

# HELPLINE SERVICE THREE YEAR EVALUATION (2022- 2024)

---

Supported by:  
Amber Shotton –  
Charity Sector  
Consultant



“A butterfly reminds us that change is possible, transformation can happen, more importantly, when we take time out for ourselves we allow for healing to happen. Therefore the three words I would use to describe [our] impact is: **transformation, hope and rebirth**”

*MWN Helpline Support Worker*

# Contents

<b>1. Report Summary</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Background	4
1.2 Overview	4
1.3 Addressing needs and impact	5
1.4 Challenges faced	5
1.5 Recommendations for future improvements	5
<b>2. Who are the helpline service users?</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Overview	6
2.2 Age profile	6
2.3 Ethnicity and faith	6
2.4 Disability and immigration	7
2.5 Location	8
2.6 Issues and needs	9
<b>3. What the helpline achieved in three years</b>	<b>12</b>
3.1 Women better informed to deal with their issues	12
3.2 Women feel heard, less isolated and empowered	13
3.3 Women protected from harm	13
3.4 Women helped to find their voices	15
3.5 Women provided with critical financial support	16
3.6 New IDVA role having a positive impact	17
<b>4. Contributing towards reducing femicide</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>5. How the helpline manages risks</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>6. How the helpline achieves success</b>	<b>20</b>
6.1 Skilled and culturally-aware helpline workers	20
6.2 Training and capacity building staff	21
6.3 Understanding language and communication needs	21
<b>7. External factors challenging helpline success</b>	<b>22</b>
7.1 Helpline under recognised as a domestic abuse service	22
7.2 Racism and Islamophobia	22
7.3 Reduction in funding / cost of living	23



<b>8. Recommendations and the way forward</b>	<b>24</b>
8.1 Investment in the use of digital technology despite impact	24
8.2 Trauma informed organisation that nurtures its team	24
8.3 Team learning and development	24
8.4 Team structures	25
8.5 Discussion with funders	25
8.6 Consider helpline accreditation	25
<b>Appendix - External Training Provision 2022 – 2024</b>	<b>26</b>



# 1. Report Summary

## 1.1 Background

Muslim Women's Network UK is a national registered charity that promotes social equality and justice for Muslim women and girls. In 2015 the charity set up Muslim Women's Network Helpline (MWN) to meet the growing demand from Muslim women for a safe space to talk. For 10 years, MWN Helpline has been providing confidential, culturally-sensitive and non-judgemental support to those experiencing forms of abuse and barriers. Every year the helpline supports around 1,400 service users to access information and advice, seek emotional support, IDVA and caseworker support, counselling, hardship funds and referrals to statutory and non-statutory services.

MWN Helpline is recognised as a 'by and for' service delivering specific domestic abuse support to minoritised women. Two thirds of service users contact the helpline about abuse, including domestic abuse, honour-based abuse, sexual abuse, tech abuse, spiritual abuse and intimate image abuse. However, the helpline is not limited to those types of abuse, as it also offers support in addictions and housing amongst others. Trained multi-lingual staff guide service users to make informed choices about their lives.

For many vulnerable women from minoritised backgrounds, MWN Helpline is a life-saving service. While majority of the service users are Muslim women, the helpline is open to any person of faith or no faith.

## 1.2 Overview

This report provides a 3-year evaluation on the operations and impact of MWN Helpline. Using helpline data covering the period from 2022 to 2024, staff feedback and interview with Helpline Manager to present insight on how the helpline creates pathways of support for victims of gender-based violence. The findings underpin core helpline activities, such as guidance, IDVA services, counselling and referrals to agencies were key drivers of impact. Challenges faced in service delivery have been identified with recommendations put forward for future development.

The wider long-term organisation goals of Muslim Women's Network UK are referred to in this report to highlight ways in which the helpline service achieves this:

- ⇒ Empowering more women and girls with knowledge about their rights to protect themselves;
- ⇒ Supporting women to have a voice and advocate for themselves, their families and communities;
- ⇒ Reducing the risk of harm;
- ⇒ Improving mental health and wellbeing.

The evaluation of MWN Helpline was supported by Charity Consultant Amber Shotton who had facilitated an impact workshop with helpline staff.

### 1.3 Addressing needs and impact

The evaluation has identified that MWN Helpline offers a tiered system of support to meet the needs of service users. As summarised on the figure below the support provision can either be general or specific and tailored. Often it is short-term with a select proportion of individuals requiring longer-term support.

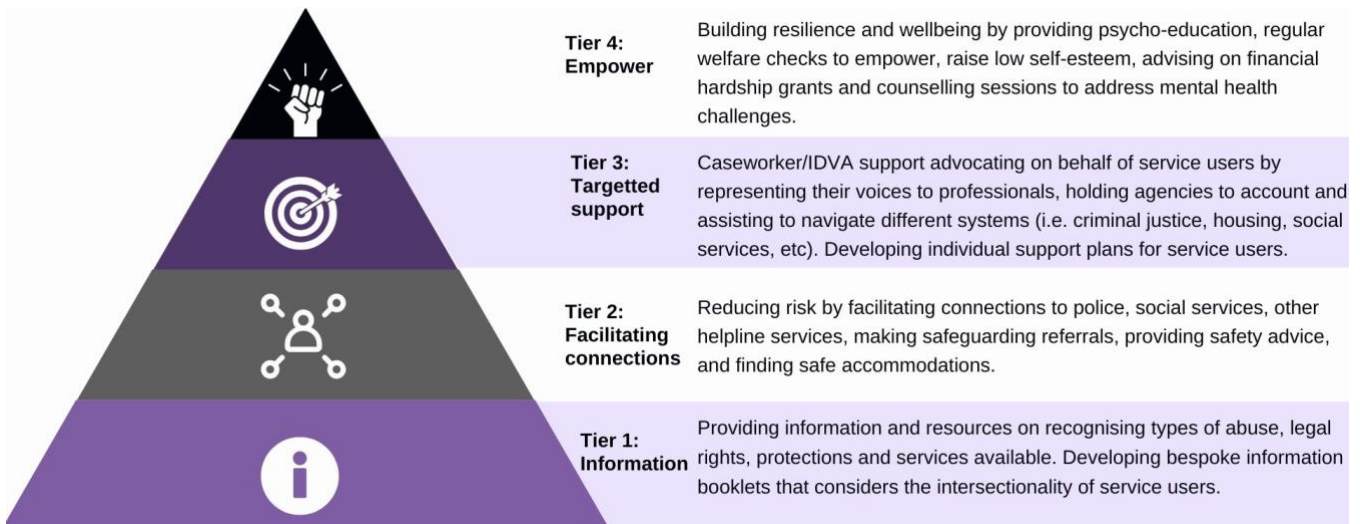


Figure 1: MWN Helpline Tiered Support System

This holistic approach ensures the helpline is person-centred recognising the needs of service users to be diverse, complex and multifaceted. As well as being a bridge facilitating access to statutory and non-statutory services to those who otherwise would remain silent. Taking such strides delivers a service that empowers and champions meaningful positive changes.

