



THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) ON BAME COMMUNITIES

CASE STUDIES

STORIES OF ELDERS

Ade Sawyer, London (May 2020)

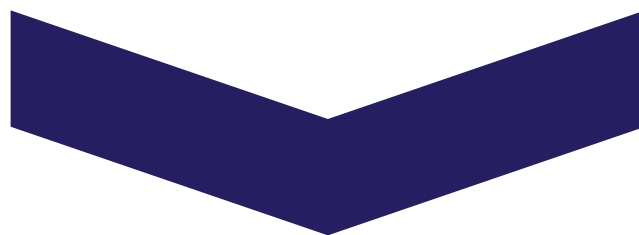
Daljit Gandhum, Slough (May 2020)

Linda Hall, London (May 2020)

Tejinder Mushiana, Slough (May 2020)

Charmaine Morgan (June 2020)

Glenroy Brown, Birmingham (July 2020)



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at info@ubele.org and tell us about:
your challenge, best practice, impact (financial etc).

ADE SAWYER



I just wonder how our children feel in a system where they are detached where nothing is coming from them and yet they will be the resolution - I guess I have to believe our kids and our young people, will do well.

Name: JW Adeyemi Sawyerr - Known as Ade

Age: 69

Gender: Male

Self Identified Racial Background: Afrikan/Ghanaian

Residing Geographical area: Upper Norwood (Borough of Croydon)

Who do you live with?

Predominantly with my wife, we have one child a son in his 30's who has special needs. He usually he lives on his own in supported housing, but when COVID19 came to the UK we encouraged him to come back home until it is over so that he is better supported.

How has this virus impacted your life (Isolation, family, fear, food access, medical supplies etc)?

I have sickle cell disease, so slowing down and staying away from others is very important. My wife, who works for a city council, decided about 4 weeks ago, that she would work from home as I am high risk. We live in a flat, so we are having to get used to being in a small space with one and other.

After talks with my haematology consultants, I was told not to come to the hospital in case I contracted the virus. I now speak to medics as necessary over the phone. Around that time, I decided to terminate my outside appointments and work remotely. I am used to working from home; however, I do miss attending Church and my Ghanaian social group gatherings.

I think I manage my sickle cell fairly well and recognise that if I am Sickling, it is usually due to other underlying issues such as my immune system being low due to having a cold or feeling stressed. I am usually prescribed painkillers but I refrain from taking because they can become addictive. Instead I make sure that I am well hydrated and rested, this usually sees me through any Sickling episodes.

Self-isolation has made me a bit lazy; I find myself sleeping more and not chasing up my work. I need to be more exercise/activity focused. In regard to, my fears around Covid 19, I know people who have died and people who have gone into hospital and contracted the illness there. I do not want to be in that position. We must protect ourselves and find ways forward together. I am not sure if things will ever go back to the way they were.

Do you get any support from government, or church, or local community groups?

I am on the list of high-risk people in Croydon because of my sickle cell. On Wednesdays I am given a food package by the local authority, this generally consists of white bread, corn beef, sardines, tomato soup, a bag of carrots and potatoes, tea and milk. It is enough food for the entire week, but I am used to eating more African food. However, my wife has been persuading me to drink the soup for my lunch which I have now gotten used to. I have also been told that I could have my medication delivered to my door.

In Ealing there is Ga-Speaking church, who are serving the Ghanaian community around London, however, they are not working as far Croydon.

Anything good come out of this situation for you?

Yes, looking at it from a black political perspective we need to start to focus now on what we want, the West cannot do it for us. China cannot do it for us. We need to get to a stage where we stop emulating western ways and start dealing with our own culture as a way of accepting ourselves in this world. For us as Africans in the continent, Caribbean, and across the world, we have an opportunity which we haven't developed very well so far. We should be united now as African countries and develop our own cultural needs and creativity. This virus has shown me that we do not need a lot of stuff and we can do without all this extra stuff that we acquire as people- large cars, etc. We looked too much to the West but this has no bearing on our lives. For example, I saw something where black people were distributing spaghetti in African countries but we should be getting cocoyams, and maize.

