

01 March 2021

MEDIA STATEMENT

Amendment to Domestic Abuse Bill – Revenge Porn, Non-Fatal Strangulation and Coercive Control

Muslim Women's Network UK (MWNUK) is pleased the government has heard concerns raised by women's rights charities such as ours and welcome the new amendments to the Domestic Abuse Bill. Strengthening laws on revenge porn, non-fatal strangulation and coercive control will provide greater protections to victims of abuse while also making it easier to bring perpetrators to justice.

Co-Chair, Shaista Gohir OBE said: "Although I welcome these new laws, I am disappointed that the government continues to overlook the plight of migrant women. No measures have been included to protect survivors of abuse who have an insecure immigration status and are not covered by the government's 'no recourse to public funds policy.' I also note that funding will be made available to provide specialist support in 'Respite Rooms' for vulnerable homeless women. Although we support this in principle, further information is needed regarding locations, who will be responsible for this type of accommodation, whether the needs of Black, Asian and minority ethnic women will be met and what safeguarding measures will be put in place."

By closing the legal gap in so called 'revenge' porn laws to now also make threats to disclose intimate images an offence, will hopefully result in more women and girls reaching out for help. The Muslim Women's Network Helpline receives calls every year from women and girls who are blackmailed with threats of their intimate images being shared online, with family members or within their communities. The perpetrators deliberately use the concepts of shame and honour against their victims, so they fear being subjected to honour-based abuse and / or being ostracised. This issue was highlighted in research we conducted in 2019, *Muslim Women's Experience of the Criminal Justice System*.

Co-Chair, Shaista Gohir OBE said: "We have found that many victims are reluctant to report perpetrators fearing that a police warning may trigger them into sharing images – a risk they do not want to take. Although victims can take legal action if images are disclosed, they would still be left to face the consequences of for example, family members finding out that they had perhaps been in a sexual relationship outside of marriage - something that is regarded as taboo and outside of cultural and faith norms. These new changes will hopefully give Muslim women and girls the confidence to seek much earlier."

MWNUK also welcomes the new criminal offence of non-fatal strangulation, as it will make it easier to punish perpetrators. Domestic abuse is one of the top calls also received on our helpline with some service users reporting how strangulation is used during abusive episodes to make them fear for their lives, behaviour that amounts to coercive control. We are pleased that coercive control laws have also been strengthened and that the government has recognised that controlling or coercive behaviour can continue after perpetrators and victims stop living together and are therefore pleased that this has now also been made an offence.

If anyone need help and support on any form of abuse, the Muslim Women's Network Helpline can be contacted on 0800 999 5786 / info@mwnhelpline.co.uk Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm.

Ends

Additional Information

- 1) For further media comments, contact MWNUK on contact@mwnuk.co.uk or 0121 2369000.
- 2) Muslim Women's Network UK (www.mwnuk.co.uk), is a national leading charity promoting social justice and equality for Muslim women and girls.
- 3) In 2020, the helpline was contacted over 3000 times and helped over 1200 women and girls.