### 1.4 Challenges faced

It was evident throughout the evaluation that the charity encounters and works to overcome multiple ongoing challenges, including but not limited to:

- ⇒ Gaining recognition as a domestic abuse organisation among funders;
- ⇒ Navigating cultural sensitivities surrounding the acknowledgment of domestic abuse;
- ⇒ The impact of external factors such as racism, anti-Muslim hate, and economic difficulties.

### 1.5 Recommendations for future improvements

There are a number of recommendations made throughout the report that will enhance service delivery:

- ⇒ Investing in digital technology to improve helpline operations;
- ⇒ Continuing to provide trauma-informed care to staff and service users;
- ⇒ Expanding training and development for helpline workers to address streamlining service delivery.

In conclusion, the MWN Helpline plays a crucial role in supporting Muslim women facing domestic abuse and related issues, while continuously adapting to the evolving needs of its service users.

## 2. Who are the helpline services users?

### 2.1 Overview

Over the last three years (2022-2024), MWN Helpline was contacted around 11,200 times and supported over **4,300 service users, averaging 1,400 per year**. In that period the helpline saw a surge in complex issues, which influenced initial average call times rising from **24 minutes in 2022 to 34 minutes by 2024**.

Majority of the calls were from women (96%) with a small proportion being men or unknown/other. Therefore, throughout this evaluation, service users will be referred to as women and occasionally people/individuals.

The most common pathways for accessing support from the helpline based on order of preference were: **phone calls (33%), emails (29%), leaving a voice message (22%), webchat (9%) and text/WhatsApp (6%)**. Overall, verbal (55%) was the preferred mode of communication compared with written (45%) messages (e.g. email, text, Amal Safety app, webchat). The varied channels of communication offered ensures accessibility, safety, and respect for individual needs.

Helpline staff are trained to sensitively gather a broad spectrum of data during calls, which helps to understand the needs and challenges of service users. The information is also used to identify trends that are used to develop and tailor the helpline service to meet changing needs.

### 2.2 Age profile

Age profile has remained **consistent with women aged between 31-40** being most likely to contact the helpline. Although, broadly speaking around 60% of women were between the ages of 26 to 50 when contacting the helpline. It is interesting to compare this to national statistics. According to Crime Survey for England and Wales (2024), young people aged 16-24 are the highest percentage of victims of domestic abuse and that women aged 16 -19 are more likely to be victims than women aged 25 years and over. The differences may indicate to minority women preferring to contact 'by and for' domestic abuse services to report abuse than statutory services.

### 2.3 Ethnicity and faith

**An average of 94% of helpline contacts were from those who described their faith as Muslim.** Whilst faith was predominantly Muslim, there were those of other faiths (i.e. Hindu, Sikh, Christian) and non-faith contacting the helpline. Almost half (45%) of service users were of Pakistani heritage followed by those of other South Asian and Arab heritages. The breadth of languages spoken by the helpline team ensures that the helpline service is inclusive, particularly to those who may face language barriers elsewhere.

## 2.4 Disability and immigration status

Although the proportion of service users with disabilities remained below the UK average (**19% for women<sup>1</sup>**), the helpline had seen a consistent yearly increase: **6% (2022), 11% (2023), and 13% (2024)**. This change can be attributed to the helpline team having undergone an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) training in 2023-2024. Therefore, better understanding of EDI and sensitive engagement with service users can in part explain the higher reporting of disability.

Granting most had secure immigration status, the helpline over the three years noticed **insecure immigration status** increase from **10%** (2022 and 2023) to **13%** (2024). Those with precarious immigration, including spousal visas, work visas, no recourse to public funds and transnational abandonment have increasingly sought support. An example of how the helpline assists women in those situations is demonstrated on case study 1.

### Case study 1: Transnational Marriage Abandonment

Elif was manipulated by her husband into boarding a flight on the understanding the family were going on a holiday, but they had to take separate flights. When she arrived to Morocco, her husband told her that her spousal visa had expired and that he was divorcing her. With no way of returning to the UK and having no access to her young children, a family member in the UK contacted MWN Helpline for support. They had informed the helpline that Elif was a victim of transnational marriage abandonment and domestic abuse.

An Arabic speaking Helpline Support Worker and an IDVA supported Elif while she was abandoned in Morocco. During the rapport building, Elif disclosed the abuse she and her children have suffered, this involved allegations of child abuse and sexual assault.

**Direct impact** – Rapport building with Elif enabled her to feel empowered to speak up about the abuse. The time and effort provided her with the confidence to challenge outcomes from investigations statutory services had conducted. In an email she expressed her gratitude -

***“Thank you, Muslim Women's Network for giving me the courage to remain steadfast and not give up.”***

**Indirect impact** – The referral pathways with multiple agencies facilitated by MWN Helpline ensured information sharing and coordinated responses to safeguard and support Elif and her children. The helpline involved social services, the children's schools and other professionals. The IDVA engaged the services of the police and contacted the designated safeguarding lead of the children's school. A MARAC referral was made and the Helpline Support Worker provided continuous language support.

---

<sup>1</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/disability/articles/disabilitybyagesexanddeprivationenglandandwales/census2021>

## 2.5 Location

A proportion (average 17%) withheld their location information. Reasons included fear of information being shared with social services and engagement taking place via emails rather than over the phone. Respecting anonymity of service users, the helpline does not push for location information unless the women are comfortable to share it.

