

NEWSLETTER

Community Update

The Salik Project UK

Spring 2026

FROM STIGMA TO INSIGHT

UNDERSTANDING ADDICTION IN ROCHDALE SOUTH ASIAN COMMUNITIES



Where This Started

Nearly a year ago, this work began as two brothers trying to make sense of a loss.

Between us, we had experience of addiction—not only personally, but also as carers. We had also navigated the recovery system ourselves, while facing the stigma that exists within our own South Asian community.

What became clear to us was this: Support does exist—but within South Asian communities, it is often not known about, not understood, or not accessed.

Conversations around addiction are often shaped by izzat (honour), sharam (shame), and fear of judgement. As a result, many individuals and families are left to manage these challenges in silence.

We didn't set out as experts—and we still don't see ourselves that way. But we knew something needed to change.

These conversations weren't happening—and they needed to.



Thank you to Rochdale Council of Mosques & Imams



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Our Mission

We feed these insights back into communities, public health, and recovery services—acting as a bridge between communities and systems, with the aim of driving meaningful change.



The Salik Project UK exists to raise awareness, challenge stigma, and educate South Asian communities and recovery organisations about the unique barriers faced when navigating addiction.

A central part of our work is gathering qualitative insight directly from South Asian communities through focus groups and one-to-one conversations. This allows us to understand how addiction is experienced on the ground, in a way that is shaped by culture, family dynamics, and community context.

We centre on Lived Experiences



Through this, we hear not only from individuals experiencing addiction but also from families and carers, whose experiences are often overlooked but are central to understanding the full impact of addiction within South Asian communities.

We feed these insights back into public health and recovery services, acting as a bridge between communities and systems. Our aim is to ensure that lived experience informs how support is shaped, communicated, and delivered—so that it becomes more accessible, relevant, and responsive to the realities of South Asian communities as well as other ethnic minorities.



ROCHDALE COUNCIL
OF MOSQUES

Community Action on Addiction



What We've Been Doing

"...as part of the National Day of Action Against Addiction, we worked in partnership with the Rochdale Council of Mosques to deliver an awareness day across local mosques, the first initiative of its kind in the UK."

Over the past year, we've been working at a grassroots level across Rochdale, in collaboration with High Level Northern Trust, engaging directly with South Asian communities.

This work has also been supported by Action Together, whose microfunding enabled us to establish The Salik Project UK CIC and continue engaging directly with communities.



This has included focus groups with young people, community leaders, and women's groups, in collaboration with organisations including The Young Khadims, Deepish Community Centre, WHAG, KYP, and BACP.

Alongside this, as part of the National Day of Action Against Addiction, we worked in collaboration with the Rochdale Council of Mosques to deliver an awareness day across local mosques.

This brought together recovery organisations including Early Break, Turning Point, and Rochdale Recovery Communities—creating a coordinated, community-facing response focused on one key aim: ensuring that people are aware of, and able to access, the professional support available to them in Rochdale.

As part of this, imams delivered sermons on addiction, encouraging people to seek support and challenge stigma. For us, this was significant. It showed how mosques—trusted spaces within South Asian communities—can play a vital role in opening conversations and supporting pathways into recovery. It was also the first UK-wide initiative of its kind which, with the support of RCM, we are hoping to repeat later this year.

We have also worked with WHAG to support several women in accessing hardship funding, including those experiencing domestic violence—highlighting the wider challenges that often sit alongside addiction and this close collaboration is ongoing.

In other news, we recently launched a podcast, *Sober Conversations*, creating another space for open and honest dialogue around addiction within South Asian communities as a way to challenge the stigma.

We are also contributing to wider research, with a recent feature on the Salik Project UK website highlighting work by Adam Khan at the University of Lincoln on how faith leaders and services can better respond to addiction in Muslim communities.

