The Sharia Question

WOMEN'S POLICY CENTRE
The Missing Piece

Sharia Councils, Religious Islamic Identity Politics, Female Inequality, Honour-based Abuse, Clan-based Cultural Enclaves and Two-Tier Justice.

2025 | SEPTEMBER

©WOMEN'S POLICY CENTRE

The Sharia Question

Sharia Councils, Religious Islamic Identity Politics, Female Inequality, Honour-based Abuse, Clan-based Cultural Enclaves and Two-Tier Justice.

A Report Commissioned by the Women's Policy Centre
By Dr Anna Z. Loutfi

The ©Women's Policy Centre is a national think tank dedicated to addressing issues concerning women without any radical ideology. We are an independent, non-profit organisation aiming to promote and develop new policy ideas to create a world that works for women. We believe in building a more dynamic, flexible economy and ensuring a thriving and happier community. Our approach to policy development is based on evidence, and we rely on surveys, qualitative and quantitative data analysis, and expert interviews to inform our work. We collaborate with senior data analysts, economists, and other experts to conduct rigorous empirical research on innovative policy outcomes. We maintain complete editorial control over all our written research and retain copyright.

Registered Company n. 15524373

1.Introduction

2.Fundaments of sharia and the reality of women's status

3.Sharia Councils in Britain

4.British Sharia Culture and the Clan Mentality

a.Cousin Marriage
b.Son Preference
c.Clan domination and the control of women

5.Conclusions & Recommendations

1.Introduction

The word sharia in colloquial British English means Islamic law. In Arabic, sharia refers to a correct code of conduct dictated by divine principles. Sharia also covers historical legislation and legal commentary across all the Arab and other Muslim states worldwide. There is therefore no single sharia code.[1] As the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams put it, when Muslim activists demand sharia in secular or non-Muslim legal contexts, 'they are usually referring not to a universal and fixed code established once and for all but to some particular concretisation of it at the hands of a tradition of jurists'.[2]

In reality, sharia law is what a Muslim in a position of authority says it is. In Britain, many Muslims have entered the domestic jurisdiction over recent decades and established large settlements or clan enclaves, over which powerful clan leaders rule. These leaders claim, on behalf of their communities, that sharia is a set of religious requirements that must be legally accommodated within British domestic laws. This is especially the case in respect of religious (Islamic) marriages and divorces, which Muslims require to be sharia compliant. Advocates for a more sharia-friendly legal system will say, simply, that Muslims require sharia-governed family arrangements in domains such as marriage and divorce. If the British state does not accept sharia, so the argument goes, then Muslims will just have to go ahead anyway, as if the state does accept it.

[1] Sharia is in reality derived from different interpretations of the Quran and other legal sources: namely the utterances and the acts of Islam's Prophet (the Sunna); the consensus among scholars dictates (ijma); and religious reasoning or the personal opinion of the Islamic jurists (ray; ijtihad).
[2] Rowan Williams, 'Civil and religious law in England: a religious perspective', in Robin Griffith-Jones, ed., Islam and English Law, Cambridge University Press 2013, p. 21.

So wrote Prakash Shah in his legal essay, 'Judging Muslims':

> Muslims are by now largely used to the state law operating at odds with their own community's understanding of the legal relations between parties to a marriage, ***and have learned to navigate around the obstinacy of state laws***.[3]

The British authorities have largely acquiesced to this jurisdictional threat. But the time has come now for them to wake up to the real-world implications of deferring to alternative legal approaches in the name of Islam. What is at stake is the basic presumption of formal equality before the law. The casualties of ignoring the urgency of the present moment are(i) women and girls, who are not equal under Islamic law; and (ii) the British state itself, which is swiftly losing sovereign control over its legal jurisdiction.

The influence of Islamic law on British law is tied to an objective numbers question about demographics. The following data points should therefore be understood objectively. The numbers below convey – objectively – why a new culture of sexual inequality has taken root in the UK – and this fact should not be dismissed for purely ideological reasons.

- Some sources estimate that there are 3,868,133 Muslims in the United Kingdom, which has a population of approximately 66 million. Muslims therefore comprise 5.86% of that overall population, of which roughly half are women and girls. These figures are based on census data collected in the years 2017-2019, and so are likely to be

[3] Griffiths, ed., *Islam and English Law*, p. 150.

significantly higher at the time of writing (2025). The ONS data collected from the 2021 Census records increases in the number of people who described themselves as 'Muslim', taking the population of Muslims in the UK to 3.9 million (6.5% of the overall population in 2021, up from 4.9% in 2011).[4]

- Writing in 2008, the (then) Lord Chief Justice Lord Nicholas Phillips put the number of Muslims living in the UK at 1.6 million, which conservatively suggests that the British Muslim population more than doubled in the following decade (spanning 2008-2018).[5] The numbers of Muslims in Britain will likely double again in the decade spanning 2018-2028, taking the overall percentage close to 10% of the general population. The Pew Research Centre on Religion and Public Life predicted in 2017 that assuming refugee (irregular) migration flows to Europe to have stopped in mid 2016, 'regular migration' flows to Europe alone would account for Muslims reaching 11.2% of Europe's population by 2050.[6] According to a report by the Muslim Council of Great Britain published in March 2025, there are 32 voting constituencies across the UK with 20% or more Muslim populations (aged 18 years and above).[7]

Such numbers mean that Britain is increasingly home to cultural norms and practices in which women's inequality is taken for granted. Islamic legal principles are tied to clan cultures, operating across Britain, which enforce male entitlement and privilege.