As shown on figure 2 the geographical reach tended to be within 5 regions: London, West Midlands, North West, South East and Yorkshire and Humberside. Although, a substantial proportion of service users were mainly based in London (25%) and the West Midlands (20%). This aligns with demographic expectations - London has the largest Muslim population in the UK, and the West Midlands — where MWNUK is headquartered — has the second largest.



**Figure 2: Location of Service Users Contacting MWN Helpline**

There were minor fluctuations across all other regions, such as increases in Wales and East Midlands, which is likely to indicate increased awareness of the helpline in other parts of the country and shows that it truly is a national service. Interestingly, on average 5% of cases every year were from women outside of the country, but who had links to the UK and included transnational abandonment cases.

*Note: If service users with unknown location are removed from the dataset, then service users from the West Midlands and London will be higher i.e. around 25% and just 30% respectively, which may be helpful when comparing data to previous evaluations.*

## 2.6 Issues and needs

The helpline data has shown the same key issues consistently emerged as primary reasons women sought support. A clear upward trend was observed from 2022 to 2024 in the proportion of women requesting help for:

- ⇒ **Poor mental health and feelings** - rising from **43% to 59%**
- ⇒ **Domestic abuse** - increasing from **34% to 40%**
- ⇒ **Increased isolation/loneliness** - rising sharply from **9% to 32%**
- ⇒ **Difficulties arising from divorce** - increasing from **19% to 21%**
- ⇒ **Money and financial challenges** – rising from **17% to 23%**

Individually the trends noted may not appear connected, but they are collectively known as primary indicators of violence against women and girls (VAWG)<sup>2</sup>. While 40% of women cited domestic abuse as their primary reason for contacting the helpline, in cases where women reached out primarily about divorce, mental health, isolation, or financial difficulties were frequently found to have domestic abuse as an underlying or associated factor.

Divorce can present additional complexities for Muslim women who have entered into a ‘Nikkah’ (an Islamic marriage) that took place in the UK. Notably in 2024, the helpline data indicated more than a quarter of women who disclosed their marital status had marriages conducted solely through Nikkah. Consequently, the lack of legal recognition for this form of marriage has restricted the financial rights available to those women upon divorce, therefore escalating their risk of poverty.

New indicators to capture the subtle types of abuse were introduced during the past three years to more clearly demonstrate the nuances of domestic abuse. These have included economic/financial abuse, spiritual abuse, tech abuse, psychological, emotional abuse and coercive control. Based upon the new indicators, for 2024 service users that report domestic abuse showed:

- ⇒ **49%** reported **psychological abuse**;
- ⇒ **50%** had experienced **financial or economic abuse**;
- ⇒ **45%** reported **physical abuse**;
- ⇒ **19%** experiencing **sexual abuse**.

Most women were affected by a combination of all of these issues. An increasing volume of coercive control and psychological abuse was noted especially for service users that disclosed non-physical abuse.

A further worrying trend linked to domestic abuse has been the significant increase in **transnational abandonment**, which increased from **only 2 cases in 2022 to 17 cases by 2024**. Transnational marriage abandonment is a form of domestic abuse involving controlling and coercive behaviour. It refers to the practice whereby the sponsor’s partner or their family member, abandons or strands

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nationaldahelpline.org.uk/what-is-abuse/>

the partner abroad, usually without financial resources, and with the aim of preventing them from returning to the UK. It may involve children who are either abandoned with, or separated from, the abandoned partner.

In addition to domestic abuse, many service users were also contacting the helpline about other forms of specific abuse such as rape, stalking, harassment, honour-based abuse, forced marriage, intimate image abuse and female genital mutilation. By 2024, the helpline data highlighted that **61%** of service users raised a form of VAWG issue – with two thirds specifically raising domestic abuse and one third reporting other forms of gender-based violence. For example, annually the helpline deals with **30 forced marriage cases**, while **honour-base abuse cases rose from 51 (2022) to 62 (2023) to 80 (2024)**. Another emerging issue included using technology to carry out abuse and control victims – around **5% of service users indicated tech abuse**, which included intimate image abuse and monitoring.

Most women, regardless of their cultural background, find the first steps of acknowledging and reporting domestic abuse extremely difficult, especially because the perpetrators are often spouses or other family members. An analysis of who the perpetrators of abuse were and their relationship to the victim showed that the majority were men (approx. 71%): husband (67%), boyfriend (2%) and father (2%). Other perpetrators of abuse were parents (5%), siblings (2%) and in laws (4%).

When exploring the subject of domestic abuse within Muslim communities, there are multiple studies that suggest that **Muslim women are less likely to recognise their own experiences of domestic abuse** due to a number of factors. These factors include:

- ⇒ **Power**: a study from the University of Huddersfield (2018)<sup>3</sup> stated “victims who believed perpetrators had a divine right to exert their will on their spouses were more likely to endure the abuse, under the false notion it was their *‘kismet’* (fate).”
- ⇒ **Patriarchy**: with ‘patriarchal norms in Muslim societies [being] strong and that these norms [can] be misused to justify violence against women.’<sup>4</sup>
- ⇒ **Policing**: racially minoritised victims of domestic abuse often suffer a double disadvantage through inadequate domestic abuse provision in general, and secondly the policing methods that do not cater for culturally specific needs.<sup>5</sup>

The Helpline staff found that service users did not always immediately disclose domestic abuse or even recognise their experiences as abuse: **“often women will call in for one issue, but at the heart of it lies domestic abuse once we begin to unpick it”**.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/161102546.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325827134\\_Seeking\\_Help\\_in\\_Domestic\\_Violence\\_Among\\_Muslim\\_Women\\_in\\_Muslim-Majority\\_and\\_Non-Muslim-Majority\\_Countries\\_A\\_Literature\\_Review](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325827134_Seeking_Help_in_Domestic_Violence_Among_Muslim_Women_in_Muslim-Majority_and_Non-Muslim-Majority_Countries_A_Literature_Review)

<sup>5</sup> <https://hyphenonline.com/2025/05/13/shaista-gohir-domestic-violence-government-culturally-specific-funding-muslim-women/>

This is a societal and sector issues as shared by Donna Covey CBE, Chief Executive, AVA (Against Violence and Abuse), stating ***“it is hard for women to recognise when they have experienced domestic abuse. And it can be even harder to talk about it or ask for help. Where women have experienced other forms of disadvantage, such as substance use, mental health, or homelessness, this can make the problem worse. The only way to break this cycle of silence is to make sure that wherever a woman goes for help, she meets practitioners who are able to ask about abuse with skill and compassion. Only then can we begin to transform the response to domestic abuse in the UK<sup>6</sup>.”***

