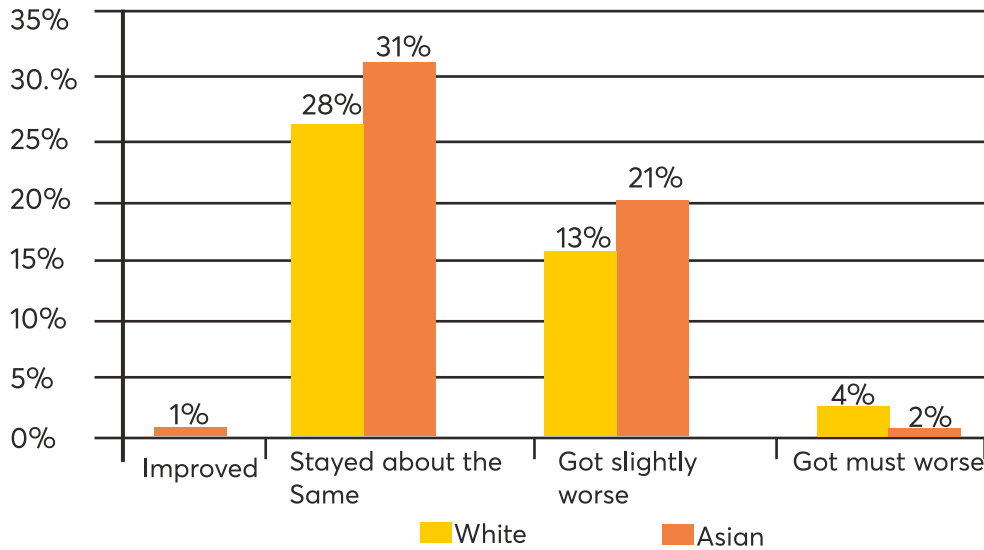
Q3.2 During the past 6 months, do you feel that the general health of other members of your household has:

Q3.1: Changes in general health of household members - whole community



When we look at how this relates to the two primary communities, we can see that when considering the general health of others within the household, it is the Asian community that appears to have fared 'slightly worse' than their White British neighbours where the general health within Asian households has deteriorated in 23% of cases and in 17% of White British households (Q3.2 below):

Q3.2: Changes in general health of household members - by ethnicity



In summary, the survey findings indicate that a significant number of people across both communities have experienced a decline in the standard of their general health over the preceding six months with 44% of respondents informing us that their general health has declined and 40% in respect of other family members within the household.

Mental Health:

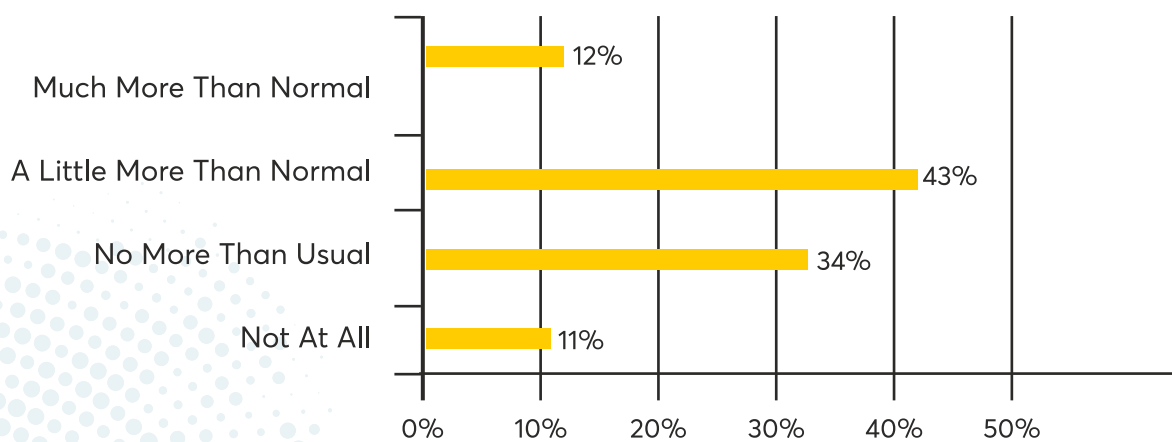
Having explored the issue of general health, we then evaluated the indicators of mental health. Again, within the survey, we asked people about changes in their own mental health and that of their household as a whole.

First, let us look at the responses from the community as a whole.

Q3.3 During the past 6 months, have you been feeling unhappy or depressed?

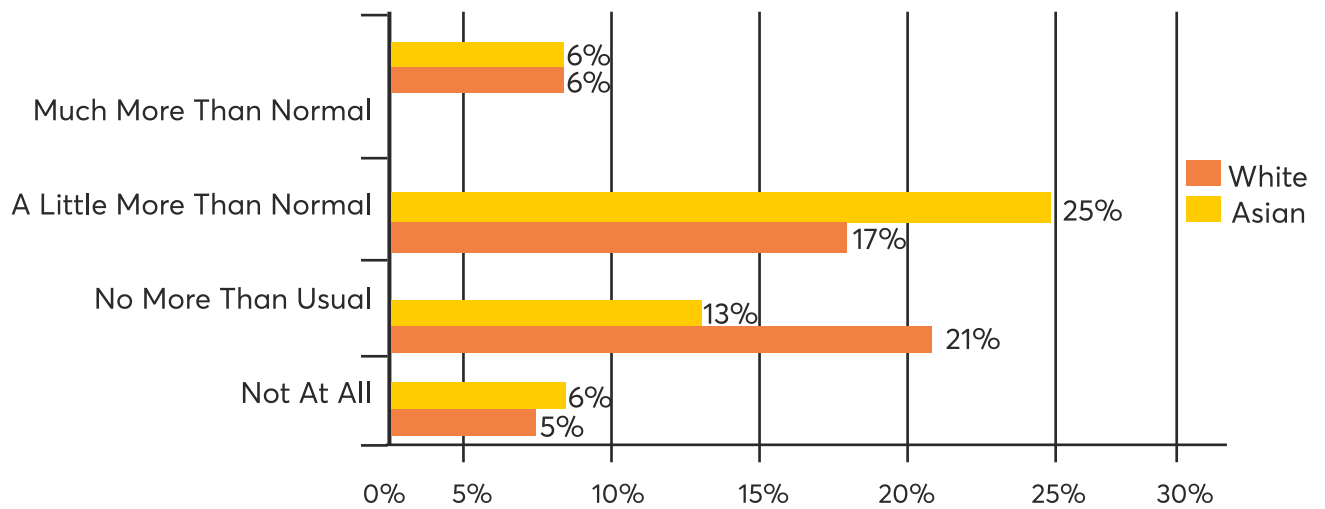
Q3.2 During the past 6 months, do you feel that the general health of other members of your household has:

Q3.3 Change in mental wellness - whole community



Over half (55%) of respondents stated that they have 'been feeling unhappy or depressed' a 'little or much more than normal.' When we examine the effects on the two communities individually (below), we can see that it is the Asian community who appear to have been affected slightly more by an increase in unhappiness and depression:

Q3.3 Change in mental wellness - by ethnicity

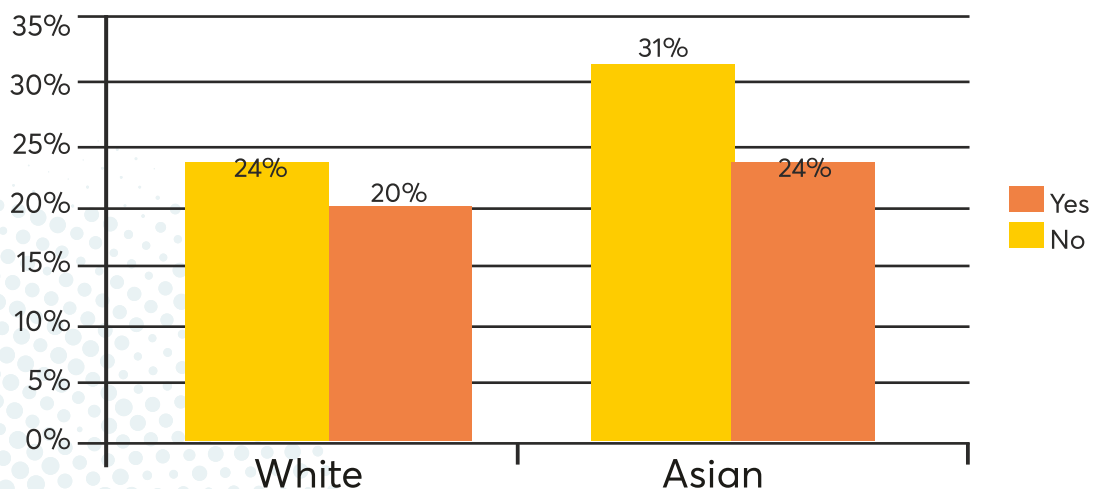


As the chart (above) illustrates, 31% of respondents of Asian origin reported that they were 'a little' or 'much more unhappy and/or depressed than normal' over the preceding six months compared to 23% across the White British community – 54% overall. Another consideration is the low percentage of people (just 6% Asian & 5% White British) who stated they had not had any feelings of unhappiness or depression – suggesting that approximately 90% of the community do. However, if we take the findings relating to 'no more than usual' it indicates that the normal state of mind for a third of the community is one of unhappiness and/or depression to some extent.

Nevertheless, and irrespective of ethnicity, the findings present a concerning pattern of decline in mental wellness of the individual over recent months. Undoubtedly, COVID-19 and the response of the government is a contributing factor here and we can only speculate as to how far into the future this situation will continue or indeed worsen. As we move on now to exploring how this is impacting upon the household as a whole, the level of concern for other household members reported by respondents gives an indication that the potential decline in mental wellness is quite extensive in both communities.

Q3.4 During the past 6 months. Have you been concerned about anyone else in your household being depressed?