I worry about the long-term effects of social distancing, Funerals are very big in his Ghanaian community, sometimes they are 3 or 4 days long. People will now have to have smaller gatherings and not bother again, especially if Covid-19 comes around again as predicted. The which we will connect will change. Western society tends to have different ways of meeting, it is more individualistic, so I feel social distancing is going to affect the black community more. We have celebration points; large funerals, large weddings, celebration of births, these celebrations are how we interact, but this has stopped. Going forward I will be staying home more and assess if I need to attend, I will decide what contributions my attendance will make. My nephew popped around to see me not so long ago- and had to sit in his car to talk to me. He was very disappointed not to be able to get closer but if he had phoned me first I would have told him about the decisions I have to make to protect myself and he wouldn't have had what he thought was a wasted journey. I have to be more conscious than others.

What's missing from your life - what could help to make it better?

We need to think through how to move things forward in our community. I think we should work towards recreating the immigration system so that we can remove elements of injustice. Race needs to be put back on the agenda it has been pushed off for too long. Policy drives everything in the UK, so our call to action should start from there. We can use Covid19 to help us to think and drive through long-lasting change.

DALJIT GANDHUM

Daljit Gandhum - Is a 65-year-old family man who lives in Langley, Slough, very near Heathrow airport.



Daljit was born in India and moved to the UK in 1967, he very much feels that his identity straddles both India and Britain. He has undertaken various trips to India as his business interests are both in the UK and India, but are international in their operations.

Moreover, he has travelled extensively across the globe (more than 30 different countries) since 1977 for business development with his previous employer and his own business for the last 25 years.

Daljit shares that he is fortunate to live in a home on a road in Langley that has just five houses, three of which are now owned by his brother and nephew. He explains that their gardens link and that this enables them to live as an extended family.

Living as a wider interconnected family has meant that the COVID19 virus has not left them feeling isolated and unable to work and share with one and other. However, it has brought moments of realisations and fears that one member of this close-knit family could bring the virus to them and that would have a massive impact.

However, they are following social distancing guidelines to minimise this risk. In recognition of the virus spread and the challenges, this could bring, Daljit and his family cleaned their home office and they have worked from home as a unit since. Their working operations have been managed using technology such as Microsoft Team and switching their travels and international dealings by use of the internet. This space is solely used by the family and other members of staff have been instructed to work from home. These changes have proved to be successful and for Daljit, he has reduced the stress from the multitude of meetings he used to have to attend to abroad. This virus has caused his family to completely restructure how they work and has reduced their air pollution significantly.

Family and adapting to Lockdown and home operations

The family home consists of Daljit and his wife, his son, daughter in law and their 3 children aged 10, 8 and 3 years of age. His son who is in his 40's and his daughter in law carry out the shopping for the household which they manage 2 or 3 times a week. For his daily exercise, as the gym he attended closed around 6 weeks ago, Daljit drives to a large park in the mornings and exercises for an hour. It is quiet in the mornings and the park is fairly large so there is no problem adhering to social distancing guidelines. Daljit commented that exercising and being in fresh air are essential to his daily routine and that he would not be able to manage without either. After which he returns home for his shower, breakfast, and begins working.

The office space has also proved beneficial for his 2 oldest grandchildren, who use the office in the mornings for their schoolwork. It is easier for the children to concentrate in the office and helps them get into the mood to 'work'. Daljit expressed that he cannot imagine schools and businesses not resorting to home working after this crisis is over. Before the virus, people and companies resisted such operations but through this forced situation, we can all now see how practical home working is and the positive effect it has had on the environment.

Does Daljit get any support government, place of worship, or local groups?

'No- we just support ourselves. We don't need it. Others need support and they should get it. I do get regular calls from the NHS, they ring to ask how I am I guess it must be because I registered with the local authority as advised and I suppose I am in that age bracket for vulnerability.'

Furthermore, 25 years ago Daljit's lungs collapsed- but with treatment and homeopathy he health has improved significantly. He states: 'I do suffer a little bit with joint pains (arthritis) and then I take a few pain killers, but I try and do that as little as possible, and the longer I can do without medication the better. Homeopathy has proved very useful for keeping me healthy alongside prescribed medication which I always try and take in a reduced format'.

Anything good come out of this situation for you?

'Yes, generally people have stopped running around and have more time. It has slowed us down. It is God's way of saying change. I never thought that a thing such as this could change the world, but I think in the future things will change. The gap between the rich and the poor has become too wide. A lot of good can come from this such as clean air and the environment. Where we live we can now see the stars at night as there is less pollution here and fewer planes flying at night. Airlines have been unchecked and unfair for a long time- they have often left me fuming at the way they can charge such differentiating prices on the same flight. I don't have much sympathy for them that the flying world will indeed change. However, If we can accept these changes the virus has brought to us and slow down, we can adapt to it. I think that people will accept and will feel even better when the vaccine comes out. I don't know how long it will take for that to happen but it will reassure people even more'.