Having multiple identities, such as being both British and Muslim, can be complex as it involves navigating potentially conflicting cultural values, social expectations, and personal beliefs. Supporting some service users was sometimes challenging when they themselves had not considered the complexity and nuances across their identities. Some faced challenges in reconciling their Muslim faith with their British culture. Some experienced discrimination from their own communities while others in mainstream services. For example, women requesting they are moved from refuges or housing due to anti-Muslim hatred/ discrimination they had experienced.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.agendaalliance.org/news/mental-health-services-failing-to-ask-women-about-domestic-abuse/#:~:text=%E2%80%9CIt%20is%20hard%20for%20women,can%20make%20the%20problem%20worse.>

### 3. What has the helpline achieved in 3 years?

#### 3.1 Women are better informed to deal with their issues

MWN Helpline supports women by not only providing them with essential information to make the best decisions for their safety and wellbeing, but does so through a timely and culturally sensitive lens.

Helpline Support Workers enable women to understand and recognise their experiences (**62% of women reported feeling more listened to**).<sup>7</sup> Listening to the women and building trust quickly is essential to ensure that the information and support is tailored. This has resulted in improving women’s awareness of their rights, as shown by the outcome indicator ‘**clients feeling better informed**’ averaging at **88%** over the three years (see figure 3).

The helpline team have increased their efforts to engage with statutory and non-statutory agencies over the years. By 2024, **15% of clients were supported by other services due to the team’s active referrals**. The team reflected that improvements in internal systems, such as the procedures database had made it easier for them to access referral agencies more easily.

The person-centred approach ensures women feel more able to implement and put the skills and knowledge received into practise, as evidenced by **57% of clients being confident to deal with problem** by 2024. These changes are likely to have longer-term impact - improving women’s mental health and wellbeing.

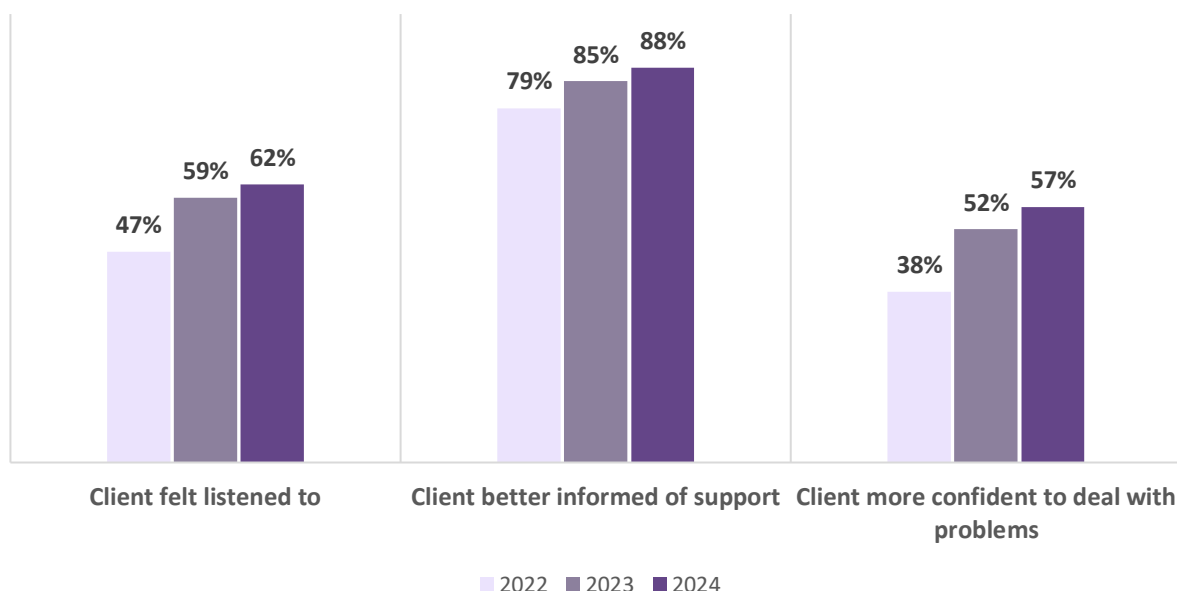


Figure 3: Service User Impact Indicators

<sup>7</sup> Based on Helpline data 2024

### 3.2 Women feel heard, less isolated and empowered

Over the three years, the helpline has increased the proportion of time invested in the initial enquiry with the service user to build rapport and confidence, and this correlates with earlier referenced improvements in disclosures, such as disability and insecure immigration status. The average time spent on the initial call was as follows: **24 mins (2022), 28 mins (2023) and 34 mins (2024)**.

Once trust has been established, the team adopts a solution-focused practice to create a strengths-based framework intended to shift self-perception and to remove barriers. This approach is likely to have contributed to year-on-year increases in service user's confidence in being able to challenge or leave abusive situations (see figure 4). In addition, their capacity to listen and connect with the women possibly influenced reducing feelings of isolation. As the outcome indicator '**feeling less isolation**' reveals in 2022 9% of services users reported this, but by 2024 this had risen to 42%.

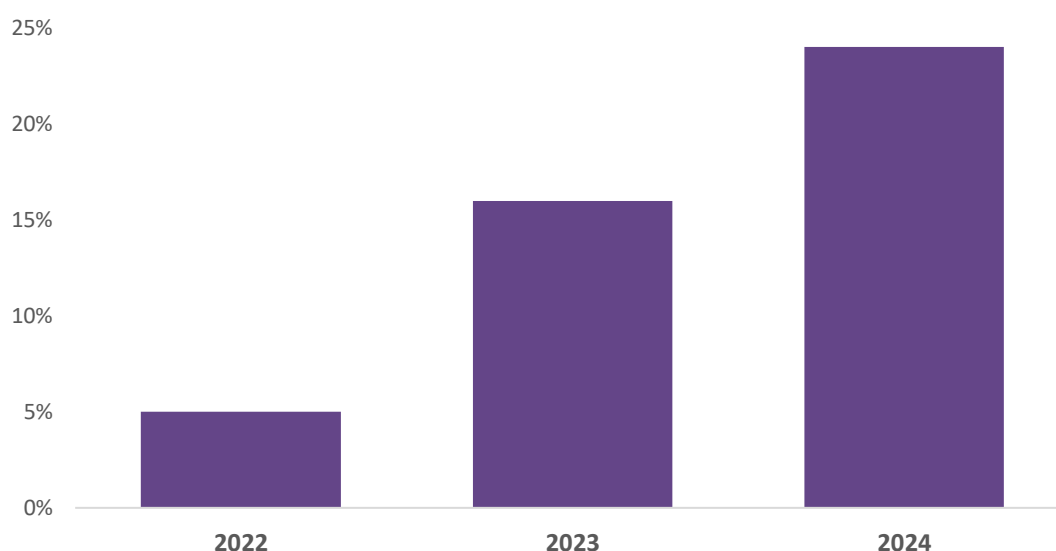


Figure 4: Impact indicator – More confident to challenge or leave abusive/harmful situation