It is not – nor should be – controversial to assert that Islamic legal imports have entrenched women's inequality in Britain. Many practices in Muslim immigrant clan cultures implement strict dress codes for women and girls; arranged and cousin marriage, forced

[4] Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021: The religion of usual residents and household religious composition in England and Wales, Census 2021 data, https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021
[5] "Equality before the Law": a Speech by Lord Phillips of Worth Matravers given at the East London Muslim Centre (3rd July 2008), reproduced in Griffiths, ed., Islam and English Law, pp. 286-293.
[6] Europe's Growing Muslim Population. Report by the Pew Research Centre (29 November 0217), https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2017/11/FULL-REPORT-FOR-WEB-POSTING.pdf. Note: The largest Muslim populations in Britain are of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage. UK towns and cities known for large and numerically rising South Asian Muslim populations are (East) London, Birmingham, Bradford, and Manchester, Blackburn, Dewsbury, Luton, Bedfordshire and Slough.
[7] British Muslims in Numbers Census Report Summary (March 2025), p. 4. See https://mcb.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Census-Report-Summary-2025-.pdf. The Muslim Council's 2025 report makes no effort to break down the demographics of Muslims in Britain by ethnicity or religious sect – perhaps because this information is not readily available from the 2021 Census. According to Rakib Ehsan, who relies on the 2021 census, as well as 2017 data sourced from the Institute for Jewish Policy Research, the majority of British Muslims are Sunni, but that is not to discount the "notable portion" who are Shia, in addition to smaller numbers of "non-denominational" Sunni minorities (e.g. Salafi Muslims) and revivalist Shia groups such as the Ahmadiyya Muslims. See Ehsan and Mansfield, A Portrait of Modern Britain Ethnicity and Religion, Policy Exchange Report (14 October 2024), at https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/A_Portrait_of_Modern_Britain.pdf. See also https://www.conservativemuslimforum.org/can-we-help/resources/muslim-demographics-by-constituency/.

marriage, child marriages, and polygamy. Cultural honour-based codes followed within Muslim clan groups betray a very high tolerance for various forms of domestic coercion, as well as physical and sexual abuse within the family. Sex-selective abortions will be viable options for women from cultures pushing 'son preference'. Such cultural practices may be discreetly encouraged by advocates for Muslim communities – in the name of strengthening social cohesion and preventing the alienation of cultural minorities. But the reality is that in order to reassure fragile and insecure ethno-Islamic religious identities, domestic law must promise to tacitly accept (or turn a blind eye to) the starkest forms of sex discrimination. In the long term, this will (ironically) undermine social cohesion, since any weakening of domestic law by separatist groups threatens the legal sovereignty of the United Kingdom as a whole.

There cannot be separate legal standards for Muslims and non-Muslims. If Britain is to retain its democratic frameworks based on 'one law for all', then the human rights argument that minorities must be granted expansive and sovereign jurisdiction over their religious activities must be revisited. Secular campaigners, including ex Muslims, have warned for decades that sharia law and its attendant cultural practices are a threat to the British constitution, and they are right to do so. [8] Such campaigners have also warned against operative British sharia councils functioning as de facto courts, which further entrench systemic legal abuses and inequality. These bodies operate along ethnic and religious lines and must be seen as a major contributor to the gradual balkanisation and sectarian fragmentation of 21st century Britain.

[8] The secular lobby group, One Law for All, campaigns against Sharia and religious arbitration in the UK and on the basis that they will lead to a greater prevalence of violence against women, and the development of a British theocracy. See https://onelawforall.org.uk/. See also Denis MacEoin and David Green, eds, Sharia Law or One Law for All? Civitas 2009.

This paper examines some of the sharia principles and attendant cultural practices which degrade the domestic personal status of women, and which are alive and well in Britain as a result of mass Muslim immigration and the entrenchment of sharia councils. It concludes with some legal and policy recommendations.

2.Fundaments of *Sharia* and the reality of women's status

Among the many sharia principles which are incompatible with English law is the wife's primary duty of obedience to her husband in exchange for maintenance.[9] Under almost all the classical Sunni and Shia jurisprudence, a wife has a right to maintenance, but it is conditional on obedience to the husband, including his right of (sexual) access at all times (*Tamkeen*).