Q3.4: Change in levels of depression within household - by ethnicity

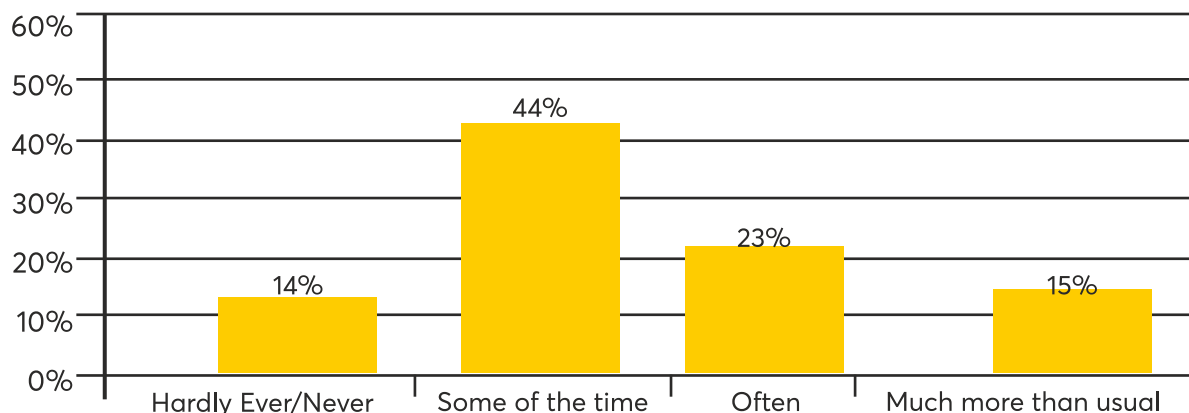


The chart (Q3.4 above), illustrates that 55% of respondents expressed concern regarding one or more of their household members being depressed – slightly less than that of the respondent themselves. We then went on to exploring any changes in the levels of stress and anxiety as a further indicator of mental wellness.

We then went on to exploring changes in the levels of stress and anxiety as a further indicator of mental wellness.

Q3.5 During the past 6 months, have you felt more stressed or anxious than usual?

Q3.5: Changes in levels of stress or anxiety of respondent - whole community

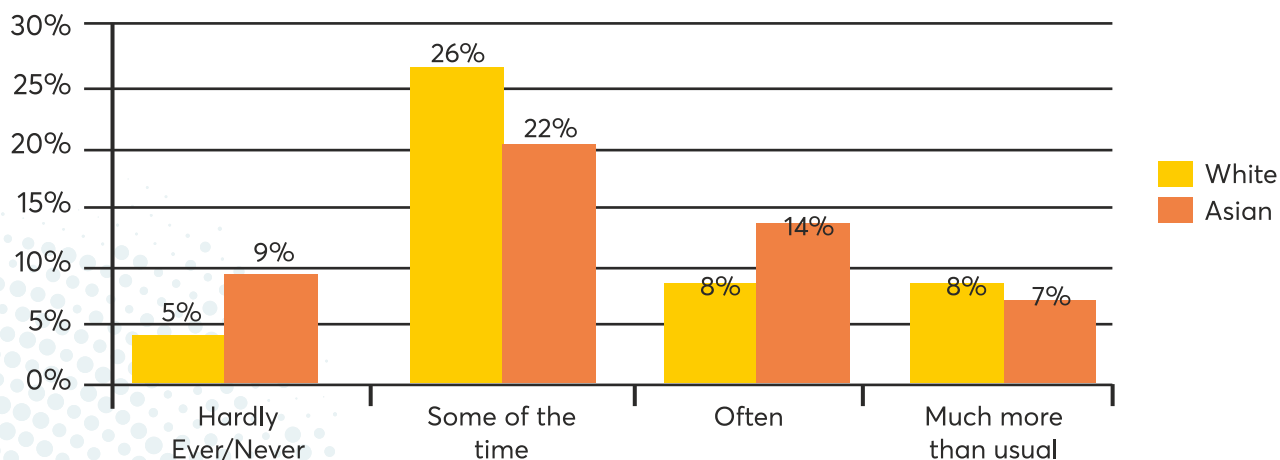


This chart (Q3.5) illustrates the responses from the entire community sample. We can see that 38% of respondents felt that the level of stress and/or anxiety has increased 'often' or 'much more than usual' over the period. However, only 14% reported little or no change whilst 48% said they had increased feelings of stress and anxiety at least 'some of the time'.

While the focus is upon the 38% of people who have experienced regular and or more frequent feelings of anxiety and stress, it is important that we do not overlook the 48% who have had similar feelings at least 'some of the time'

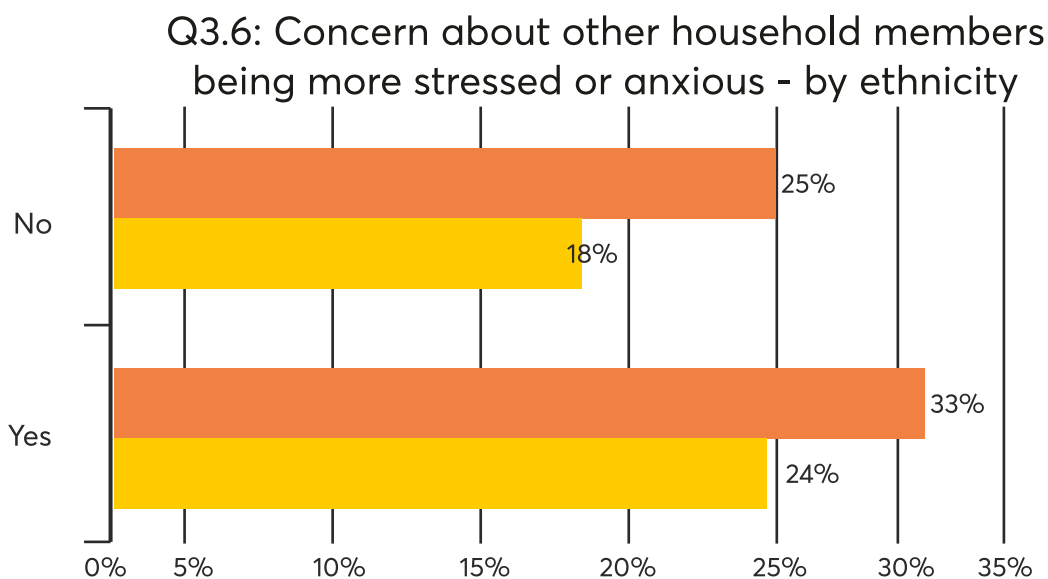
When we look at how this affects the individual communities, (Q3.5b below), it appears that the Asian community have been affected more than their White British neighbours, i.e., 22% of Asian people having increased levels of stress and anxiety 'often/much more than usual' compared to 16% within the white community:

Q3.5b Changes in levels of stress or anxiety Respondent - by ethnicity



In exploring the incidence of increased stress and/or anxiety experienced by others within the household, respondents were asked:

Q3.6 During the past 6 months, have you been concerned about anyone else in your household being more stressed or anxious?



The chart Q3.6 (above) indicates that the prevalence of stress and anxiety within other household members is a clear concern of respondents where, across both communities, such concern was expressed in 57% of cases.

However, it should be noted that a number of respondents from the White British community chose not to answer this question by a factor of 9. Taking this into account, it is estimated that this would have the effect of narrowing the difference between the two communities.

Nevertheless, it can be assumed that two thirds of people living in the 105 households included in the survey have experienced/are experiencing raised levels of stress and anxiety to a point that is of concern to the respondent. At two thirds, this equates to approximately 116 individuals.

Summary:

In this section we have explored changes in the general well-being and mental health within the community as a whole and by ethnicity. We acknowledge however, that the majority of the 55% respondents stated an increase in stress and anxiety that was a 'little more than usual' and it could be argued that this is no great surprise given the current climate. However, it is an indicator of both a general deterioration of mental health across the community and of the potential fragility of mental health going forward. As in the case of general health where a comparable statistic was reported (above), the apparent increase in the level of unhappiness and depression is noteworthy.

Additional comments of respondents

Through the more qualitative, free response section within the Health and Well-being category, we found that -by far -the most common themes where respondents expressed heightened needs and wants were:

- Information, advice and guidance
- Access to general health and fitness support and activities
- Support with mental health relating to stress, anxiety and loneliness

Information advice and guidance

Responses under this category focussed predominantly on the need for support and guidance on family finance (including benefits advice) and employment support. In many cases, respondents cited changes in their circumstances since the emergence of COVID-19.

Below is a selection of free responses typical of those received:

- I had to give up my job because of childcare – family & friends would not take on responsibility because of COVID and I couldn't afford to pay for childcare. My English isn't good, and I need help with claiming benefits and my finances generally (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- I lost my part-time job, and I don't have enough money for food (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- I'm self-employed so not able to go to work and provide for my family – I'm grateful for (the money from the Government's) self-employed income scheme but it's not enough and I need help. (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- My housing conditions are really bad, I need help to improve this.
- A further 14 comments related to the need for IAG services

Access to general health and fitness support and activities

A large proportion of responses under this category revealed a common theme with local people expressing their hope that the centres reinstate the currently suspended health and fitness classes as soon as it is safe and permissible, to do so.

- Once it is safe, we need more exercise classes for all ages – especially the elderly (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- Advice and support with staying healthy – doing exercise (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- More health classes and walks (once they're allowed) (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- I'd like more exercise and fitness classes (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- Free health clubs and gym passes so I can improve my health (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- We need healthy living type classes for all age groups (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- A further 13 comments related to the need for support with physical health, exercise and dietary issues.

Support with mental health relating to stress, anxiety and loneliness:

Of the three most featured themes, this was found to indicate a particular and concerning trend. Perhaps unsurprisingly, residents stated that issues of uncertain employment, reduced income, children and adults staying at home, caring responsibilities, isolation and loneliness etc, had contributed to their stress, anxiety and depression.



