

23 May 2018

MEDIA STATEMENT

Muslim Women's Network UK welcomes first forced marriage conviction of its kind in England

Yesterday a woman who forced her 18 year old daughter to marry a relative almost twice the victim's age was found guilty of two counts of forced marriage. We welcome this conviction and hope it will act as a catalyst of change that will eventually see an end to forced marriages in the UK.

Our Vice-Chair Nazmin Akthar-Sheikh commented:

"It is a bitter-sweet moment because on the one hand we are pleased that justice has been served in this case, but at the same time are saddened to hear of the ordeal this very brave victim has had to endure. We regularly deal with forced marriage cases and are aware of the complexity of the issues involved. It is especially difficult when it is your own family forcing you against your will. Whilst they wish to escape the forced marriage, many victims tell us that they do not want their parents prosecuted. We thank the victim for the courage she has shown and hope this will encourage other victims to come forward too. This case is a lesson to all the parents who feel they can use their child's love for them as a shield to evade justice, we hope they have received the message loud and clear."

There has been a steady increase in the number of calls received each year by our MWN Helpline where forced marriage has been a relevant issue. There has been a significant increase in the number of calls received generally from those aged 21 and under. Our Helpline statistics can be viewed through our dashboard: <http://www.mwnuk.co.uk/muslim-women-helpline-dashboard.php>

Whilst anyone can be a victim of forced marriage irrespective of their gender, age, faith, ethnicity, sexuality or disability, those of a younger age can be particularly vulnerable to forced marriages and we have as a result dedicated resources to working with young people so that they are better aware of their rights and the help available to them. We urge schools and colleges to be especially vigilant of any signs that a forced marriage may be taking place, particularly in light of the upcoming summer holidays when victims may be taken abroad under the pretence of a family holiday.

As well as receiving calls from individuals who are in danger of forced marriage, we also receive calls from women who were forced into a marriage, remained in it due to familial and cultural pressures and are now suffering domestic and sexual violence at the hands of their spouses.

Vice-Chair Nazmin Akthar-Sheikh added:

"Giving evidence in court can be an intimidating experience for anyone but more so when you may have suffered physical, emotional, financial and/or sexual abuse as many victims of forced marriage will have. There may be concerns over disownment and resulting isolation, homelessness and even honour based violence. It is vital that all necessary physical and emotional support is provided to victims both during any trial process and in the future, because a victim's journey does not begin or end with prosecution. Victims need to feel able to leave an abusive situation and for that we must ensure that resources are dedicated to addressing all their needs, whether that is counselling, a safe roof over their heads or financial independence."

Forced marriage is against the law and against Islam. There is no justification for forcing another individual into marriage and eroding their human rights. MWNUK is committed to tackling forced marriages and will continue to work towards ending this abhorrent practice.

If you or anyone you know may be at risk of forced marriage, call our MWN Helpline for confidential and impartial support/advice: 0800 999 5786/ 0303 999 5786 (www.mwnhelpline.co.uk)

Ends

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Muslim Women's Network UK (www.mwnuk.co.uk) is the national leading Muslim women's charity working to improve the social justice and equality for Muslim women and girls