That a husband's financial obligations to a wife are contingent on her sexual obedience is reflected in the principle that an unconsummated marriage results in the wife's dower payment (upon divorce) being halved.[10]

The requirement of a wife's spousal obedience is codified into Islamic jurisprudence under the term *nashiza* (the disobedient or rebellious wife); a wife's disobedience may include denying a husband his conjugal rights, leaving the matrimonial home without lawful reason, or borrowing money without her husband's permission. A wife's maintenance may be suspended if she travels without her husband or if she leaves Islam.[11] The *Quran* expressly sanctions physical punishment for a wife's disobedience.[12]

[9] 'Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient (to Allah and to their husbands), and guard in the husband's absence what Allah orders them to guard (e.g. their chastity, their husband's property'. Quran, Sura Nisaa, IV, verse 34.
[10] Mukhtasar al-Quduri, cited in Mona Siddiqui, 'Law and the Desire for Social Control', in Mai Yamani, ed., Feminism and Islam (Ithaca Press 1996), 54.
[11] Nasir, The Islamic Law of Personal Status, 97-98.
[12] 'As to those women on whose part you see ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next), refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly, if it is useful); but if they obey you, seek not against them means (of annoyance)'. Quran, Sura Nisaa, IV, verse 34.

Male authority is tied intricately to honour under sharia systems. There is an expectation of a man that he will marry a woman of equal or lower social status, but a woman will not marry below her status (*Kafa'a*). This arrangement ensures that a husband will not be socially 'lower' in status than his wife's father/guardian, which would bring him shame and could be grounds for annulment of the marriage.[13]

Islamic laws prohibit child (or pre-pubescent) marriage because a wife has to be old enough to render conjugal rights to her husband.[14] That said, in his review of Arab personal status laws, Jamal Nasir notes the frequency of 'subterfuges' used by families in many rural parts of the Middle East to present brides to the state authorities as "older than they really are". Nasir cites statistics (from his time of his writing in the 1980s) that 80% of wives of the region of Isfahan province in Iran were married between the ages of 9 and 16. Iran today permits a girl to be married from the age of 8 years and 9 months with paternal permission, and the UK Government has recorded that in 2023 there was an annual average of 135,000 registered marriages in Iran involving brides under the age of 18 (a figure likely to be higher in reality). In Iraq, the clerical establishment also promotes 'early marriage' and recent legal reforms earlier this year have given the Islamic courts in Iraq increased authority over family matters, which will have the effect of formally legalising customary practices of child marriage in that country.[15]

Men who have reached the age of majority, and who are deemed sane and to be acting of their own free will, have a legal right to divorce their wives with extraordinary ease through the

[13] This is a sticking point within the Hanafi doctrine of jurisprudence and is set down in the Sharia codes of Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Morocco.
[14] Jamil J. Nasir, 'The Conditions of Legal Capacity', The Islamic Law of Personal Status (Graham & Trotman 1986), 43-45.
[15] Nasir, The Islamic Law of Personal Status, 45 (fn13); UK Government guidance, country policy and information note: women - early and forced marriage, Iran, June 2025 (Updated 1 July 2025), https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/iran-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-women-early-and-forced-marriage-iran-may-2022-accessible. See also "Iraq passes laws that critics say will allow child marriage", The Guardian (21 January 2025), https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/jan/21/iraq-passes-laws-that-critics-say-will-allow-child-marriage.

utterance of the word *talaq* (repudiation). A wife does not have the right of repudiation, but may obtain divorce with the permission of her husband, or by paying the husband for a divorce (*khula*), or through the intervention of the courts.[16] Different schools of Sunni jurisprudence allow a husband to repudiate a wife with contingencies: e.g. (i) 'If you leave home you shall be divorced'; or (ii) 'you will be repudiated in one year from now'. In the second instance, divorce could occur from one year after, or at the time the *talaq* is uttered.[17]

Adoption is prohibited by *Quranic* edict.[18] Guardianship (of property and person) is invested in the father only. In the event of a divorce, custody of the children is with the father. Men are tasked under sharia with managing the education (*wilayat at-Tarbiyya*) and property of a child (*al wilayatu alal maal*). Generally, the male child will remain with his mother until he is seven; a female child will remain with her mother until she is nine. The father thereafter has custody of the children. If the mother remarries before the children reach those ages, she will lose custody of even her very young children – with often devastating effects. The Palestinian historian, Ghada Karmi, describes coming across women in Aleppo who had lost custody of their children in this way. She recalls one woman who 'used to stand at the gates of her daughter's school every day in the hope of catching a glimpse of her'. Another woman, removed from her mother's custody when her mother remarried and who was subsequently raised by her aunt, 'never forgave her mother for 'abandoning' her, never spoke to her or about her and behaved as if she were dead'.[19]

[16] The origin/legal source of khula is the Quranic ruling that a woman may give back to her husband the gift she received from her husband in marriage (mahr) in exchange for a divorce. Sura Baqara, II, verse 229.
[17] Nasir, The Islamic Law of Personal Status, 107.
[18] Sura Ahzab, XXXIII, verse 4-5.
[19] Feminism and Islam, p. 75.

Both Shia and Sunni sharia codes (on the basis of *Quranic* interpretation, Islamic legal tradition and scholarly consensus) permit polygamy – up to four wives. Legislative frameworks across the Arab world have increasingly indicated a preference for monogamy or restricted polygamy.[20] However, statutory restrictions on cultural practices in Muslim countries abroad do not necessarily apply to sharia zones in Britain, where formal equality between the sexes is a world away from the customary reality faced by many Muslim women – often enforced by so-called 'sharia councils'.

