



15th January 2025

MEDIA STATEMENT

Muslim Women's Network Helpline marks its 10 year anniversary

Today, the Muslim Women's Network Helpline proudly celebrates its **10-year anniversary**, marking a decade of supporting Muslim women. Since its launch, the culturally sensitive confidential service has been contacted **30500 times** and has helped **11,000 service users**. It now helps more than **1400 service users annually**. The helpline can be contacted via phone, email, webchat, text and more recently through the Amal Safety mobile phone app, which provides useful information and can be used to record incidents.

Most callers contact the helpline about **domestic abuse**, forced marriage honour-based abuse, sexual abuse, mental health and other related issues such as homelessness, finance / debt and divorce etc. They are supported by trained multi-lingual staff who help to involve police, find a refuge, advice on escape plans, provide safety advice, secure emergency funds and make counselling and safeguarding referrals etc.

The Muslim Women's Network Helpline is a **life-saving service**. According to a report by the National Police Chiefs' Council (March 2024), domestic abuse victims are more likely to **attempt suicide** and minority ethnic women are slightly over represented in the statistics. The helpline has steered many women away from suicidal thoughts. For example: *one woman wanted to end her life and called the helpline while she was on her way to the train station, as she had planned to throw herself in front of a train. The Helpline staff talked her out of doing this and arranged follow up help with the mental health crisis team immediately.*

Muslim Women's Network UK Operations Director, Shameem Hussain said: *"Contributing factors to Muslim women attempting suicide often include lack of community support networks, a sense of shame, the co-existence of depression, insecure immigration status or the lack of confidence or language barriers to ask for help or not being fully understood."*

There is also over representation of minority ethnic women in **domestic homicide rates** by 22% (*Lord Sharpe of Epson, House of Lords, 22 Jan 2024*). The Muslim Women's Network Helpline therefore plays a crucial role in protecting women from being harmed: *One woman informed the helpline that her brothers had beaten her up after they discovered she was a lesbian and in a relationship with another woman. They had even involved a faith healer to carry out some kind of exorcism. The helpline supported her to move away from her family. In another example, a husband continued to turn up at the victim's house despite a non-molestation order prohibiting contact. The police did not arrest him - the helpline had to intervene and contact the police.*

The Muslim Women's Network helpline also deals with **forced marriage**: *One young woman informed us that her family were forcing her into a marriage. She was prevented from even going to work unless she agreed. The Helpline involved the police who visited the family home and she was rescued and placed in a refuge in another city.*

Muslim Women's Network UK Operations Director, Shameem Hussain added: *"Many of the women who contact the helpline are at a key decision point in their lives and many at or before crisis point. Around one in five of the women are impacted by the **cost of living crisis** and many have children and some are pregnant. Sadly, a few even consider having an abortion because they cannot afford everyday items."*

The helpline also provides vital information for Muslim Women's Network UK's advocacy work. For example, the helpline has had to rescue women who have been tricked into leaving the country and being abandoned abroad, sometimes with children. According to government data, there were 28 transnational abandonment cases in the first 6 months of 2024. We have asked **transnational abandonment** to become a specific offence so men are held accountable for this type of domestic abuse.

We would particularly like to thank our funders past and present without whom our vital work would not be possible. Our current funders are: The National Lottery Fund, John Ellerman Foundation, Coutts Bank Foundation and Pears Foundation. Previous funders included: Comic Relief, Henry Smith Charity, Tudor Trust, Lloyds Bank Foundation and the Government Cabinet Office.

The helpline operates 10am-4pm Monday to Friday and can be contacted via phone, email, webchat, text and Amal Mobile phone app and further information can be found on www.mwnhelpline.co.uk. Although the vast majority of service users are Muslim women, the helpline is also open any person of faith or no faith.

Additional Information

- Media enquiries can be directed to: contact@mwnuk.co.uk or 0121 2369000
- Muslim Women's Network UK is a national charity and more information can be found on its website: <https://www.mwnuk.co.uk>
- MWN Helpline (national specialist faith and culturally sensitive helpline) can be contacted on: TEL: 0800 999 5786 / Email: info@mwnhelpline.co.uk / Text: 07415 206 936 and further Information can be found here: <https://www.mwnhelpline.co.uk/index.php>