### 3.3 Women protected from harm

MWN Helpline saw an increase in having to contact the police and social services to safeguard victims of abuse. There was police involvement in 21% of cases in 2022, which rose to 25% by 2024. Similarly, in 2022 the helpline involved social services in 23% of cases and by 2024 this had risen to 32% of cases. Sometimes the police and social services were already involved prior to the victims contacting the helpline.

Between 2022 and 2024, the helpline supported women in securing both short-term and long-term safe housing. Respectively assisted 85 women, including those with children into emergency accommodation. Considering that **'over 10 times as many women are sleeping rough in England than government data suggests'**<sup>8</sup>, the early intervention from the helpline yields significant indirect impact as more women are being protected from rough sleeping. Shown on case study 2 is an example of how the helpline prevented forced homelessness of a young mother and her child.

### **Case Study 2: Mother and child protected from harm**

A young woman from Pakistan was controlled and abused by her husband and his family. She was not allowed to go out unless chaperoned and made to do all the household chores. The coercive control extended to restricting access to money and contact with her family in Pakistan. It became worse after the birth of her child as efforts were made to throw her out of the family home whilst keeping the newborn. Given the escalating risk of forced homelessness, MWN Helpline arranged for her to be rescued with her child. She is now living in safe accommodation.

**Direct Impact** – Mother and baby prevented from serious emotional and physical harm.

**Indirect Impact** – Early intervention is likely to have saved the NHS, police and social services considerable time and money.

The helpline's early interventions are also likely to be saving public service costs. Government figures suggests that there is an estimated cost for a single victim of domestic abuse of £34,015<sup>9</sup>. With MWN Helpline supporting over 500 women specifically affected by domestic abuse per year, they are making a significant contribution to society through their early intervention.

In recognising the elevated risk of suicide among domestic abuse survivors, the helpline's interventions over those three years helped prevent self-harm and suicide in 90 cases. Service users were also referred to counselling, with an average of 115 referrals made per year. Additionally, the helpline directly provided counselling to approximately 70 service users annually.

To help safeguard women, MWNUK formally launched the Amal Safety app in 2024 dedicated to Fawziyah Javed who was murdered by her husband. The Amal Safety app is designed to support victims by helping them to identify various types of abuse, offering anonymity, safety advice, enabling incident logging, and providing information on available support. For women concerned about their communications being monitored, the app is password protected and also allows contact with the helpline. During its pilot in 2024, the app engaged the helpline 8 times.



<sup>8</sup> [Women's Rough Sleeping Census 2024 Report](#)

<sup>9</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/918897/horr107.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/918897/horr107.pdf)



## Interview with Helpline Manager

When women call, they initially only state that they have a single issue and only require one piece of information. But through the team's professional curiosity and skilled approach in asking clarifying questions that we begin to unpick the web of abuse from start to end. Often, they might not see it as abuse because it's normalised – because they're women. First, it's your father or your brother with underlying misogynistic views that is reinforced in the community and society. You then marry and find yourself in a situation where these experiences continue and may subtly increase. However, through our conversation we will explain that abuse doesn't have to be someone being physically violent towards you.

For example, we've had cases where the physical abuse isn't direct. It's indirect - banging doors, threatening moves to throw chairs or by raising their hand, but doesn't hit you. It is our experience from the past three years that this is the predecessor to physical harm. We've had women sharing that *"he threw banana skin at me"* and then a week later he threw a suitcase at her. Or he poured a packet of crisps over her head. And when directly asked about abuse their response is *"oh no, he doesn't hit me."* So, we [staff] have to then say what you're telling us is concerning.

We train our staff to be clear on what appears to be physical abuse and that just because it's not a slap, a kick or a punch, it is still abuse. I don't think they even realise it or they do realise it, but they needed somebody who looks like them, talks like them and has similar experiences to tell them the reality.

### 3.5 Women provided with critical financial support

MWN Helpline is able to annually offer a limited number of hardship grants for emergencies including food, clothing, toiletries, household items and travel. Over the past three years, demand for these grants had nearly doubled (see table 1). Helpline data showed that 16% of service users reported being directly affected by the cost-of-living crisis. Additionally, the crisis had a pronounced impact on women fleeing domestic abuse, with 41% identifying it as a significant concern. However, on account of available budget remaining unchanged the rate of successful applications declined.

Hardship Fund	2022	2023	2024
Average Hardship Fund Values	£149.00	£173.00	£252.00
Lowest Value	£50.00	£30.00	£40.00
Highest Value	£290.00	£430.00	£1,200.00
Women Applied	24	36	45
Women Successful	11	17	13
Success Rate	46%	47%	29%

**Table 1: MWN Helpline Hardship Fund**

As the cases needing hardship funds have grown, more donations are now needed to meet this increased demand. For example, in 2024 the highest hardship grant was £1,200 for a transnational abandonment case, where the helpline contributed towards costs of return flights to UK for a mother and her children.

Additionally, the helpline has observed a notable rise in applications from refugees and asylum seekers awaiting decisions on their status, as well as from women who have arrived on care worker visas.

### 3.6 New IDVA role having a positive impact

An IDVA is an Independent Domestic Violence Advocate who provides intensive, long-term support to women who have experienced domestic violence. In 2024, MWN UK was able to implement a key recommendation from their caseworker evaluation in 2023 by successfully obtaining additional funding to train one caseworker to become an IDVA. It is widely recognised that there is still a significant shortfall of IDVA coverage in England and Wales<sup>10</sup>.