[20] Nasir, The Islamic Law of Personal Status, 61.

3.Sharia Councils in Britain

On 24 July 2025, a job advert was posted by Manchester Community Centre on a portal run by the UK Government's Department for Work and Pensions. The post was for a full time 'Sharia Law Administrator' to provide administrative support for Manchester Sharia Council, based in Didsbury (Manchester). The advert was later deleted after a public outcry, revealing the strength of feeling across Britain about the need to curtail the power and reach of sharia councils.[21]

Sharia councils have operated in the UK since the early 1980s. The Islamic Sharia Council (ISC) in Leyton, East London, was one of the first such councils to be established by and for British Muslims.[22] The Conservative Party oversaw this development under Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, but there is no record of Mrs Thatcher expressing any formal or government position on the need for sharia councils in Britain. Since their implementation in the 1980s, the primary function of sharia councils is to allow Muslim women to obtain an Islamic divorce in cases where their husbands have not given consent.[23]

It is frequently argued that it is fearmongering to suggest that sharia councils operate within a parallel legal system. We are told that the rulings of sharia councils 'have no legal standing here or abroad, and they have no enforcement powers'.[24] But this approach has long passed its sell-by date and does not persuade on the facts and realities of

[21] 'Sharia court job advert deleted from government website', The Telegraph (28 July 2025), https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/07/28/government-website-sharia-court-job-advert-deleted/.
[22] David Torrance (Debate Pack No: CDP-2019-0102), Sharia law courts in the UK, House of Common Library (1 May 2019), p. 2, at https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CDP-2019-0102/CDP-2019-0102.pdf
[23] See section 2 below.
[24] Homa Khaleeli, 'Inside Britain's sharia councils: hardline and anti-women – or a dignified way to divorce?', The Guardian (1 March 2017), https://www.theguardian.com/law/2017/mar/01/inside-britains-sharia-councils-hardline-and-anti-women-or-a-dignified-way-to-divorce

multicultural Britain. Multiculturalism creates parallel legal jurisdictions. This is because culturally distinct groups enforce cultural norms as law within their communities.

Technically, devout Muslims are obliged on the civic level to observe national law in the state where they reside.[25] However, it is unrealistic to imagine that large groups of Muslims settling in Britain are simply shedding deeply embedded cultural norms and expectations in order to comply with domestic law.

The question of whether sharia courts can be accommodated within the workings of the UK legal state has been a live one since 2008, when the (then) Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, described some recognition of Islamic law in Britain as 'unavoidable' – causing something of a media storm.[26]

By 2009, there were at least 85 councils and tribunals in the UK known to be operating ostensibly on the basis of sharia principles.[27] Since then, the number of 'back-room councils' ruling on Muslim marriages has continuously risen, forming a powerful shadow legal economy that exposes the impractical reality of UK multiculturalism.[28]

In spite of growing concerns about the prevalence of sharia councils in Britain, concrete data and information has remained sparse when it comes to the basic questions. How many councils are there altogether? Where are they? How are their activities to be regulated, given that they operate mainly in private homes and back rooms?[29] Who runs them? If councils are run by recognised Imams, who or what recognises such individuals? If there are powerful men exerting influence over

[25] Maira Butt, 'Sharia: are fears of a parallel legal system unfounded?', Religious Media Centre (26 August 2025), https://religionmediacentre.org.uk/news/sharia-are-fears-of-a-parallel-legal-system-unfounded/.
[26] Robin Griffith-Jones, 'The 'unavoidable' adoption of shari'a law – the generation of a media storm', in Griffiths, ed., Islam and English Law, 9-19.
[27] Denis MacEoin and David Green, eds, Sharia Law or One Law for All? Civitas 2009, 69.
[28] 'How the UK became 'western capital' for sharia courts', The Times (18 December 2024), https://www.thetimes.com/uk/society/article/sharia-law-courts-uk-marriages-divorce-zs76vq2c9; David James Smith, 'Sharia London: surge in back-room councils that rule on Muslim marriages', The Standard (17 April 2025), https://www.standard.co.uk/news/islamic-sharia-council-law-london-marriage-divorce-b1222943.html. Julie Bindel, 'Dangerous rise in Sharia courts in UK revealed and why they blow apart Starmer's claim there is no two-tier justice', The Sun (8 September 2025), https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/36624503/sharia-courts-starmer-two-tier-justice/
[29] Samia Bano, a law lecturer at Soas (University of London) has published a book on sharia councils and once joked in the press about just how informally they operate: 'I could open one tomorrow'. As reported in Homa Khaleeli, 'Inside Britain's sharia councils'.

the councils – and the wider community – who are they? How has their power within particular communities grown? Are there operators using sharia law as a cover for political, even subversive (terrorist) activities?