- It has been very stressful not knowing what the future holds and I became extremely anxious at the start of lockdown (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- My health is generally not good, and I felt worse during lockdown in particular (Resident of Indian heritage)
- I'm lonely and depressed (Resident of mixed heritage)
- I get very depressed being alone in the house all day (Resident of mixed heritage)
- I'm concerned about my wife – she gets upset and becomes angry over little things (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- The quality of my house is poor, and it gets me down – I need help with home improvements (Resident of Indian heritage)
- It was stressful having all 5 children at home during lockdown. Being a single parent, it was very hard. The children got bored, and I wasn't able to do any activities with them as I was too busy with baby and housework (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- I live with my elderly parents and these are very worrying & uncertain times. I have lost an Aunt to COVID and my 75Yr old parents and I am obviously very scared (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- My husband has been (seriously ill) and as he can't exercise or meet others, he is lonely and depressed. He has lots of aches and pains, has diabetes and high blood pressure (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- Me and my wife have had to care for my mother whose dementia has got worse since lockdown. We don't have a break from caring and cannot go out or visit family and friends
- A further 11 comments related to mental health issue

5.2. Children & Their Wellbeing

Introduction

In this section we look at how the COVID -19 pandemic has impacted upon the children living in the households surveyed. Ordinarily of course, we would have reached out to engage directly with children to hear their views, but this was simply not advisable in the current environment. However, by exploring the impact on children through the eyes of parents or other close family members, we have also gained an insight into the concerns of the adult regarding the well-being of their child/children.

Of the households surveyed, 55 (52%) reported that they had children of school age (<16yrs) living at home and the survey population of school/college age children (<18yrs) is 114 – comprising 41 White British and 70 Asian children and young people.

Key findings

We selected six statements and asked each respondent to indicate ('tick') all that they felt applied to their children. The statements were designed to gain an insight into the impact upon learning, physical health and mental well-being.



This table shows the spread of responses to the issues raised:	WHITE		ASIAN		TOTALS
	NO.	%	NO.	%	%
No-one in the household able to help with home schooling	18	28%	19	19%	22%
One or more children appearing lonely, anxious and/or depressed	8	12.5%	9	9%	10%
One or more children being a little more disruptive, aggressive/ or confrontational than normal	8	12.5%	8	8%	10%
Fewer opportunities for children to exercise	10	15%	23	23%	20%
Fewer opportunities for children to socialise with other children	16	25%	25	25%	25%
One or more children putting-on more weight than usual	5	8%	17	17%	13%

When we look to analyse the data in this table, we need to take in to account the fact that the respondents were asked to consider the relevance of these six issues within the context of the preceding six months, i.e., July – November 2020.

As this time frame largely avoids the period when schools were closed due to lock-down and includes the summer holiday and subsequent return to school on September 2, 2020, the responses must largely be seen in the context of the on-going, government -led, constraints and restrictions.

We feel that this is an important distinction because it means that the responses could indicate a sustained set of circumstances that affect children and young people rather than the isolated impact of lock-down early on in the government’s response to the pandemic.

In order to focus upon the key issues, we have highlighted (in red), the issues that attracted 20% or more responses from the sample population.

Taking these key issues in priority order:

Fewer opportunities for children to socialise with other children.

This was seen as a concern by both communities in equal measure (25%). The closure of community venues which would ordinarily have provided youth-based activities in the period is likely to be a significant contributor to this issue. However, we suspect that this does not provide a complete picture. Schooling clearly plays a significant role in socialisation for children and young people, but as stated above, schools have been open for at least half of the six -month period to which the responses apply.

Our conclusion is that there is a demand for new opportunities for children to socialise with other children beyond that provided by local centres and schools, i.e., regardless of the current, on-going restrictions.

No one in the household being able to help with home-schooling.

During the time when schools were closed it was widely reported that, nationally, 1 in 5 children did no schoolwork at home and the many of the 4 out of 5 who did, did not do this to expected levels with only 17% studying more than 4 hours a day (UCE Institute of Education June 2020). There is no government policy regarding the amount of homework that should be given to pupils, but it is widely accepted that homework is an integral part of learning not least in helping children to develop wider skills, e.g., independent study, self-responsibility, perseverance etc.

With this in mind, it is a concern that at least a fifth of respondents felt unable or ill-equipped to help their child/children with schoolwork at home. This featured in 22% of responses overall and in 28% responses by White British households and 19% of Asian households.

In a number of comments added by Asian respondents, the lack of confidence in the English language of parents/carers was cited as a reason for this and, to some extent this might have been expected. Although a generalisation, Asian families typically place great importance on the education of their children and will endeavour to find support with this from within their extended families and community if they themselves feel ill-equipped.

It appears to be the white British households who struggle most in terms of supporting their children with schoolwork at home and it might be that they may have fewer opportunities to access the support they need from within their wider family or community

The data suggests that some form of intervention to support children with independent study/homework and to develop capacity within parents to support their children, would be beneficial. Whether this should be LEA -led or delivered through community venues (or a partnership of the two), is something to be considered.

Fewer opportunities for children to exercise.

Across the community as a whole, 1 in 5 respondents raised this as a concern but particularly so within the Asian community, at 23%, compared to the White British community at 15%.

Again, the sustained closure of local centres and facilities are likely to be a major contributing factor on this issue. Given that there are restrictions regarding public open spaces, streets and gardens then the data suggests parents/carers of children have relied upon local centres (public and/or community- based centres) to provide the opportunities for child focussed play and exercise.

One or more child appearing a little lonely, anxious or depressed / being more disruptive, aggressive or confrontational than usual.

We have combined these two factors as they both relate to the mental welfare of children.

Whilst neither featured significantly in the data when looked at separately, when combined together they become potentially important indicators of a decline in the mental wellness of children and young people across the community.

When taken together 42% of responses show a concern across both communities regarding the presentation of loneliness, anxiety, depression and, disruptive and aggressive behaviours among children and young people.

Even when taking into account the distortion which can occur when combining statistical percentages in this way, the results do give an apparently clear indication that the mental wellness of children and young people is a real concern.

Of course, there may well be a correlation between the reduced opportunities for children to socialise and exercise (as above) and their mental wellness. There may also be a correlation here with the pressures placed upon parents and the wider family as a result of the pandemic and the restrictions implemented by the government and the impact these have had on family income.

Additional comments of respondents

Through the more qualitative, free response section under the Children and their Well-being theme we found that by far the most common themes that respondents expressed heightened needs and wants were:

- Support on helping children with their education outside of school
- Access to youth focussed activities around physical & mental health and social development

Parents/carers needing help to support their children's education outside of school:

Many of the comments made related to the inability of parents to help their children with schoolwork some of which relate to the lack of access to a computer and largely to difficulties with language and/or their own perceived lack of education.

- We have no computer to help my child with home-schooling (Resident of Indian heritage)
- Not able to understand schoolwork due to difficulties with English language (Resident of Indian heritage)
- (would like) support group/s available for families (Resident of Indian heritage)
- Information about what help is available to me as a parent (Resident of Indian heritage)
- Due to (my) poor education (I'm) not able to assist our children with home-schooling. (Resident of Indian heritage)
- (would like) more support from schools and equipment (Resident of Indian heritage)
- Always try and keep schools open (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- More homework classes and exercise classes for young people (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- Need access to a tutor (Resident of Mixed heritage)
- Homework clubs would be great (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- More homework classes once it's safe and allowed (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- Youth clubs/activity sessions (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- The children have had no home schooling as we don't have the confidence to help – if our English was better and we knew more then we could help (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- I need education support for my child with learning difficulties (Resident of White British heritage)
- I don't have a computer at home (Resident of White British heritage)
- I don't have the skills or learning materials to help my child at home (Resident of White British heritage)
- I'd like access to computer equipment for school learning (Resident of White British heritage)
- I can't cope with online learning resources for my child as I have learning difficulties (Resident of White British heritage)
- It's hard to help my child with home schooling as I don't have a computer at home
- Opportunities for family learning (Resident of White British heritage)
- I need support with online teaching as one of my kids has learning difficulties (Resident of White British heritage)
- I need help with online learning for my child (Resident of White British heritage) (several)
- I only have my phone to access learning resources for my child. It's difficult as he has learning difficulties and I am struggling (Resident of White British heritage)
- Need support with home schooling (Resident of White British heritage)

Parents/carers wanting access to youth focussed activities around physical & mental health and social development:

- Due to being at home all day, my child is constantly eating and becoming overweight (Resident of White British heritage)
- My kid needs more opportunities for outdoor activities (Resident of White British heritage)
- I need opportunities to enable me to let my little one to socialise as she's becoming lonely (Resident of White British heritage)
- Having a family support advisor to guide us with helping our children (Resident of Indian heritage)
- My sister was supposed to start college but is not bothered anymore – she sits alone in her bedroom making Tik Tok videos! (Resident of Indian heritage)
- My children have found it difficult being at home and spent a lot of time on their phones. It would have helped if there was support for lone parents like myself, which helped out with childcare while I went to work. I have had to give up my job (as a result of having no childcare). Now the kids are back at school I will need to find another job (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- The children got very bored (during lockdown) and had nothing to do. They had mood-swings and got very aggressive to their siblings. They ate too much junk-food and had no routine. The Council/schools should offer free childcare for single parents – maybe 'stay and play'? Local community centres should offer activities for children aged 0 – 13yrs (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- My 9yr old became very anti-social – played online games and ate junk food. He has gained a lot of weight. He was not at all motivated to play in the garden on his bike or with a ball. We became very concerned about our son while he was off school. (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- Community sports days for kids to get them active again in a fun way (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- Things like community cultural days/events so kids can mix with others and explore different cultures/religions (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- Exercise classes and sports days for teenagers (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- Free play schemes so children can interact – for parents who cannot afford to pay (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- My son is always in his bedroom, constantly on his phone, does not come down for his dinner but wants it in his room (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- We stocked-up with junk food before lockdown as we were worried about supermarkets running out. Our children have had a diet of junk for months and are unfit (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- A further 12 comments relating to youth focussed activities.