Given the rise in complex cases identified as safeguarding and/or medium-high risks, an IDVA became a crucial component in the tiered system of support the helpline delivers. In 2024, the newly trained IDVA had supported 34 women, working in a culturally responsive way that was tailored to individual needs. While length of support averages at 4-months, interactions with the IDVA developed bespoke individual plans that was centred on empowering service users to manage their safety, self-esteem and confidence.

The team reflected that the introduction of an IDVA had helped to realign the time needed to manage additional calls by the helpline team.

<sup>10</sup>[https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimservicesenglandandwales/november2020#:~:text=According%20to%20the%202019%20practitioner,with%202017%20\(Table%201\).](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabusevictimservicesenglandandwales/november2020#:~:text=According%20to%20the%202019%20practitioner,with%202017%20(Table%201).)

## 4. Contributing towards reducing femicide and suicide

MWN Helpline empowers women to take positive action and deal with challenges confidently. Although, it is difficult to directly attribute the helpline's work in reducing femicide, it is likely to play a key role in protecting Muslim women experiencing domestic abuse.

It is clear from the Femicide Census that most women are killed either by family, partners or someone known to them and that the majority of killings were committed in the home (see figure 6).



Figure 6: Data taken from <https://www.femicidecensus.org/>

More worryingly, the intersectionality of gender and race sees minority ethnic women being disproportionately affected, with **24% of domestic homicides happening to women of minority ethnic yet making up only 18% of the population**, an over representation of 33%<sup>11</sup>. This has increased from 22% in 2022, which is deeply concerning as funding to specialist services are too often underfunded.

The threat of suicide is significantly increased in domestic abuse victims, which is also elevated for minority ethnic women<sup>12</sup>. Although, the helpline is unable to completely attribute its support to the direct reduction on suicide or femicide, it is making a significant contribution to a community that is often overlooked and underserved. For example, as women who have experienced non-fatal strangulation are at more risk of a domestic homicide - this is now recorded as an indicator and Helpline Support Workers are trained to inform victims about their increased risk of harm and that this type of abuse is also now a criminal offence.

<sup>11</sup> Source: Vulnerability Knowledge and Practice Programme (VKPP): Domestic Homicides and Suspected - Victim Suicides 2020-2024 (Year 4 Report) [https://www.vkpp.org.uk/assets/Year-4-Report\\_publication-with-footnote.pdf](https://www.vkpp.org.uk/assets/Year-4-Report_publication-with-footnote.pdf) - page 29 section 3.3.1

<sup>12</sup> <https://news.npcc.police.uk/releases/report-reveals-scale-of-domestic-homicide-and-suicides-by-victims-of-domestic-abuse>

## 5. How the helpline manages risks

MWN Helpline embeds a proactive approach to managing risks to protect those accessing their service. The helpline has implemented resources from SafeLives to ensure consistency in domestic abuse risk assessment. Training on safeguarding are regularly attended by helpline staff to understand the systems and strategies in place for adult and children safeguarding. Other resources from statutory agencies and learning from internal safeguarding quarterly reports are also applied for regularity purposes.

Review of the internal safeguarding reports and feedback from helpline staff discern the benefits and challenges on how risks and safety is managed on the helpline. These have included:

- ⇒ **Domestic abuse risk checklist:** the helpline uses SafeLives *Domestic Abuse Stalking Honour-based* (DASH) resources to guide and identify cases of high risk. The DASH checklist enables the team to assess levels of risk, escalating those where referral to MARAC<sup>13</sup> is required. However, similar to other by and for led domestic abuse services, the helpline has raised concerns around cultural competency and intersectional framing of the DASH checklist. The tool does not adequately reflect the specific forms of abuse minority ethnic women are likely to experience neither considers patterns of abusive behaviour carried out by multiple perpetrators. To address these gaps, internal training around how to best use the DASH was delivered.
- ⇒ **Right Help, Right Time:** the helpline refers to the *Right Help, Right Time* (RHRT) guidance developed by Birmingham Safeguarding Partnership. The RHRT provides the team with a framework on how to assess the needs of families affected by domestic abuse, identify potential risks and the actions to take to support and to safeguard.
- ⇒ **Information sharing:** working with safeguarding bodies to implement training delivered to and from statutory services for consistency and multi-agency collaboration. For example, the Helpline Manager and Caseworker have been involved in MARAC meetings and local safeguarding hubs. This helps to increase recognition of the helpline to external partners and facilitates in the understanding of cultural nuances, which often is lacking within the mainstream services.
- ⇒ **Safeguarding quarterly report:** every quarter the Helpline Manager and Operations Director meet with the Safeguarding Lead, Dr. Iram Sattar who is also a Board Trustee of MWNUK. Between the years 2022 and 2024, 12 quarterly meetings were held. Those meetings highlighted good risk management practice within the team; effectiveness of safeguarding practices, where further improvements can be made (i.e. updating safeguarding policies and procedures) and the learning from cases where breach of confidentiality was required.

---

<sup>13</sup> Multi-agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC)

## 6. How the helpline achieves success

### 6.1 Skilled and culturally-aware Helpline Support Workers

At the heart of MWN Helpline service are a group of trauma-informed, supportive and culturally aware Helpline Support Workers. Through their tailored support they work with service users to:

- ⇒ **Reduce harm:** Helpline Support Workers help to reduce the risk of harm to women by providing information, safety advice, and continuous support through regular welfare check-ins when needed. Their work includes actions like contacting the police or social services, relocating to safety, and making safeguarding referrals to MARAC, social services or police to ensure women are protected and supported comprehensively.
- ⇒ **Improve wellbeing:** Helpline Support Workers enhance the wellbeing and decrease isolation of service users. The team ensures that each service user feels listened to and has someone to talk to while navigating multiple challenges. By offering advice, facilitating access to counselling, raising awareness of local networks, and regular wellbeing checks; helps to mitigate the anxiety, depression, and ultimately the risks of self-harm and suicide.
- ⇒ **Improve knowledge:** Helpline Support Workers empower women by providing knowledge and psycho-education so that they can make informed decisions. They offer detailed information on legal rights, bespoke information booklets sensitive to faith and cultural lens, while also guiding women towards other helpful services that align with their needs.
- ⇒ **Representing them:** Helpline Support Workers play a vital role in advocating on behalf of service users by representing their voices to frontline professionals, such as police, social services, housing providers and legal representatives. Furthermore, the team provides interpreting services to ensure effective communication and supports women in filling out necessary forms.
- ⇒ **Decrease financial worries:** Helpline Support Workers work diligently to alleviate the financial worries of women by assisting them to access public funds and hardship grants, providing budgeting advice or referrals to budgeting courses, and connecting them to debt helplines. They provide women navigating complex financial situations with guidance on legal aid, victims' compensation schemes, and financial rights in divorce cases. Additionally, the team supports repatriation for transnational abandonment cases, ensuring access to public funds, and aids women in finding jobs or voluntary work to improve their financial independence.