Take the case of Habiba Jan, for example. A British born Pakistani Muslim woman from a polygamous marriage (her mother also from a polygamous marriage), Jan, along with other women, submitted evidence to the UK Parliament in 2016 to register her concern about sharia councils being allowed to operate under UK arbitration clauses. Jan blames them for 'the greatest human rights violations of minority women in the UK'.[30] Jan's father, a British citizen, went to Karachi in the 1970s to marry Jan's mother. Jan was the second of two daughters and Jan's mother was told by her father that he had not wanted 'another daughter' and threw Jan's mother out of the house with her new-born. Jan's maternal relatives challenged her father, who had by then taken another wife, and so he left for Holland without giving Jan's mother a divorce. She was therefore unable to enter into another Islamic marriage (*nikah*). Jan's mother entered a civil marriage legally, under English civil law, but her second husband was not only very physically violent, he also took a second wife – his first cousin – and brought her to Britain from Pakistan, along with their mutual children. Jan states: '*We have no idea how he did this, as my mother was legally married*.' At 15, Jan was taken out of school in Britain and moved to Kashmir with her sister, there to be married to a cousin twice her age. Jan gave birth to daughters and brought them to Britain, where she was put in touch with the radical Jihadi preacher, Anjem Choudary,[31] who gave her unwanted counselling sessions. What Jan

[30] Written evidence submitted by One Law for All (Personal Testimonies by Women on Inequities of Sharia Courts Updated 7 November 2016), https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/75313/pdf/.

[31] Anjem Choudary is/was the leader of a proscribed Islamic group, al-Muhajiroun. He was given a life sentence at Woolwich Crown Court in July 2024 for terrorist-related offences, and was described by the judge, Mr Justice Wall as seeking to 'spread sharia law, by violent means, to as much of the world as possible'. See 'Anjem Choudary jailed for life', BBC (30 July 2024), https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3geqp8vx08o.

wanted was an Islamic divorce. Jan describes Choudary as 'a misogynist'; 'a dangerous man'; and asks, 'how many more like him are running these mosques or sharia courts that women who are escaping forced marriages and domestic violence […] have to use?' Jan also alleges that many Imams practising in Britain, who pose in public as moderate clerics, actively promote (when among their communities) ultra-zealous Islamist interpretations of sharia. Imam cultism can exploit women trapped in a transnational hellscape of multiple legal jurisdictions, none of which recognise women's legal equality over an Imam's authority. But such cultism also poses a clear threat to Britain's national security, as the case of Choudary demonstrates.

The tolerance shown to sharia systems in Britain has resulted in the gross empowerment of imams who hold no accountability to any national, legal or even religious body; and who are able to operate with more or less total autonomy within the loopholes afforded by the British legal system. As clan leaders within enclaves of largely unintegrated families, religious teachers and leaders can effectively dictate to 'their own' Muslim populations what is permitted and not permitted (under the auspices of Islamic law and religious teaching). Women have few opportunities to make legal representations in this landscape.

To women like Jan, sharia is not a safeguarding system of legal rights and protections for women and children, but rather its opposite, offering a smorgasbord of opportunities to Muslim men (nominally resident in Britain) to do as they please. In response, the British administrative class has appeared more

interested in singing the praises of 'religious freedom' and bending over backwards to appear 'anti-racist' than in upholding fundamental constitutional principles such as formal equality. This has resulted in a system of 'fuzzy law'[32] that is ill-equipped to protect women and children from abuses such as underage or forced marriage, polygamy, genital mutilation, domestic violence or honour-related abuse, loss of child custody, or family disinheritance from an estate.

Sharia has practical legal force in Britain – even if sharia council decisions are not recognised by the British state as formal courts. The sheer number of Muslim communities in which sharia principles of male entitlement take precedence over all other considerations render Jan's story as a perfectly typical one – not an aberration. Jan makes clear in her evidence to the UK Parliament that there are many Muslim women who are 'not in support' of vesting power to sharia arbitration councils, since they have helped ruin the lives of women like her and her mother. In a new study of British Sharia culture, Islam Uddin, a London-based, British Bangladeshi imam, has related 'depressingly similar' stories in his research of domestic slavery and abuse, and the power of 'shame' and 'honour' as control systems underpinning Islamic family custom.[33] Uddin describes one woman, Parvin, whose husband beat her in the stomach when she was pregnant, but she could not go to the police because of embarrassment. Uddin suggests the answer lies in better regulation of sharia councils via a self-regulatory body, but there is no indication that creating additional sharia institutions will do anything but further entrench unwanted cultural practices that are utterly incompatible with British law and values.

[32] Former South African Judge and constitutional lawyer Albie Sachs describes the need for 'fuzzy law' to better support immigrant communities struggling to find their place in the broader, 'intolerant' society. The rights of women stuck in the fuzzy spaces between the host and the immigrant legal jurisdictions are not featured in Sach's 'praise of fuzzy law'. See Sachs, In Praise of 'Fuzzy Law'", Islam and English Law, pp. 230-231.
[33] Islam Uddin, Muslim Women and Islamic Family Law. Lived Experiences in Britain, Routledge (2025).