5.3. Employment

Introduction

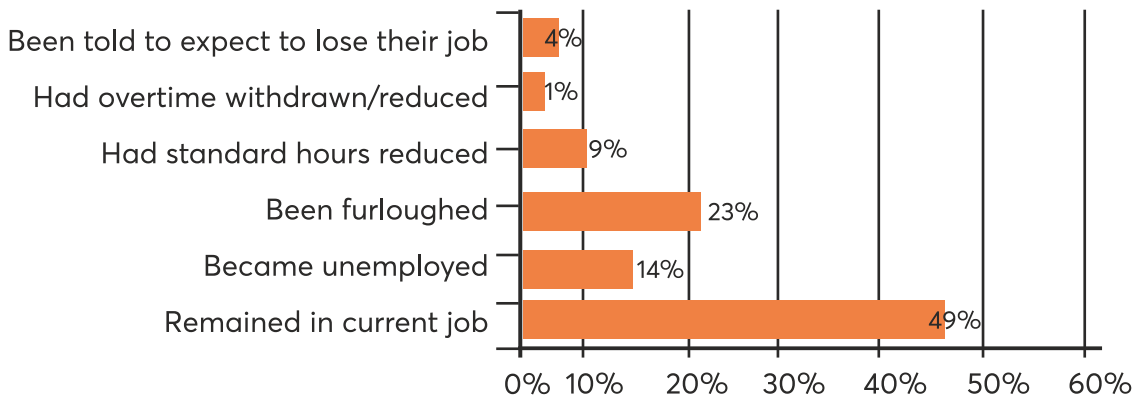
The rationale behind this theme was to gauge the impact that the pandemic and the associated restrictions put in place by government has had upon employment in the area. Changes in employment status, particularly for the principal wage earner can have a significant impact upon the life and well-being of the individual and their families. Consequentially, we felt it important to capture data on how employment patterns may have changed in the preceding six months with potential multiple implications upon local families that local centres and agencies may need to respond to.

Key findings

Of the 113 households included within the survey, 32 (28%) were not supported by earned income or were in retirement and 81 (72%) had at least one wage earner. We asked respondents to 'tick' just one answer to the following question:

Q5.0 During the past six months has the main wage earner in your household:

Q5.0: Changes in employment status - whole community



Our survey indicates that of the respondents who were in employment in the preceding six or more months ago, 49% have remained in their current job with no reduction in pay.

However, the data indicates that there have been changes in employment status for the other 51% of respondents, with 14% becoming unemployed, 10% having had overtime or standard working hours reduced and 4% having been told to expect redundancy. The remaining 23% had been furloughed i.e., technically still in employment but not working (awaiting the resumption of their employment role and wages supported by government).

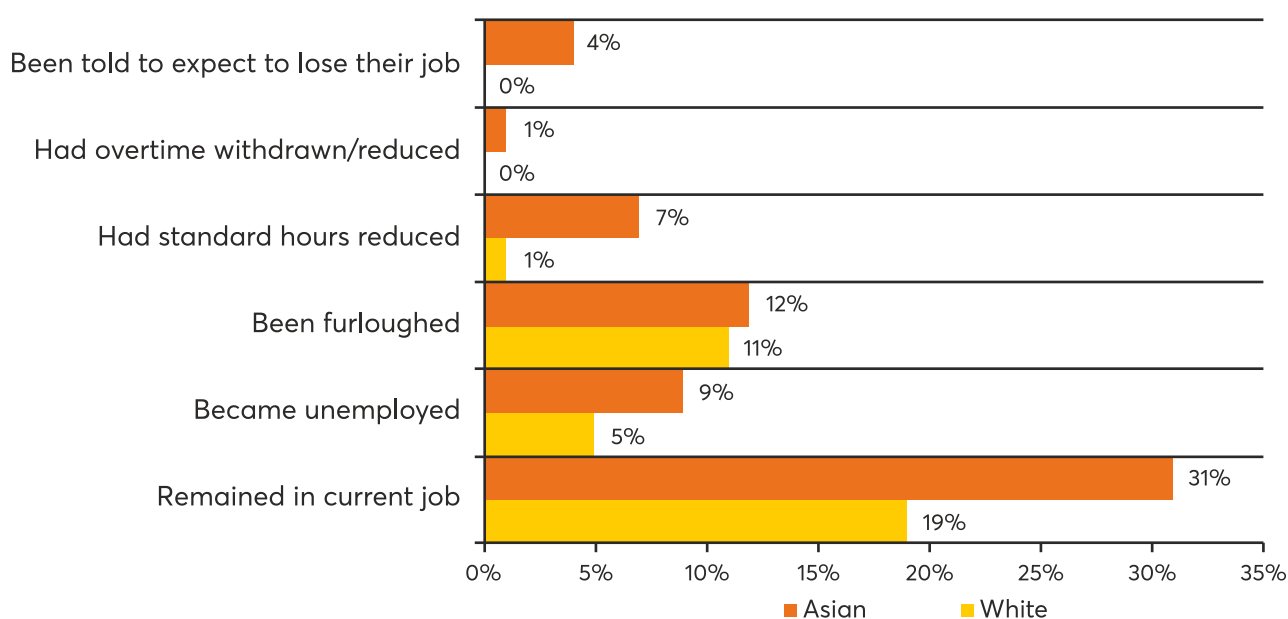
If those on furlough actually return to work, then we can assume that the employed total is 72%. Similarly, we can assume that the unemployment percentage is likely to increase to 18% if we include those respondents who have already indicated that they have been told that they will lose their jobs. Moreover, levels of unemployment are likely to rise significantly if COVID-19 and the on-going environment of lockdown constraints continues to impact on employees.



In the analysis reported by HMRC in October 2020, it shows that 90% of workers who 'came off' furlough by 31 July 2020 returned to their pre-Covid employers. However, this figure is based on data from August 2020 and potentially hides the worst of the job losses that have occurred since. Subsequent reductions in the level of financial support from the government in September and October, (the net effect of which means employers now have to fund 30% of employment costs of furloughed workers), could see an increase in job losses within those sectors affected most by lock-down measures, E.g., catering and hospitality, other food services, administration and support services.

When we look at how changes in employment status have impacted the White British and Asian communities separately, it is clear that the Asian community has been affected the most in all factors apart from job retention where 31% stated that they had remained in their current job compared to the white working population at 19%.

Q5.0: Changes in employment status by ethnic background



Within the limits of this research, we can only speculate as to the reasons why the Asian community were affected most by changes in their employment status. If, as in many other inner-city areas, a higher percentage of Asian people are employed in the hospitality and service industry and occupations such as taxi driving, then this may explain the differentiation as these trades have been significantly and disproportionately disadvantaged by lockdown measures and related restrictions.

Finally, our survey provides an indication that even those who have continued in employment may face an increasing trend of pay reduction going forward. For example, of those respondents in employment and not on furlough, 9% reported that the main wage earner had seen a reduction in earning potential through either having their working hours or over-time opportunities reduced.



5.4. Household Income

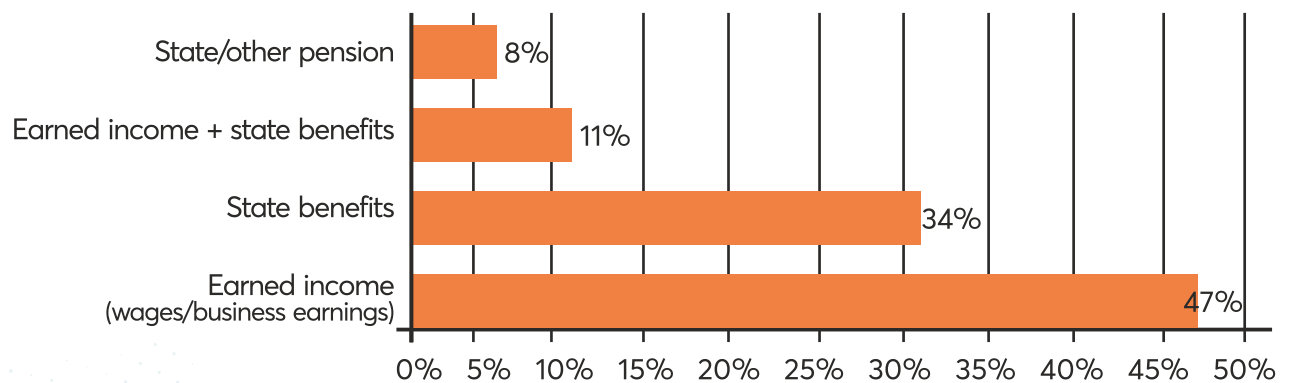
Introduction

Within this section we look at the primary sources of household income of the households included in the survey. Although we do not have a baseline against which we can measure changes in the source of primary income over the period, in our subsequent lines of inquiry (Q5.2 & Q5.3), we were able to gain an insight into how the standard of living has changed over recent months.

