



11th December 2024

MEDIA STATEMENT

Sara Sharif suffered unimaginable cruelty

Warning: This statement contains details some people may find distressing

Now that Urfan Sharif has been found guilty of murdering his 10 year old daughter Sara Sharif - he must never be released from prison. We at Muslim Women's Network UK are shocked and angry by the immense suffering endured by Sara during her short life. The pain and torture inflicted by her father was compounded by serious systemic safeguarding failures and by the silence of those who were aware of her abuse. We therefore welcome that her stepmother Beinash Batool was also found guilty of murder.

The details of her horrific abuse are deeply distressing. She was subjected to unimaginable cruelty, including being burned with an iron, scalded with hot water, strangled, bitten, tied up with rope, and beaten with a cricket bat and rolling pin. Homemade hoods were placed over her head and face. This brutality continued over a prolonged period, leaving her with countless internal and external injuries.

Sara Sharif's case must now serve as a call to action for everyone to prevent such tragedies from happening again. Critical questions remain unanswered: why was custody awarded to her father despite his history of domestic abuse? Why were the bruises reported by teachers not properly investigated, particularly given her withdrawal from school? Did cultural sensitivities deter teachers from questioning why Sara suddenly began wearing a headscarf? The culture of silence within families and communities must also be confronted, as there were individuals who knew about the abuse but failed to report it.

MWN UK CEO Baroness Gohir said: *"While Sara's teachers eventually reported the bruises they noticed, it is possible they had earlier concerns when she started wearing the headscarf but hesitated to act out of fear of being seen as prejudiced or discriminatory. Although many girls wear headscarves as part of their family's religious practices, this heartbreaking case highlights that, in rare circumstances, some parents may misuse the hijab to conceal abuse. While communities may understandably be sensitive to such enquiries, safeguarding children must always take priority over the fear of causing offence. Teachers should receive thorough training to handle these situations with cultural awareness while ensuring the safety and well-being of children remains paramount."*

The Labour government has pledged to reduce violence against women and girls by 50%. We urge them to implement tailored campaigns within diverse communities to raise awareness about abuse, its devastating impact, and the importance of speaking out. These campaigns should also highlight the legal consequences for those who fail to report abuse, reinforcing the critical need for accountability and action.

MWNUK CEO Baroness Gohir added: *"Specific cultural issues must also be addressed, such as spiritual abuse, where claims of jinn possession are used to justify harmful behavior—a concern frequently reported on our Muslim Women's Network Helpline. In Sara Sharif's case, she was similarly blamed and accused of being possessed by a 'jinn.' It is essential for the government to take steps toward legally defining spiritual abuse, given its diverse manifestations. Establishing a clear legal definition would not only enhance protections for victims but also act as a deterrent against this form of exploitation."*

If you are a victim or abuse or want to support someone who is affected by abuse, you can contact the Muslim Women's Network Helpline on 0800 999 5786 / info@mwnhelpline.co.uk and you can contact us via the Amal safety mobile phone app.

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>