In December 2016, Dame Louise Casey published her well-known review into 'opportunity and integration'[34], stating that 'not much is known about how [sharia councils] actually operate across the country'. Some of the findings of the review were damning, namely:

- Discriminatory sharia practices against women are causing serious harm.
- Women's rights groups have accused sharia councils and other parallel legal systems of denying vulnerable women and children access to equality and human rights.
- Some sharia councils have been supporting the values of extremists, condoning wife-beating, ignoring marital rape and allowing forced marriage.
- The influence of sharia councils is growing.
- Women are being charged higher fees than men for using the same service (sometimes up to four times as much).
- Women are facing lengthier processes for divorce than men.
- Some women are unaware of their legal right to leave a violent husband and are being pressurised to return to abusive partners or attend reconciliation sessions with their husbands despite legal injunctions in place to protect them from violence.
- Some Muslim arbitration tribunals in the UK are exceeding their mandate in arbitrating on issues outside of their jurisdiction, such as child custody and domestic violence.
- Lack of oversight and an absence of consistent standards means individuals with no training are dispensing life-changing advice, and thereby traumatising women and children.

[34] Dame Louise Casey DBE CB, A review into opportunity and integration (December 2016), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80c4fded915d74e6230579/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf.

- Sharia marriages leave women without full legal rights upon divorce.
- Some men refuse to give or agree to a divorce in order to extract a more favourable financial settlement from their wife. Divorce is used as a coercive verbal threat by men (who do not need to go through any formal procedure) – as is polygamy.[35]

The Casey review further found that 'unregistered polygamy' was 'more commonplace than might be expected'; and that many, if not most, Muslim marriages in the UK were not registered under the Marriage Act – a fact which has long been in the public domain.[36]

Sample cases provided to the Casey review, primarily from the Birmingham Central Mosque Sharia Council, revealed that women in Islamic marriages seeking a divorce were frequently left without any recognition of their equal rights under domestic law. Such women tend to be disproportionately under or unemployed, with poor English language skills and little awareness of the discrepancies between what sharia councils tell them to do and what British law permits.

Nominally, the UK's sharia bodies are not recognised courts of UK law, but clarification was sought on this point in the House of Lords by Baroness Cox as early as 2011, who was at that time concerned about the role of sharia councils in determining outcomes in Muslim family proceedings that were discriminatory against women.[37] Baroness Cox's Arbitration and Mediation Services (Equality) Bill sought to prevent any agreement that discriminated against women: e.g. giving less weight to a

[35] Casey review, paras. 8.40-8.45.
[36] Casey review, para. 8.45. See also S. Khan, Muslim marriages like George Galloway's should be registered. The Guardian (4 May 2012), https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2012/may/04/muslim-marriages-must-be-registered.
[37] Arbitration and Mediation Services (Equality) Bill [HL]. To make further provision about arbitration and mediation services and the application of equality legislation to such services; to make provision about the protection of victims of domestic abuse; and for connected purposes. https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/867

woman's evidence than to a man's or allowing unequal division of inheritance between male and female children.[38]

The Bill was defeated in the end, because it questioned whether sharia councils should really be able to govern marital disputes on the basis of religious principles.[39] The UK Government's position was that the whole point of having an arbitration mechanism was precisely to allow the possibility of dispute resolution according to religious principles.[40]

Baroness Cox explained that her reason for bringing the Bill was to expose the 'quasi legal system that goes under the name of Sharia law […] associated with the Muslim community.' This system, she said, 'discriminates systematically against women […] in matters of family law and testimony evidence before the law and domestic violence'.[41]

Baroness Cox's Bill exposed the precise nature of the threat posed to the domestic jurisdiction by sharia councils and showed that these bodies do operate a separate (*quasi*) legal jurisdiction.

[38] Ian Edge, 'Islamic finance, alternative dispute resolution and family law: developments toward legal pluralism?' in Islam and English Law, p.124.
[39] Under section 46(1) of the Arbitration Act 1996, parties can obtain religious divorces and divide assets according to tenets of Islamic law. A similar provision exists in the United States under the 1925 Federal Arbitration Act, which allows Muslims, Christians, Jews, etc. to use religious tribunals to arbitrate disagreements. To combat abuses of the 1996 Act, resulting in de facto legal discrimination against women, Baroness Cox's Bill sought amendments to ss29, 142, 149 and Schedules 3 and 18 of the Equality Act 2010; s6 of the Arbitration Act 1996; s9 of the Family Law Act 1996; 4 Court orders based on negotiated agreements PART 4 s51 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994; and s118 of the Courts and Legal Services Act 1990. See https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/lbill/2014-2015/0021/15021.pdf.
[40] Amin Al-Astewani, 'Why has Baroness Cox's Bill failed to become law?', Law and Religion UK (4 April 2016), https://lawandreligionuk.com/2016/04/04/why-has-baroness-coxs-bill-failed-to-become-law/.
[41] Cross Rhythms (interview): 'Baroness Caroline Cox And The Sharia Bill' (30 June 2011), https://www.crossrhythms.co.uk/articles/life/Baroness_Caroline_Cox_And_The_Sharia_Bill/43747/p1/.