Key Findings

Q5.1 Do you mind telling us what the main source of income is within your household

Main sources of household income - whole community

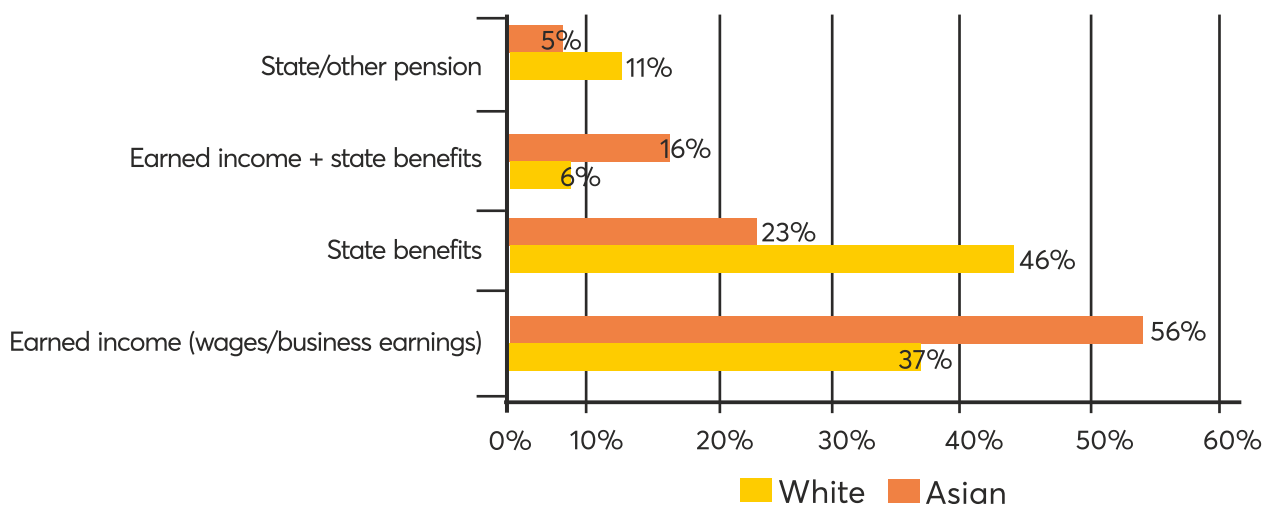


Almost half (47%) of respondents said their main source of income came from employment/self-employment which is in line with the percentage of workers who stated that they had retained their job despite Covid-19 and associated restrictions (Q5.0 above).

In total, 45% of respondents relied wholly or partly on state benefits as their main source of household income with 11% working people stating that they were in receipt of income support with the remaining (34%) respondents being wholly benefit-dependent. A small percentage (8%) stated that their main source of income was derived from a state and/or private pension.

The following graph indicates the dispersal of household income sources across the two communities:

Q5.1: Main sources of household income - by ethnic background



As we can see from the chart (Q5.1 above), 56% of the Asian community derive their main income from employment and this broadly correlates to the 31% who said that they have retained their employment, unchanged, in the period.

Similarly, it is the White British community who tend to be more dependent upon state benefits (46%) than that of Asian families (23%).

When we look at those respondents who rely on income support (earned income plus state benefits) it is Asian households which account for nearly two thirds (16%) of cases and White British households, one third (6%).

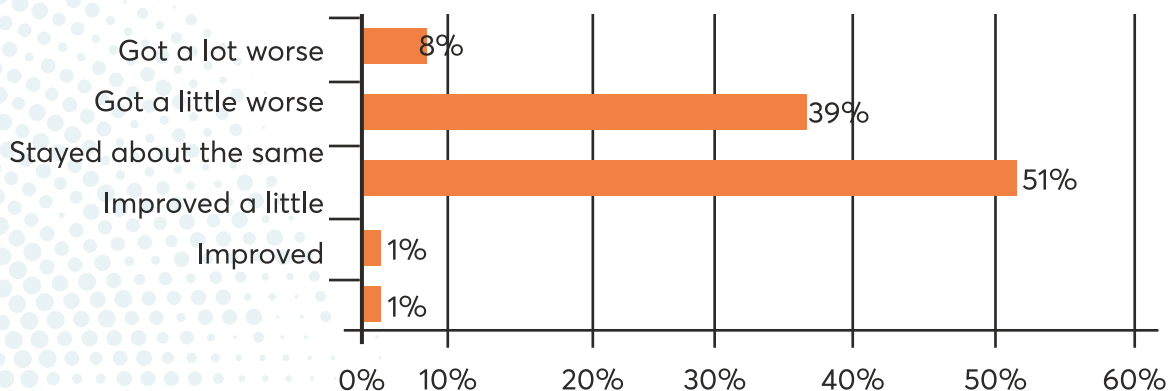
This differentiation may be a reflection of a wide range of factors (family size, under or unpredictable employment etc.) or, indeed, the national pay gap between Asian workers and their White British counterparts which was reported in the ONS study, 'Ethnicity pay gaps 2019' calculated to be on average, a gap of 15% between these communities.

Having gained a better understanding of how households derive their main source of family income we wanted to explore people's perception of how they felt their general standard of living had changed over the period.

Our first table looks at the results across the community as a whole (Q5.2 below).

Q5.2: Thinking about any changes in your general standard of living over the past six months, do you feel that it has:

Q5.2: Change in general standard of living - whole community



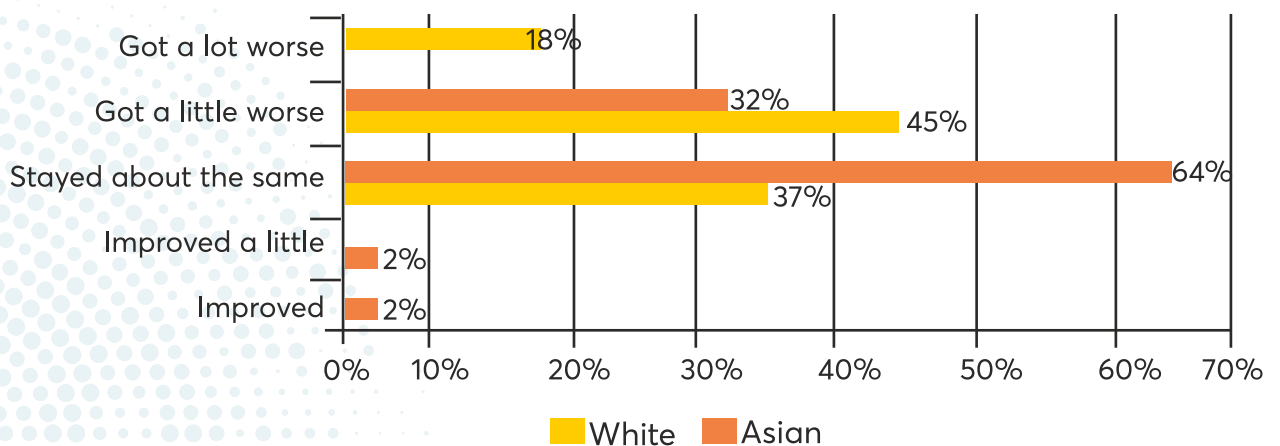


From what respondents have told us their perception of any change in their general standard of living, 51% had not noticed a change and a further 2% felt that it had 'improved a little' or 'more'.

The balance lies with the 39% of respondents who felt that their standard of living had 'got a little worse' and 8% a 'lot worse'. We know from the data presented in Q4.1 that 33% of the whole survey are furloughed or are working less hours or have lost overtime and it seems reasonable to assume that this is likely to be behind the 39% figure. Such a correlation is also evident when looking at the 51% of respondents who felt that their standard of living had not changed and the 50% who reported that the main wage earner had remained in employment with no stated change in pay.

When we look at the perception of change in the general standard of living by ethnicity (chart Q5.2 below), it is the White British community who present the greater reduction in their standard of living with 63% of White British respondents stating that it 'has got a little worse' (45%) or 'much worse' (18%). This is in contrast to their Asian neighbours where 32% respondents stated that their standard of living had 'got a little worse' with none stating a 'lot worse'. Again, comparing the slight or greater fall in living standards with the findings in Q4.1 – changes in employment status where the Asian community have been more successful in retaining their employment with no reported loss of income, this possibly explains the difference in perceived changes across the two communities.

Q5.2 Change in general standard of living - by ethnicity



Our conclusion is that there is a direct and unsurprising link between changes in employment status and perceived changes in the general standard of living across both communities.

What it tells us is that the need and/or demand for information advice and guidance services around benefits advice and household money management is very likely to be considerable now and in the near future.

While it is highly useful to gain an understanding of changes in the standard of living within Tipton households, it is important to explore how this impacts on households and to highlight the extent to which local families are struggling to manage on a reduced income.

Q5.3: Thinking about the impact of any changes in your total household income over the past six months do you feel that:

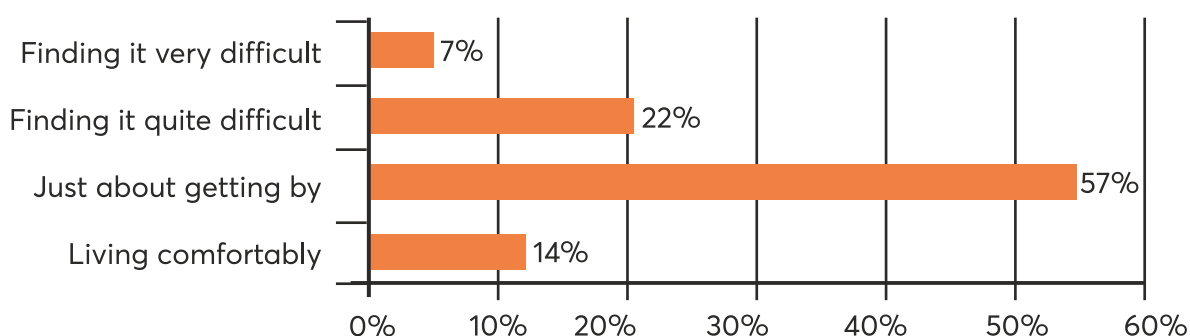
In the following chart (Q5.3 below) we can see that just 14% of households (all White British households), consider themselves as 'living comfortably'. We used the category of 'living comfortably' as a status depicting a household where there were no real or prevailing concerns about managing financially – though not in itself, suggesting affluence.

Notwithstanding this, we have taken the view that this 14% of households while not necessarily affluent, are comparatively free of the money worries or pressures affecting the remaining 86% to varying degrees.

Across the whole community, our analysis indicates that 29% of households are struggling on the current levels of household income from whatever source.

A further 57% stated that they are 'just about getting by'. It could be argued that these households are vulnerable to any sustained or new constraints on income going forward, i.e., at some risk of having difficulties if key factors such as employment status, change as we continue to live with COVID-19 and the various forms of lockdown restrictions impact upon livelihoods, health and well-being.