What would you like to make things better for you at this time?

'Only the vaccine. The way the world has been the last few weeks it has been fine. After the pandemic is over, all governments should implement lockdown on Sundays - all non-essential places should remain closed, like it was in the sixties and seventies. The way things have been we are destroying families. Families are being divided by having to work during social hours. This has had a huge impact on family lives, and that is not working.

The long opening hours in shops, bars, pubs, restaurants, etc are hugely damaging to our lives. We need to get back to calmer family times. Whoever makes the decisions about these things needs to be more honest- its all been about making money but not for the poor. Shops should go back to closing at decent times so people can go home and be with each other.

LINDA HALL



Age: 65

Where do you live? Brockley, SE London

Self identity: Mixed Race – African and English

Who do you live with?

I live with my husband Patrick and our Bengal Cat called Martel who is now 13 years old. We have lived in this house for 32 years.

How has the virus impacted on your life?

We haven't seen our grandchildren since the beginning of March – well at least not in person. We have been video calling with them, but it is not the same. The first 3 weeks were a very emotional time. The realisation of the enormity of the virus really got to me. In addition, a good friend who suffers with Lupus had been in a coma for a couple of weeks and I wasn't aware. I didn't have her address, just her phone number, what alerted me that something was wrong, was her silence on social media. She was someone who posted regularly and having checked with a couple of people we noted she had disappeared.

After a bit of tracking on Facebook, we found her brother and it transpired that she had COVID19 and had been in hospital 2 weeks before we knew. All together it's been almost 2 months since her illness and she is still learning to walk and talk again properly. Then one of my husband Patricks, close friends phoned really breathless and rasping one evening, he had spent 3 hours trying to get through to 111- and his wife was ill too he was really panic breathing, you could hear it over the phone.

Obviously, it is personal situations like these that bring it home, this Virus is so real and being in London we are all more privy to its effects. Patricks friend finally managed to get a through to 111 and a GP wrote a prescription which his brother picked up for him. They were antibiotics for himself and his wife and they recovered.

In relation to how it impacts on us In our day to day life, Patrick and I wear the masks I made for us and all my extended family, when we leave the shopping. We go shopping as and when but mainly stay indoors. We speak to our 2 children daily by face time. I have diabetes which I have medication for, I have also suffered with Rheumatism for over 40 years, which I take painkillers for when needed.

Lonliness/containment and reflections

This lockdown has made me reflect on trauma,sadness and loss. It has made me think about how I would cope is somebody close to me passed away. This has become a very real concern for me I particularly scared to lose my husband. Then I remember that it might be me who passes away first so I have begun teaching Patrick how to cook, so he is able look after himself should this occur. This lockdown period has bought us closer as a couple on a spiritual and emotional level.

Do you get anything supportive from government, or church, or local community group?

No, I am not classed as a highly vulnerable people. However, one of the neighbours on the road who I had never really spoke to prior to lockdown saw me and gave me her number and said to ring if I need anything, which I thought was very caring. A few weeks later, she kindly delivered some food to us. We have also come together as a neighbourhood for the national clap for the NHS @ 8.00pm on Thursday evenings.

Has anything good come out of this COVID 19 lockdown situation for you?

My husband Patrick and I have spent a lot of time reminiscing and reflecting on past which has been very healing. I have realised things about my husband that I never knew before and we have been married for over 46 years! We have bonded greatly over the past two months. I think being in lockdown together has brought us closer together as a couple. I have also got to know myself a bit, having the time to be still and to contemplate. I feel I have become a bit more independent in regards to the internet and technology as I have not had my children to rely on. I have been spending more time doing the things I love, this includes reading, sewing, gardening and binging on Netflix series.

What's missing from your life what would you like to make things better for you at this time?

I am focussing on keeping healthy, eating well and trying to do exercise as much as I can.I also realise how precious my family and friends are to me. One of my brothers who lives in LA cannot leave the house without a mask, so I have made him some and sent them to him in the post. My other brother has had to closed his shop but the main thing is that we are all fine.