4.British Sharia Culture and Clan Mentality

The parallel legal jurisdiction of the sharia council is fundamentally incompatible with recognition of formal equality. The existence of sharia councils presents a barrier to Muslim integration in Britain, but such councils also symbolise the legal autonomy and power of Muslim clan enclaves, in which women and girls are regarded as 'clan property'. Cultural practices which reinforce the clan's proprietary claims over the bodies of women and girls include cousin marriage, son-preference, honour-based clan violence and other forms of female subjugation.[42]

a.Cousin Marriage

In England, first cousin marriage was prohibited under Roman Catholic canon law in the fifth century, but since the reign of Henry VIII, it remains technically within the law.[43] But while cousin marriage is not prohibited under English law – or Islamic law[44] –, the majority of the British do not practice it, whereas Muslims living in Britain do. Brought from parts of South Asia (specifically Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh) with significant Muslim populations, first cousin marriage is regarded by many immigrant clans in Britain as perfectly compatible with Islamic faith and doctrine. Given the absence of prohibitions in English law, Islamic first cousin marriage is now embedded in British society.

[42] The European Court of Human Rights made clear in the case of Refah v Turkey that sharia 'clearly diverges from Convention values [and] is incompatible with principles of democracy, [particularly with regard to] its rules on the legal status of women and the way it interferes in all spheres of public and private life in accordance with religious principles'. Refah Partisi and Others v. Turkey (2003) 37 EHRR 1 (application no: 41340/98), §123.

[43] The Marriage Act 1949 and the Sexual Offences Act 2003 prohibit (or criminalise) marriage between siblings, parents, and children - but not between cousins. See A H Bittles, 'Commentary: The background and outcomes of the first-cousin marriage controversy in Great Britain', International Journal of Epidemiology, Volume 38, Issue 6, December 2009, Pages 1453–1458, https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyp313

[44] Muslim men, according to the Quranic verses of the Sura Nisaa (the fourth chapter of the Quran focusing on family law and personal status) are instructed as follows: 'Prohibited to you are your mothers, daughters, sisters, father's sisters, mother's sisters, brother's daughters, sister's daughters' (*Sura Nisaa*, IV, verse 23).

Cousin marriage is a notable feature of how Muslim clans reproduce themselves as separate enclaves. The practice dovetails with sharia family law structures 'to entrench insular clan loyalties at the expense of integration into modern democratic societies'. High rates of cousin marriage correspond with 'an aversion to cultural exchange'.[45]

In Pakistan, cousin marriage is normal and prevalent, comprising around two-thirds of marriages overall.[46] Among Muslims in Britain, cousin marriage is not only prevalent, but has risen exponentially within certain communities (particularly from Pakistan). The data appears to suggest that **cousin marriage becomes even more strategically important for British Muslim immigrant populations**, because it operates as a defence mechanism against cultural and economic integration within the 'host' state and allows ties to be retained with the 'home' state. Studies of British Pakistani settlements in English counties such as West Yorkshire have noted significant increases in the proportion of cousin marriage (e.g. from 33% to 55%; and 37% to 59%) over a single generation of Pakistani mothers.[47]

It is important not to regard cousin marriage as a passive cultural form, passed down from generation to generation in a state of ignorance – by families seemingly impervious to the many medical risks (cystic fibrosis and sickle cell disease). Cousin marriage is a tactic – and one consciously deployed by clans working within the perimeters of what is permitted under English law. It allows wealth and influence to be internally consolidated through the strengthening of family alliances, often with the aim of maintaining strategic relationships and financial assets in the country of origin.[48]

[45] Patrick Nash, 'Sharia in England: The Marriage Law Solution', Oxford Journal of Law and Religion (2017) 6, p. 528.
[46] https://popcouncil.org/insight/the-prevalence-and-persistence-of-cousin-marriage-in-pakistan/ Cousin marriage is often also arranged at an early age – usually by the parents or wider family of the betrothed The promise of marriage is not a binding contract under Islamic law, but in cultural terms such a promise will be ceremonially honoured by an exchange of presents between the families and recitals from the first chapter of the Quran (the Fatihah or 'opening' chapter).
[47] See Patrick Nash, 'The Case for Banning Cousin Marriage', Oxford Journal of Law and Religion, Volume 13, Issue 1, February 2024, Pages 98–118, https://doi.org/10.1093/ojlr/rwae014.
[48] See Darr A, Modell B. 'The frequency of consanguineous marriage among British Pakistanis'. J Med Genet. 1988; 25: 186–190; and Shaw A. 'Kinship, cultural preference and immigration: consanguineous marriage among British Pakistanis'. J Roy Anthrop Inst. 2001; 7: 315–334. Cited in Shaw A. 'Drivers of cousin marriage among British Pakistanis'. Hum Hered. 2014; 77 (1-4): 26-36, footnotes [9]-[10].