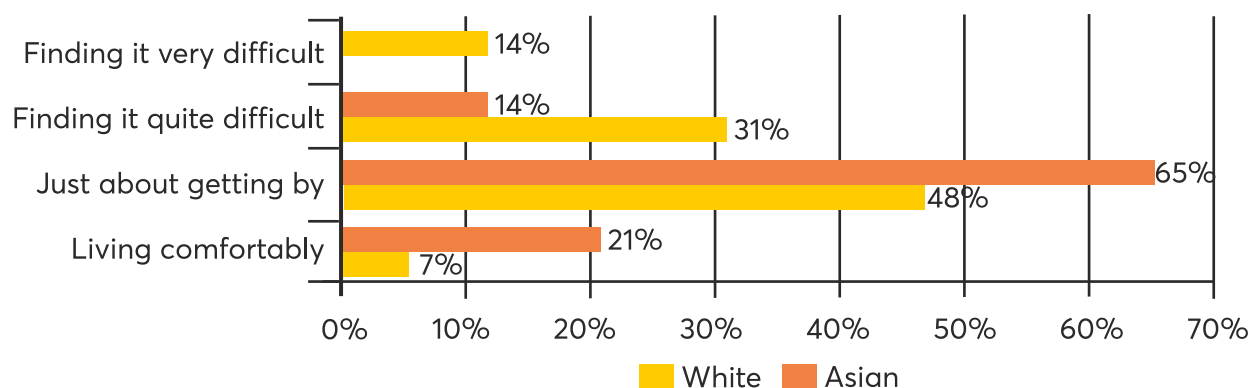
Q5.3: Impact of changes in household income - whole community



When we delve more deeply into the impact of changes in household income by ethnic group, it is the White British community that appears to be struggling the most, where 45% are finding it 'quite' or 'very difficult' with 14% of Asian respondents stating they are finding it 'quite difficult'.

Again, in the category of 'just getting by', while 65% of Asian respondents state this as their situation, it is the case for less than half (48%) of the White British community

Q5.3: Impact of changes in household income



In conclusion, as referred to previously, with 78% of the combined population 'just about getting by' or indeed experiencing difficulties managing financially on their current income, there is a real danger of families - whether surviving on the margins or worse - facing real hardship due to COVID-19 and the associated lockdown restrictions affecting their capacity to generate adequate income – perhaps for months to come. This points to a clear indication of the need for a tailored response by key agencies in the area; to support local families particularly around household budgeting, benefits and welfare advice.

Additional comments of respondents

Through the more qualitative, free response section under the Household Income category, we found that by far, respondents most commonly expressed heightened needs and wants in the areas of: IAG regarding welfare benefits and entitlements, debt, money management and budgeting support, employment support and job search.

IAG regarding welfare benefits and entitlements

- I need advice about welfare benefits (Resident of Indian heritage)
- Since my husband died 2 months ago, I need advice on welfare benefits and my entitlements (Resident of White British heritage)
- Welfare advice & support (Resident of Indian heritage)
- Information about what support & benefits are available (Resident of Indian heritage)
- I need support with welfare benefits (Resident of Mixed heritage)
- Any advice and support for low-income workers (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- Help for low-income workers and those who have spouses who cannot access benefits (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- Advice about what support there is with housing and repairs etc (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- Support and financial advice for self-employed people (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- Computer/digital support as everyone needs to use this (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- General benefits advice and support (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- Advice on welfare benefits (Resident of White British heritage)

Debt, money management and budgeting support

- It is extremely hard as a single mum with 5 young children and I did not get any help from anyone – I had to borrow £100 from a friend during lockdown as I couldn't afford baby milk or nappies (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- We manage but some days are harder than others (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- We struggle some days due to money (Resident of Indian heritage)
- We have visa applications, and my wife needs to take her English tests soon – we have no savings or any source of income other than my state and private pensions (Resident of Indian heritage)
- I struggle to pay bills and still owe some people money (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- We've been using our savings (the) BWA provided us with food parcels every week which has really helped us (Resident of Indian heritage)
- I'm really thankful for the Governments financial support to the self-employed. Need the Government to (provide) more help for small businesses (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- I'm now the only wage earner – my son has been furloughed and the rest of the family rely on universal credit (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- I need help with budgeting at home (Resident of White British heritage)
- I am in debt and need help to find out what support/advice is available (Resident of White British heritage)
- I am not good at budgeting and need help with this (Resident of White British heritage)
- I need debt support (Resident of White British heritage)

Employment support & Job search

- Need help with job applications once lockdown ends (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- It's difficult being on benefits – need motivating to find another job (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- I need help with finding a job (Resident of Mixed heritage)
- My husband has been out of work so long he's lost all his confidence
- My wife lost her job and she's finding it difficult to find another
- I have been furloughed and I don't think I'll have a job to go back to. I don't know what job I'll be able to get and will need help with this (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- I need help to look for a part-time job (Resident of White British heritage)
- Help with finding a job (Resident of White British heritage)
- Need help with finding a job (Resident of White British heritage)
- I need to be able to access a PC for job search (Resident of White British heritage)
- Need support in looking for a job (Resident of White British heritage)
- I need support to find a job – I only have my phone to find jobs on (Resident of White British heritage)
- My son is furloughed and like many young people he is unlikely to keep his job – young people are going to need help with job-finding (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- The whole household is either unwaged or on limited benefits – we need help to get out of this situation (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)

5.5. Community Relations

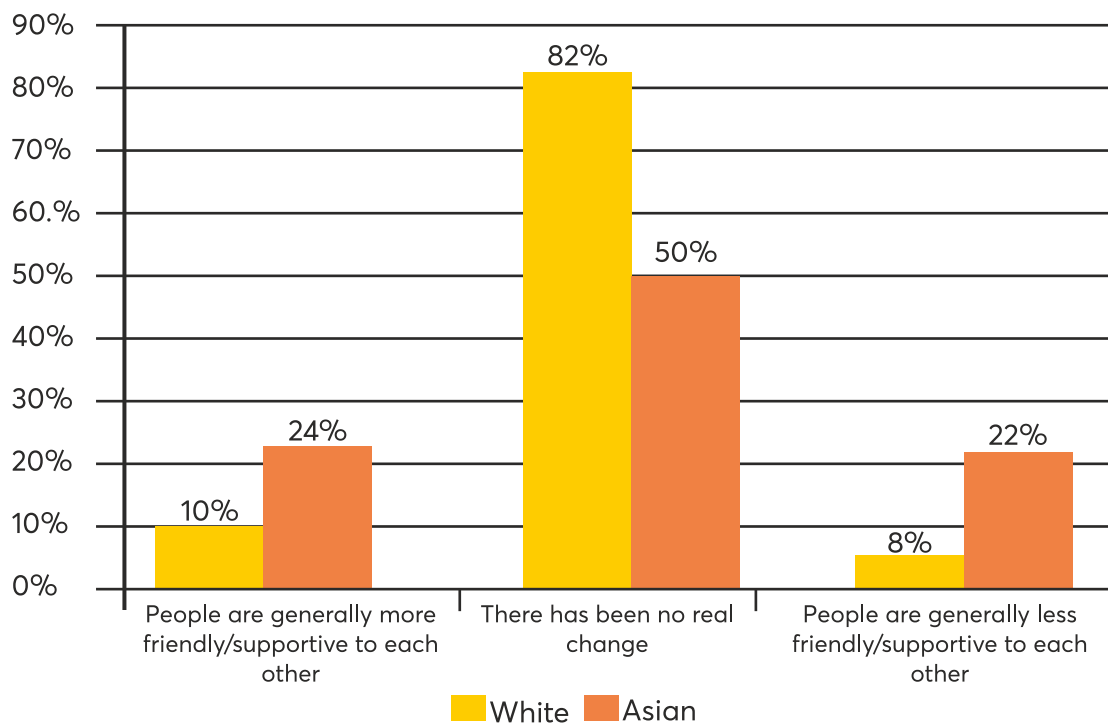
Introduction

In this, the final strand of our research, we look at the extent to which COVID-19 and the associated constraints and pressures placed on local people has impacted upon the sense of community spirit and cohesion within Tipton.

Key Findings

In our first table (Q6.1), we present the responses to the question:

Q6.1: Thinking about 'community spirit' in your neighbourhood over the past six months, do you think that:

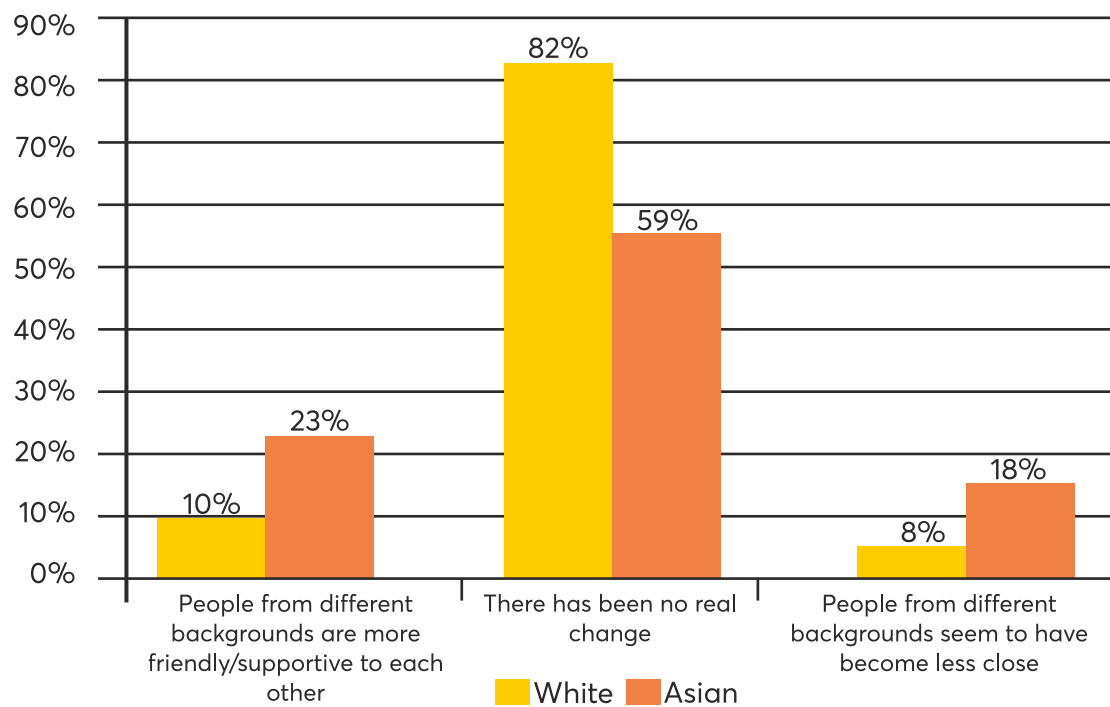


This question sought to look at how the community as a whole has responded to COVID-19 and its associated pressures and constraints.