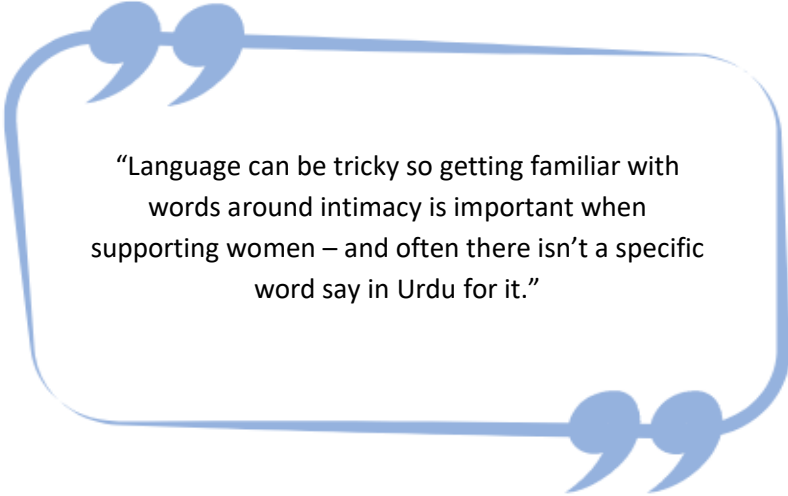
## 6.2 Training and capacity building staff

Staff training and skills capacity building is central to the success of MWN Helpline. Over the years, a blend of internal and external training has been delivered to provide Helpline Support Workers with the information, skills and approaches required to support complex issues. External training included: recognising and responding to economic abuse, stress, vicarious trauma and managing wellbeing and handling suicidal conversations. Internal training provided skills around system updates and capturing of new indicators, as well as bespoke sessions exploring the cultural nuances of service users. See appendices for the extensive list of learning provided.

## 6.3 Understanding language and communication needs

A critical aspect of the helpline is the ability to not only speak the right language, but also have the ability to listen and draw out the hidden issues lurking in the conversation. Over the three years the number of women contacting the helpline, who do not speak English, has grown from 9% in 2022 to 13% in 2024.

The Helpline team speaks eight languages, including Arabic, Bengali, Hindko, Gujarati, Mirpuri, Pothwari, Urdu, and Arabic. They also have access to a language translation service for additional languages when needed.



“Language can be tricky so getting familiar with words around intimacy is important when supporting women – and often there isn’t a specific word say in Urdu for it.”

## 7. External factors challenging helpline success

### 7.1 Helpline under recognised as a domestic abuse service

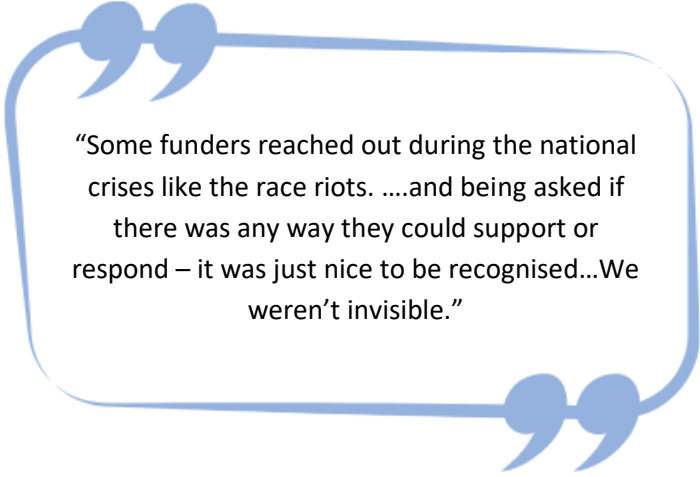
MWNUK operates the only national helpline dedicated to Muslim women and therefore plays a growing and significant role within the VAWG sector. Yet surprisingly, it is not as widely recognised by some funders as a domestic abuse organisation. This may be due to the fact that MWN Helpline is just one of its projects (despite it being the most prominent and major one taking up significant resources). Therefore, it is important that funders improve their understanding of the different types of organisations delivering domestic abuse services. In the current difficult funding environment, more women's groups like MWNUK may have to adapt and take on additional projects to access funding.

### 7.2 Racism and Islamophobia

It is well documented that the effect of anti-Muslim hate is disproportionate on Muslim women particularly the experience of hate crimes<sup>14</sup>. Recent research published by MWNUK reveals that 82% had experienced anti-Muslim hate in the last five years with 80% not reporting it.<sup>15</sup>

The resurgence of right-wing political parties, their divisive narratives and several national incidents such as the war in Israel<sup>16</sup> and summer race riots of 2024 has exacerbated the social and political climate in which MWNUK delivered its services.

This not only negatively affected the individuals using the helpline<sup>17</sup> but also resulted in the team having to deploy new processes to respond to the external factors including: removing the MWNUK logo from office building to reduce targeting of abuse and removal of staff profiles from their website. In addition to these measures, staff capacity was impacted by the need to respond to threatening emails, calls and social media messages; and the police investigations that ensued. This had also led to additional staff safeguarding and wellbeing needs, unlikely to be experienced by other helplines. During those unprecedented challenging times, there was a sense of sisterhood, pulling together and embedding skills e.g. recognising and assessing genuine vs. hoax calls.



“Some funders reached out during the national crises like the race riots. ....and being asked if there was any way they could support or respond – it was just nice to be recognised...We weren't invisible.”