What This Work Has Started To Achieve

Through this work, we have begun to:

- Open conversations where there was previously silence
- Reach individuals who would not typically engage with services
- Support women through practical intervention
- Work with mosques to address addiction openly
- Build links between communities and recovery organisations
- Gather research and insight grounded in real experiences and feed it back to Public Health



What We're Hearing

gap in intergenerational understanding, with participants highlighting the need for schools to play a stronger role in influencing the choices young people make.

Across all of our conversations within South Asian communities, a number of consistent themes have emerged.

Addiction is present—but often hidden. Stigma remains one of the biggest barriers, with concepts such as izzat and sharam shaping how situations are understood and managed. This often leads to silence within families and delays in seeking support until issues reach a crisis point.

Families and carers are carrying much of the burden. Many described managing complex situations behind closed doors—holding families together, navigating emotional strain, and taking on responsibility without guidance or support. There is also a wider lack of knowledge around how to support someone experiencing addiction, including where to go for help and what support is available.

It is also clear that **addiction cannot be understood in isolation.** Participants spoke about the connection between substance use and wider issues such as mental health, trauma, social pressures, and the availability of drugs. Concerns were also raised around drug-related criminality, with some describing the visibility of drug dealing within communities and a perception that not enough is being done to address it.



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Alongside this, there were **growing concerns around emerging and visible drug trends**, particularly nitrous oxide. Participants spoke about a lack of awareness around its risks, with discarded canisters commonly seen in local areas and reports of people inhaling balloons while driving—highlighting both the normalisation of use and associated safety risks.

Women described facing additional layers of pressure, including family expectations, stigma, with concerns around safety in areas where drugs were openly used and sold. Many highlighted the burden of carrying family honour and being blamed when someone turned to drugs.

Young people are navigating increasing complexity, with changing drug trends and greater accessibility via social media, but limited honest and culturally relevant information. Participants also highlighted a gap in intergenerational understanding, alongside a need for schools to play a stronger role in shaping the choices young people make.

There was also a clear **call for more outreach and community-based work**. While mosques are widely seen as trusted and influential spaces, some participants felt they are not currently doing enough in this area, despite the important role they could play in educating communities and supporting open conversations. Mosques were seen as an untapped resource.

Finally, a key insight from this work is that many people **simply do not know what support exists**, or how to access it. Even where services are available, there is often uncertainty around how they work or whether they are appropriate.

This is not just a service gap—it is an awareness and engagement gap.

Working Together

We are clear that this work cannot be done alone and we have only just scratched the surface.

Moving forward, this requires drawing on the existing strengths of South Asian-led organisations, working collectively in a focused way to raise awareness, challenge stigma, and utilise community networks to encourage people to access professional support.

For us, this means creating opportunities to share learning, strengthen connections between communities and services, and ensure that South Asian lived experiences sit at the heart of how support is shaped, developed and delivered by professional recovery services.

By working together in this way, we can begin to create a more accessible and responsive system for those who need it.

The Salik Project UK has been heartened by the response from the community and their willingness to help us tackle this issue head-on with requests from individuals and groups asking us how they can get involved and collaborate. This indicates a proactive attitude and momentum building within Rochdale's South Asian communities which we will do our best to nurture ensuring the issue of addiction always remains squarely on the public agenda.



Looking Ahead

This work started from lived experience. It continues because people are willing to share their experiences with us.

Our focus now is to build on this—continuing to listen, expanding our outreach, and strengthening the connection between South Asian communities and the support available to them. Central to this is our role in gathering community-led insight, ensuring that lived experience is captured, understood, and used to shape how addiction is approached.

This includes developing our community engagement, creating more spaces for open conversation, and ensuring that the voices we hear are fed back into public health and recovery services—informing how support is understood and delivered, with the aim of creating culturally sensitive pathways into existing recovery services.



Contact Us to Collaborate



Contact us if you would like to receive our reports

contact@salikprojectk.org

With special thanks to the following organisations for their continued support



Rochdale Recovery Communities



funded by