Here, we can see that 28% of Asian respondents and 10% of White British believe that through the turmoil of the preceding six months, people across the community have generally been more friendly and/or supportive to each other.

This is fairly remarkable given the difficult environment during the period and is a measure of community resilience.

At the opposite end of the scale however, the situation is less positive with 22% and 8% of Asian and White British respondents respectively, stating that they felt that people have become generally less friendly or supportive of each other in the period.



Additional comments of respondents

Through the more qualitative, free response section under the 'Community Relations' category we found a range of needs, wants and suggestions. By far, the most common comments related to activities that build and strengthen communities by encouraging people from different cultures to come together. The balance of comments related to the respondents' perception of the community around them (both good and less so).

- Community centre - based support
- Perceptions on the community as a whole

Community centre- based support

- More/new opportunities for communities to come together (Resident of Indian heritage)
- A community group to raise issues and concerns with (Resident of Indian heritage)
- Community focus groups would be good (Resident of Indian heritage)
- Having a community networking group to discuss any issues in the local area (Resident of Indian heritage)
- We have a good neighbour (Resident of Indian heritage)
- I'd like more community events like fun-days for families (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- More fun-days and community events when it's allowed and safe to do so (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- Community (based) learning (Resident of Mixed heritage)
- More community events when lockdown ends (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- General community events when its safe (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- I'd like to have cultural days and events – like we had years ago (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- Bring back cultural events, sports days and fun days (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- I would like more community events when its allowed again (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)

- More community centre activities and events when its safe (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- Having fun-days, cultural events and sports days once everything is back to normal (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- More activities that include people from different backgrounds (Resident of White British heritage)
- The Jubilee Centre needs to be open 7 days a week (Resident of White British heritage)
- Need more social inclusion of different multicultural community coming together in a safe environment (Resident of White British heritage)
- Cultural days/events to allow kids to learn and understand different cultures and religions (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- As we can't visit other people's homes, we need COVID safe activities at the community centre (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)

Community centre based support

- My neighbours are Indian and have been very kind by buying my kids small gifts every week (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- I did not receive any help from anyone (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- (We have) not seen much difference in our neighbourhood - people around us seemed the same (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- We stayed indoors - nobody checked on us (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- We live in a wonderful neighbourhood - everyone was willing to help out (Resident of Pakistani heritage)
- The community centre (BWA) helped me out (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- The health service, GP's and council have been very unhelpful. People are blaming each other for COVID and are not supportive of each other. They don't realise that it's no one's fault. Whatever you can do to stop this would be good (Resident of Bangladeshi heritage)
- People seem to be talking and helping each other out in times of need (Resident of White British heritage)



6. Conclusions and areas for development

The research brief given by the BWA was to explore Tipton communities' experiences of the COVID-19 crisis, its impact on their lives and to capture their views and priorities to inform the future of Community Development Services in Tipton.

Our approach to the research was to gather data on the changes residents had experienced over the preceding six months across five key areas of life that are prominent features in the lives of individuals and their family members.

Under normal circumstances we would have taken the questionnaire approach to gather the statistical data and then to test and explore the results through a series of focus groups in order to provide a qualitative dimension to the research. However, the research was undertaken in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and at a time when the communities of Tipton were affected by the constraints of the highest level as a result of the Government's approach to pandemic control.

Within this environment it was agreed that it would be both irresponsible and inappropriate to proceed with the focus groups and instead to encourage respondents to consider and give their thoughts in specific sections of the questionnaire. Once it is considered safe to do so, we plan to undertake selected focus groups in partnership with the BWA.

Survey sample.

We were pleased to have been able to secure completed questionnaires from 113 households and the insight that it provided on the lives and experiences of the 370 household members surveyed.

We are sincerely grateful to the staff of the BWA who gave their time to the research by inviting clients to complete the questionnaires and support those who may otherwise have found it too daunting to participate in the exercise.

On pages 4 to 7 we provided an analysis of the survey population which we consider provides an equitable mix of gender, age and ethnicity – a mix which correlates to the demography of the community that the BWA serves.

Being satisfied that we have secured a fully representative sample of the local population, we are confident that the data we have applied and the conclusions we have drawn, provide an accurate and objective reflection of the impact COVID-19 has had on the lives of local people.

In the following section we present our key findings and recommendations on the potential responses and service development opportunities for the BWA, going forward.



6.1: Health & Wellbeing: Key issues & indicators of need

Within this category we explored the issues of general wellness and mental health of the respondent and their household members.

6.1.1 General wellness.

Our research findings suggest that the level of general health has declined quite significantly over the period. For example, the level of health and well-being of nearly half (44% respondents/40% of households) within the community as a whole, has declined. While there is no statistically significant difference between the two communities, there are subtle variations which may influence the design and/or approach of any interventions to reverse this decline. The more qualitative results clearly depict the real demand within the community for organised activities around exercise and fitness and for opportunities to access support and guidance regarding healthy living and lifestyle choices.

6.1.1 General Wellness - priorities:

The BWA has a strong and successful history of delivering general health and well-being services and their withdrawal, due to COVID-19, has undoubtedly contributed to the demand for the return of such services, expressed by the community. However, given the apparent level of decline in health and well-being within the community, the response requires more than a reinstatement of the pre-COVID delivery of services and activities, (however valued and successful they may have been). In order to plan for service delivery in the post-COVID environment, a focus needs to be placed on the design and scope of potential interventions. It is our view that this needs to be on a foundation of consultation with local people to define and refine needs and preferences and in collaboration with other community health agencies and partners. The qualitative responses provided within the report give an indication of the forms of support the community need and desire.

6.1.2 Mental health.

As with 'general wellness' our research highlighted a concerning decline in mental wellness across the community. We applied measures of relative unhappiness, depression, anxiety and stress as the indicators of mental health, and we found a decline in each of across both communities. Over half (55%) of respondents said that they were a 'little' or 'more unhappy' and/or 'depressed' than they were six months previously. We found that there was little statistically significant difference across the two communities overall. When we consider that only 6% Asian and 5% White British stated that they had no feelings of unhappiness or depression, then it is not unreasonable to assume that 89% do. Then, when we look at the household as a whole, we found that the same percentage (55%) of respondents expressed concern regarding depression among others within their household – again with no statistically significant difference between the two communities.

When we look at the change in levels of stress and anxiety of the respondent, 48% indicated that they had felt more stressed or anxious 'some of the time'. Whilst this figure is significant and should not be dismissed, our view is that it is not wholly surprising in the context of 21st century living generally and during a national pandemic in particular. The more concerning statistic is the 38% who said that they had been feeling more stressed or anxious 'more often/much more than usual' over the period. This concern is exacerbated by the two thirds (57%) of respondents who expressed concern about other household members being more stressed or anxious.

The direct correlation between poor mental health and physical health is widely acknowledged and as such any interventions targeted at either should be harmonised. We cannot accurately define the drivers of this change and can only suggest that these may comprise factors such as uncertainty relating to employment, loss or reduction in household income, the impact of lockdown measures etc. We do, however, suggest that if appropriate support were to be given to help residents with these issues, that this could make a valuable contribution in the lowering of these statistics over time.

6.1.2 Mental health – priorities

Based on the findings of our survey, the increased levels of depression, anxiety and stress cannot be ignored and the need for support is undeniable. As in the case of general health, there is a need now to plan for service delivery for both the current and post-COVID environment. A focus needs to be placed on the design and scope of potential interventions to address the high levels of depression, stress and anxiety. It is our view that this needs to be on a foundation of consultation with local people to define and refine needs and preferences and in collaboration with other community health agencies and partners. We would urge an approach of incorporating cross-cutting linkages and referrals between interventions around mental health/general health and those of employment, income, debt and other drivers of depression, stress and anxiety.

6.2: Children & Their Wellbeing: Key issues & indicators of need

Within this theme we explored the extent to which the pandemic and the associated governmental controls have impacted upon children and young people in Tipton. Clearly, by the nature and limitations of the survey, the responses are from an adult perspective rather than of children or young people themselves. However, our line of questioning takes this into account, and we believe that our approach benefits from being of the adult's perception of noticeable changes in the behaviours of their child/children, along with factors concerning general and mental wellness.

6.2.1 Home-schooling

Our first question sought to identify the extent to which parents felt equipped to support their child/children with schoolwork at home. In this respect we used the closure of schools at the beginning of the lockdown in the response to the pandemic, as a unique point of focus for parents as the expectation was placed upon them to deliver home-schooling. The results of course, serve to provide an indication of the overall capacity of parents to help their children with schoolwork in 'normal' circumstances. Across both communities, 50% of respondents with school age children said that there was no one within the household able to help their child/children with home-schooling. Regarding the communities individually, this was found to be the case in 28% of White British and 19% of Asian households. Within the qualitative results the three most common reasons cited were:

- Inability and/or lack of confidence due to poor English language.
- Lack of PC/laptop
- Low level of education

This in turn led to the vast majority of the stated needs/wants of respondents being around a demand for after-school and homework clubs, access to PC's and, educational support for parents both linguistic and academic.