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/forgotten\\_women\\_report\\_united\\_kingdom\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.enar-eu.org/wp-content/uploads/forgotten_women_report_united_kingdom_-_final.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> [Anti-Muslim Hate – Concerns and Experiences](#)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2024/oct/04/record-amount-of-anti-muslim-abuse-reported-in-uk-since-7-october-attacks>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.statista.com/statistics/623880/islamophobic-hate-crimes-england-and-wales/>

### 7.3 Reduction and challenges in funding

Increased competition for funding has led to charities either dipping into their cash reserves to meet running costs or forced to close some services.

Over the last 12 months, MWNUK submitted 30 applications for funding with a success rate of less than 10%. Given to economic austerity, the senior management team are having to spend a significant proportion of their time searching for funding where MWN Helpline meets the criteria. This is compounded further as some funders have temporarily closed funding. Although, 'closed' funding may typically apply to new applications as one foundation was reported to have distributed grants in the millions to its existing grantees<sup>18</sup>. With a narrowing pool of available funding, there is an over reliance on strengthening relationships with existing funders.

Changes in the funders landscape have consequently led to the team having less capacity for strategic planning, horizon planning, raising the organisation's profile and influencing policies.

---

<sup>18</sup> Understanding the funding crisis in the UK voluntary sector  
([https://acf.org.uk/acf/ACF/Blog/2024/CEO\\_blog\\_funding\\_crisis.aspx](https://acf.org.uk/acf/ACF/Blog/2024/CEO_blog_funding_crisis.aspx))

## 8. Recommendations and way forward

### 8.1 Investment in the use of digital technology

The need for reinvestment into the hardware used to deliver the helpline service was a clear ask. Small charities often do not prioritise IT hardware investments as highly as other areas like frontline services or fundraising, however the impact on service delivery can be significant, especially if the systems fall over.

The Charity Digital Report 2024 raised that it “*consistently sees a digital skills gap between large and small charities. 72% of small charities are struggling due to squeezed organisation finances and this, in turn, means they have very little capacity and headspace to engage with digital.*”<sup>19</sup>

The team also requested IT transcription software to minimise manual notetaking from calls and voice messages. To consider reviewing current systems to ascertain whether the feature is already available considering today's advanced AI capabilities. As with all new technology this would need to be developed and piloted so that it creates the right results for staff and service users.

### 8.2 Trauma informed organisation that nurtures its team

Discussions with the helpline team highlighted good working environment and relationships in place are essential to the success of the helpline service. **A trauma-informed organisation** promotes a culture of empathy, understanding, and support, which can improve outcomes for women who have experienced trauma. It helps create a safer and more effective service delivery environment, fostering trust and collaboration while **reducing the risk of re-traumatization**.

The person-centred approach actively considers the needs of individuals holistically. To ensure this approach is considered and embedded by all staff and managers, it is advisable to implement a process within one-to-one and appraisal sessions where staff share how they have demonstrated values in their work. Furthermore, **creating "about me" mini manuals** for each staff member allows for sharing strengths and challenges—this is particularly helpful given the increasing understanding of neurodiversity.

### 8.3 Team learning and development

The role of the Helpline Support Worker is central to successful service delivery. It is evident from the evaluation that there have been inconsistencies in the inputting into the helpline database and level of training received. This is particularly where internal training is delivered by Helpline Managers. Some ways that this could be mitigated include:

- ⇒ **Creating a formal induction package** for all new starters but can also be used to provide refresher sessions. This could include the creation of a digital sandpit where staff can play with the helpline system. A digital sandbox is a secure, isolated environment where people

---

<sup>19</sup> <https://charitydigitalskills.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Charity-Digital-Skills-Report-2024.pdf>

can safely trial applications without impacting live systems or data.

- ⇒ **Digitalising the learning** by creating an online training package. Packages such as [Scribeshow](#) can provide an inexpensive way to test whether this type of resource is effective, compared to the current face-to-face delivery.
- ⇒ **Developing a whole team internal verification process** something which is often used within academic setting to ensure reliable and standardised approaches, as well as identifying areas for improvement. By holding quarterly review meetings with the team to clarify, which indicators will support consistency in data collection. The team also reflected that regular refreshers on specific topics, such as divorce processes for both Islamic and civil requirements would be helpful.
- ⇒ **Accessing sector resources** such as the Routes to Support Directory which is an online system providing up to date information on violence against women and girls services. It aims to assist front-line services to identify refuge spaces and other services that are available.

## 8.4 Team structures

As the team and organisation has grown, it is important to reflect on the structures in place to support staff, day-to-day operations and more strategic operational discussions are had, along with good communication. MWNUK could consider the creation of a Senior Leadership team to ensure that more strategic operational conversations are undertaken regularly. The creation of Senior Helpline Support Worker roles would also provide additional support when the Helpline Manager is unavailable due to planned or unplanned leave.

## 8.5 Discussion with funders

While funders recognise that MWNUK is a 'by and for led' minoritised specialist organisation, there may be a lack of recognition about the importance of MWNUK being a trusted service by Muslim women. The important role played by minoritised specialised faith organisations in the domestic abuse sector should be an issue raised with funders and the government.

Maintaining connections with organisations for referrals and wider networks such as [Imkaan](#) (VAWG) and [Women's Aid](#) will also ensure that MWNUK is connected and continues to influence the wider domestic abuse and violence against women and girls sector.

## 8.6 Consider helpline accreditation

Another tool that can help organisations with consistency of service is to enrol in accreditations. There are a number of bodies and organisations that offer quality assurance whether in helplines generally, women specifically and domestic abuse. MWNUK should continue to explore The Advice Quality Standard (AQS) which is a sector-owned, independently audited quality standard that is awarded to services delivering social welfare legal advice. However, there are alternative accreditations for helplines more broadly, such as [Helplines.org](#).

## Appendix - Training Provision 2022 – 2024

1. Modern day slavery and human trafficking
2. GDPR awareness training for charities
3. Working with resistant families (Birmingham Children's Trust)
4. Trauma informed practice
5. Professional curiosity and challenge (Birmingham Children's Trust)
6. Recognising difference between DV and parental conflict (Birmingham Children's Trust)
7. Equality and diversity
8. Mental health first aid awareness
9. Recognising and responding to economic abuse
10. Stress, vicarious trauma and managing wellbeing
11. Handling suicidal conversations
12. Professional boundaries
13. Safeguarding children (SAFE CiC)
14. Safeguarding adults (SAFE CiC)