TEJINDER MUSHIANA

Name: Mrs Tejinder Mushiana

Age: 81

Racial Background/self Identity: Indian Asian

Residing in geographical area: Slough

Who do you live with? My Husband - Mr. Mushiana



How has this virus impacted your life (Isolation, family, fear, food access, medical supplies etc)?

It has not a big deal for us. My husband is less mobile anyway due to his past ill health, this means that we are more used to stay indoors however, I worry about my family and friends who are not so used to living like this. We stay in and mostly do online shopping which they deliver to our door, they leave it outside, and we bring it in. We have done our shopping online for a while now, Tesco stocks most of the foods that we need as a family. Our milk is delivered by the milkman since we moved to Slough about 13 years ago. If there is anything, we need urgent help with, we ask our daughter Arunjot. She comes in through our conservatory, this is where she picks things up and drops off. She stays in the conservatory and I speak to her through the window, she usually checks in on us, about 3 times a week.

I have rheumatoid arthritis and high blood pressure, I take medication for both, which is delivered by the chemist. I enjoy gardening but I do less now due to arthritis. I practice yoga every day for about 20 - 30 mins which also helps with my arthritis.

What about loneliness?

I talk to my husband, I do my housework and I keep busy and I always have a nap and rest after lunch for a couple of hours. I use my iPad to surf the web, do my shopping and to keep myself occupied. I also use it sign into Facebook and interact with my friends and families. This has always been the way in which I have done things, not just because of COVID. I get calls from my daughters every day since Covid 19 and my daughter who lives locally rings me 2 or 3 times a day, so I feel well looked after.

Do you get anything supportive from government, or church, or local community group?

No, Nothing. They have never offered, and I have never asked. I am Sikh but I am not practising, so do not go to the Gurdwara and or join in services online.

Anything good come out of it for you (attention from the church, family, friends, technology)?

Yes, the Environment. There was so much pollution and now there are fewer cars around, the sky getting clearer. The stars are a lot brighter in the sky at night. I have also heard that wild animals are moving around more, more freedom for them because we are quieter.

What's missing from your life what would you like to make things better for you at this time (people to talk to, food delivery)?

Nothing. I wouldn't mind being nearer to a park, so that I could go for walks. The nearest one is at least 30 mins walk away and I can't walk that far with my arthritis.

CHARMAINE MORGAN



‘People tell me in person, that I am quite a sociable creature I like and get on well with people - but I’ve always been quite cat like - I do my own thing’...
‘When someone like me gets the virus, will they get it again. I do ask myself - ‘How can I be part of the solution and not the problem’

Charmaine Morgan’s approach to life

Name: Charmaine Morgan

Age: 50 years old

Charmaine lives alone in Stechford Birmingham and identifies as Black British born of Jamaican parents

How has this virus impacted on your life?

I am quite a calm person, I don’t get flustered and as a home community support worker, I am used to working with a wide range of people with different ailments. I have a pre-existing persistent tickly cough, I have had various tests done on my lungs, but doctors do know what has caused it, so I have lived with it ever since. It has made some people uncomfortable, particularly in the current pandemic. However, in February, I felt that my cough had become more noticeable so I self-isolated and stopped attending choir practice as it was making some people anxious. I found that people were watching me and constantly asking if I ‘was alright?’.

I decided to self-isolate and after 7 days, I called 111 and explained that I had a runny nose and was sneezing. The advisor said that my symptoms were not COVID related. However, a week later I read online that some people who had tested positive for COVID had runny noses. I began feeling very achy to the point that I could not comfortably lie down, my symptoms developed into stomach pains, chest pains, no sense of taste or smell. The only symptom I didn’t have is a fever, living on my by myself means that I do not have anyone to assist me when I am not well. During the period in which I was unwell, I barely left my bed, and there were times that I felt fearful, because of the scaremongering caused by the news. I was given some advice by my cousin who is a nurse, she advised me to keep hydrated and to have hot and cold showers, ‘start with heat and gradually reduce it to cold which helps to bring fresh blood to the surface and drinking honey lemon and garlic’. I have slowly forced myself to begin exercising to build up my strength. I have never been very good at taking medicine and am quite aware of my own body and when it’s not functioning well. I am happy that I made it through the virus and that I can speak about my experience.

Although I live alone, I do not feel isolated, I have a large extended family who I am in regular contact with via zoom. I belong to a church, we also have regular prayer meetings via zoom. One of my family members has a key to my house and they kindly left food for me on my porch when I wasn't well. People tell me in person, that I am quite a sociable creature I like and get on well with people, but I've always been very cat-like, in the sense that I have always done my own thing.