6.2.1 Supporting the education of children & young people - priorities

Based on the findings of our survey, the demand for support in this area is significant and a demand which cuts across the community as a whole. This demand comprises two core strands – increasing the capacity of parents to support their child's education at home and, the need for opportunities for children to access organised activities which enhance their school-based learning. We would recommend that the BWA explores opportunities for a coordinated approach which delivers educational support for children. This should be developed in consultation with local schools and the LEA to ensure the approach is in harmony with the localised syllabus and national curriculum. A 'mirrored' approach is required for parents who want to develop a capacity to support their children. Clearly there is a need for support with English literacy particularly for those parents for whom English is not their first language. From our survey we can see that English literacy is just one dimension. In order for parents to be able to support their children more effectively, then it is recommended that they gain an adequate understanding of the syllabus that their child is following at school. This will require a degree of partnership working with local schools in order to ensure a coordinated delivery of support.

6.2.2 Mental wellness of the child

We used changed behaviours such as anxiety, depression, and disruptive or aggressive attitudes as indicators of mental wellness. Here we found that 20% of respondents across both communities were concerned about their child/children presenting one or more of these behaviours – with discernible variation between each community. Within the context of the multiple pressures and constraints placed upon families during the pandemic, it is perhaps not unsurprising that such indicators were found to be in evidence in our sample. In the case of children and young people, the lack of opportunities to socialise and exercise outside of the home are highly likely to be major contributing factors here. Indeed, 45% of respondents across both communities said that the lack of opportunities for their children to socialise and exercise with others has been a concern over the period. When we look at the qualitative responses, the enforced cessation of child/young person-focussed activities of the kind traditionally delivered by the BWA, are greatly missed across both communities.

6.2.2 Mental wellness of the child - priorities

Based on the findings of our survey, the reported increase in levels of behavioural indicators is fairly nominal and, perhaps unsurprising given the loss of freedoms and positive activities resulting from the government-led responses to the COVID-19 pandemic over the period. Nevertheless, the findings do illustrate the important role that recreational activities play in the lives of young people across the community. From several of the qualitative responses received, it is clear that this role goes beyond the activities themselves with the importance placed on providing shared experiences which, in turn, help to foster and facilitate cohesion and understanding between children from different backgrounds and cultures. These findings will not be a surprise to the BWA and others who traditionally deliver youth-based activities and services in Tipton. The key recommendation here is to reintroduce youth activities as soon as it is permitted and safe to do so. There is a need now to plan for service delivery for both the current and post-COVID environment. A focus needs to be placed on the design and scope of potential interventions targeting the needs of children and young people – providing new opportunities for personal development, improved health and positive behaviours. It is our view that this needs to be on a foundation based on consultation with children, young people and parents. We would also suggest that future youth work should pay special care to the mental wellness of children and young people as well as their physical health. While the survey identified a relatively low level of concern from respondents regarding the mental health of their children, issues of sensitivity and privacy may have masked the true level of concern – a fact that should not be ignored.

6.3: Employment & Household Income: Key issues & indicators of need.

Here, we have combined these two themes due to the inextricable links between employment and income. In terms of employment, the results of our survey strongly indicate a growth in unemployment. Of the main wage earners in work six or months ago, our findings indicate that around 18% of them have since become unemployed. With no apparent easing of the economic climate in sight there is clear potential for the rate of unemployment to increase in the coming months. Our qualitative research regarding this factor clearly demonstrates a growing demand for job search and job brokerage support. Several respondents referred to the lack of a computer and/or internet access at home being a barrier particularly when such access outside the home is also restricted or unavailable.

When we look at how the Tipton community are coping with the levels of household income they generate (earned or otherwise), then the picture is similarly concerning. Half of all respondents stated that they had not really noticed any significant change in their general standard of living. Of the remaining respondents, 39% reported that their standard of living had 'got a little worse' or 'much worse' (8%). It appears that it is the White British community who are most affected by a decline in their standard of living, but it is clear that their Asian neighbours are not far behind.

In terms of changes in household incomes across the community, just 14% said that they have continued to live comfortably over the period. By contrast, 29% reported that they are now finding it 'quite' or 'very difficult'. The balance - 57%-informed us that they are now, 'just about getting by'. Taking into account the potential growth in unemployment and/or reduced terms of employment (working hours, overtime, shift bonuses etc.), then the concern is that the near third of the population who are 'just getting by' or worse are especially vulnerable to any further economic downturn.

6.3.1 Employment support - priorities

Our survey findings clearly indicate an increasing trend of unemployment and/or a sustained decline in employment terms. This is supported by the qualitative findings where the demand for employment support, job search and employment brokering is clear. There is a need now to plan for service delivery for both the current and post-COVID environment. A focus needs to be placed on the design and scope of potential interventions to support unemployed people back into employment and those who are in employment or on furlough, who face a precarious future.

Many of the qualitative responses indicate that support is much needed around job search, preparing applications along with having access to PC's and internet to enable this. We would recommend that this should be delivered in collaboration with public and community sector agencies that are specialised in this area and who have the appropriate links with employers and training providers

6.3.2 Household income - priorities

Nearly half the community have stated that they are experiencing a decline in their general standard of living and 86% have informed us that they are 'just about managing or worse' on their current level of household income. It is not unreasonable to expect this situation to worsen over the coming months and beyond, which can only create an increased demand for a range of support mechanisms. Furthermore, several of the qualitative responses referred to concerns around debt, confusion and uncertainty regarding benefit entitlements and issues of stress and depression arising from financial pressures. Again, we can make an informed assumption that these effects are likely to increase in unison with the any further decline in household incomes.

Our recommendation therefore is for the BWA to plan for the delivery of a coherent package of support services for both the current and post-COVID environment. In consultation with relevant agencies and specialists in the field, a focus needs to be placed on the design and scope of potential interventions to support local people with IAG regarding benefit entitlements and claims, help with household budgeting and other forms of financial advice. Again, we would urge an approach of incorporating cross-cutting linkages and referrals between interventions around mental health/general health and those of employment, income, debt and other drivers of depression, stress and anxiety.

6.4: Community Relations: Key issues & indicators of need

In this final theme of our survey, we sought to explore how the community as a whole responded to the challenging environment created by the pandemic and associated pressures and constraints. The community of Tipton is not known for cultural divisions or animosity between individual communities, and we found no evidence to indicate that this situation had changed to any great extent. We see this as a demonstration of the strength and resilience of the wider community of Tipton as a whole.

Across both question areas, 68% of respondents said that 'nothing much had changed' in terms of community relations over the period. An average of 14% of respondents felt the community has become less friendly, supportive or close in the preceding six months while 18% expressed an opposite opinion. From the qualitative responses there was a clear demand for community activities that allowed and encouraged people from different backgrounds to come together to celebrate 'community' and promote understanding and respect between people from different cultures and backgrounds. Our view is that this is an excellent foundation upon which to further strengthen the community and the cohesion within it and is something that the community look to the BWA to deliver.

6.4.1 Community Relations - priorities

While there is little that can be done practicably under the prevailing constraints, the BWA should plan for the reinstatement and expansion of its community cohesion events and activities. It is pleasing to see that the stresses and anxieties resulting from 'lockdowns' and enforced restrictions do not seem to have damaged the sense of 'community' in Tipton and this is testament to the resilience of local people.

From the numerous comments made by participants, it is clear to us that there is a real appetite for activities and events where residents from different backgrounds can come together as a single community and to share and learn about each other's culture and heritage. Such activities were being delivered by the BWA prior to the pandemic and their absence is clearly regretted by the community. The organisation is perfectly positioned to lead on such activities, and we believe that the communities it serves look to the BWA to deliver these accordingly.

We recommend that the BWA plan ahead for the re-launch and expansion of their delivery of events and shared activities aimed at building upon the cohesion and sense of 'community' and this should be targeted at both adults and children and young people in equal measure. As and when the threat of COVID-19 is removed and restrictions to prevent further contagion are lifted, there is little doubt that the community will be looking to the BWA to lead on the delivery of events and activities where local people can reconnect with each other and celebrate their diversity.

7.0 CONCLUDING REMARKS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- Within our research we have discovered a community that has and continues to face a hostile environment of interconnected challenges which, to a great extent, have been exacerbated (if not created), by the COVID-19 pandemic and the government -led interventions aimed at controlling it.
- Consequently, we have outlined a series of priorities (above), which we recommend the BWA apply in the design and development of the services and responses we believe are necessary, now more than ever, to support the community they have served so well for the past 37 years.
- It is clear from the responses received (a sample of which have been included within the report), that the established services of the BWA which have been necessarily suspended or curtailed due to COVID-19 restrictions, are highly valued and missed by the community.
- It is clear to us that the reintroduction of these valued services would be welcomed by the community and would make an important contribution in meeting some of the priorities that we have proposed. However, we believe that the BWA must take this opportunity to review their established provision in light of the clear exacerbation of the needs within the community that the provision to date, was originally designed to meet.
- Such a review should take in to account the increased demand for support and the corresponding increase in resources required to meet it. It is vital that the BWA embrace any opportunity to up-scale its established approaches and increase the organisation's capacity accordingly.
- This necessary action forms just one step towards meeting the needs of the community. The BWA is an established and effective service provider that is both trusted and respected by the community it serves. As such, we believe that the BWA is perfectly placed to expand its provision in order to face the wider issues facing local people.
- We recommend that the BWA should build upon its strong reputation and seek the necessary support it requires in order to develop and deliver the full range of the key priorities that we have identified through our research.
- As we have said, these priorities require long term responses. Notwithstanding that at some point the COVID-19 virus will be overcome – the negative impact it has had on the lives and well-being of local people will undoubtedly persist long into the future.
- It is also important to highlight that on many levels the impact of COVID-19 has simply exacerbated pre-existing issues within the Tipton community. We suggest that for all the negative connotations associated with the pandemic, it has helped to shine a light on the fine and fragile borderlines that exist across the community, i.e., the borderlines between growth, survival and failure.
- Taking all of these factors into account we recommend that the BWA, in consultation with partners, develops a coherent project - based approach which incorporates the mechanisms through which the interrelated issues of employment, household income and mental health can be served seamlessly and sensitively.