Do you get anything supportive from government, or church, or local community group?

Yes, I have a great support network, which includes both family and friends. As someone who has always lived alone, I have always ensured that I get to know and build good relationships with my neighbours. My neighbours are very dear to me and would usually be my first port of call.

Anything good come out of this isolation lockdown period for you?

Being in lockdown has made me aware of the importance of having a daily routine and the benefits it brings. My routine consists of the following; I wake up very early and meditate, I then exercise on my cross trainer, have a good breakfast and call my friends and family for a chat and check in with them. This new routine means that I am having more meaningful and consistent conversations with my family and friends.

I have rekindled old friendships and have learnt to use zoom. I have also been spending more time with my neighbours as they have been helping me with some gardening. I now recognise and appreciate the simpler things in life. I have always loved nature and talking to people so being in lockdown has made me more appreciative of these things. I would like to begin reading am looking to read Nelson Mandela's A Long Walk to Freedom. I am a keen singer; I grew up in a musical family and I am usually invited to sing at funerals and weddings. I sing a couple of hours a day and it is great to read that one of the suggestions for building up our immune system is to sing.

What's missing from your life what would you like to make things better for you at this time?

I think I have everything I need to be happy, the only thing I would probably want is consistency and transparency. People just don't know; we need and want reliable information and more honest clarity. I would like to be tested and I would like to know the likelihood of me contracting the virus again.

GLENROY BROWN



Name: Glenroy Brown

Age: 75

Self-Identified Racial Background:
Black-Jamaican

Residing Geographical area:
Erdington, Birmingham

Who living with: Wife of 51 years

How has this virus impacted your life (Isolation, family, fear, food access, medical supplies etc)?

I keep myself busy with DIY jobs around the house and the garden. I am not being able to get out as much and do the things I usually would, adapting to this new way of living has been difficult and stressful at times. I am used to being out and about shopping, seeing friends, going to church, so staying at home, and not being able to receive any visitors has caused me some anxiety. My Church now holds the weekly service on Zoom. I sometimes think about what would happen if something went wrong and I needed help. When the doorbell now rings, it comes as a bit of a shock. It is strange when the things we order over the internet arrive, the delivery person rings the doorbell and then steps back, there is little interaction. I find this very strange and has taken me some time to get used to. The postman is someone I miss having a little chat with. He used to knock if things needed to be signed for and we would have a little chat, it just doesn't happen at the moment, I miss that social interaction.

My wife used to work in administration so she tends to do the ordering of goods online and then I do the shopping outside of the home. We wear masks when we go shopping. I have noticed that people have become more supportive of each other. Our neighbours have kindly offered to get the shopping for us. One of the benefits of this virus and lockdown is that my wife and I go for morning walks together for about an hour and I have noticed that passers-by say 'hello' more which makes for better social interaction. In general, people seem more friendly and helpful.

Some of my anxieties come from the fact that we don't know what is going on? First they said it was going to be 3 weeks, then it was 3 weeks and more, however from what I have seen its more likely to be about a year before things are back to Normal.

Myself and my wife know four people who have passed away from suspected COVID. All were over 70, three men and one woman, 1 white person and 3 was black people. The deaths among Black people are very high and the explanation as to 'why'- seems baffling to me. At the back of my mind, and with things I am reading I am wondering why this virus is having such an impact on Black people, or is there another reason?

Do you get anything supportive from government, or church, or local community group?

Not really, however, the other day I was really surprised that my bank - Santander- rang up and asked if there was anything that I needed - what they could do for me. I asked what sort of help they could give - being a bank. They said they would arrange for others to support me. I checked if this was genuine call from the bank and was pleasantly surprised that it was.

Anything good come out of it for you (attention from church; family; friends; technology)? People are more sociable and friendly. This virus does not discriminate against race, class and gender. We all have to be careful, and it makes me think about life more and what our purpose here on earth is. I drive and wear masks whenever I am out. They are always kept in my back pocket.

What's missing from your life what would you like to make things better for you at this time (people to talk to, food delivery)?

I have been making more of an effort to check in with my family and friends, I would love to see them. I miss close contact, I have friends, who are more like an extended family in the USA, Canada and Jamaica who are ringing me much more frequently than in the past. People from England do phone me but I notice the effort made from abroad more. We know that our life is getting shorter as we age, so I appreciate the efforts made.