To this end, cousin marriage is often mandatory for women and children, and can be ruthlessly enforced as a customary legal obligation, with serious penalties for non-compliance. Fozia Rashid Fozia, for example, was taken from Britain to visit her uncle in Kashmir at the age of 16, where he threatened her with gun, telling her he would kill her and her family if she did not marry his son (Fozia's first cousin).[49]

b.Son Preference

In February 2015, Conservative MP Fiona Bruce proposed an amendment to the Serious Crime Bill to criminalise abortions selected on grounds of foetal sex (female foeticide). Bruce had earlier, in November 2014, proposed an 'extremely straightforward' amendment to section 1 of the Abortion Act 1967 to clarify that sex-selective abortion was a criminal offence.[50] Bruce was unequivocal that sex-selective abortions were happening in the UK and that 'little is being done to stop them'. She cited GP and former BPAS consultant, Dr Vincent Argent, who had confirmed to her that this issue was a growing problem in the UK; that there were significant numbers of 'covert sex-selective abortions' being carried out; and that some hospitals would not tell a women the sex of their baby for fear that it might lead to a sex-selective abortion. Bruce related case studies brought to her attention involving South Asian Muslim women and asked the House if these case studies could 'persuade those who doubt that son-preference is a problem in this country'.[51]

[49] Emma Webb, Interview with Fozia Rashid on 3 October 2019, cited in Webb, 'Fallen through the cracks Unregistered Islamic marriages in England and Wales, and the future of legislative reform', Civitas (August 2020), pp. 69-70.
[50] Section 1 of the Abortion Act 1967 does not expressly prohibit the termination of a pregnancy on grounds of the unborn child's sex.
[51] Abortion (Sex-Selection) Volume 587: debated on Tuesday 4 November 2014, https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2014-11-04/debates/14110444000001/Abortion(Sex-Selection)

Recent, independent demographic analysis of sex ratios at birth in the UK reveals that there is a 'missing girls' problem in the UK among British Asian populations.[52] But the British Medical Association has continued to be highly dismissive of the idea that sex-selective abortions are being carried out in the UK, calling evidence 'largely anecdotal' and suggesting that the practice is already unlawful under unamended law. Yet the Muslim Women's Network has been on the whole quite clear that there is a good deal of family coercion in their communities, which involves women being 'beaten, abused, harassed and *forced to abort*'.[53] Islamic advocacy groups such as *Muslims for Choice* have opposed any restrictions that would create barriers to women accessing abortion, on the basis that Islamic religious legal consensus allows abortion (it is not mentioned in the *Quran*). *Muslims for Choice* has expressed concerns that doctors would be asked to breach patient confidentiality were they to harbour suspicions that a pregnancy was being terminated on grounds of sex; and that Muslim women could find themselves 'on the wrong side of the law' for seeking sex-selective abortions, given that their communities are routinely scapegoated and smeared for being 'uniquely backwards on women's rights' and 'dictating' to women.[54] Such arguments are nothing else but bold and brazen opposition to the fact that British domestic laws enshrine formal equality. Cultures based on son-preference must not be able to level accusations of scapegoating and prejudice as a way of subverting state law and introducing sharia customary codes by the back door.

[52] Unnithan, M., & Kasstan, B. (2021). 'But It's Not That They Don't Love Their Girls': Gender Equality, Reproductive Rights and Sex-Selective Abortion in Britain. Medical Anthropology, 41(6–7), 645–658. https://doi.org/10.1080/01459740.2021.2002857; Sen A. Missing women--revisited. BMJ. 2003 Dec 6;327(7427):1297-8. doi: 10.1136/bmj.327.7427.1297. PMID: 14656808; PMCID: PMC286281.
[53] MWNUK Statement on Call for Sex-Selective Abortion Amendment (23 February 2015), https://www.mwnuk.co.uk/mediaStatmentDetail.php?id=127
[54] Rashida Islam, Muslims for Choice, in an address to the pro-choice Abortion Rights group on 26 February 2018, https://abortionrights.org.uk/muslims-for-choice-founder-addresss-british-islam-conference-on-being-muslim-and-pro-choice/.

c.Clan domination and the control of women

Clans measure their chances of survival in direct proportion to the amount of control they are able to exert over women and girls. Women are the reproducers of clan identity (materially and symbolically). Clans impose a greater responsibility on women for maintaining clan boundaries and impose punishments on women for having sex or having children with males from outside the clan. The highest premium is chastity. In the *Quran*, a woman's chastity is expressly the property of her husband and to be carefully guarded in the husband's absence, with permitted admonishments or beatings for lack of obedience.[55] In Islamic legislation, provisions exist to reduce penalties for so-called crimes of honour, committed by family members against females who have exhibited unchaste conduct. The Arab jurist and commentator Abdul-Hamid Shawarbi wrote about a husband's honour as 'the most precious thing that he possesses', giving rise to 'aggravating and extenuating circumstances' for violence committed where a clan male's honour has been violated, stating: 'At the moment that he catches his wife committing adultery he will no doubt lose his reason and kill his wife and her partner'. [56]

Within Turkish immigrant enclaves in Germany, honour-related violence (including killings) against women and girls has been well documented.57 In Britain, particularly among Pakistani enclaves, egregious patterns of abuse have entered the UK's criminal courts. The most well-known case is that of Shafilea

[55] Sura Nisaa, IV, verse 34).
[56] Siddiqui, "Law and the Desire for Social Control".
[57] Kroslak, Daniel, Honor Killings and Cultural Defense (with a Special Focus on Germany) (June 19, 2009). Míľniky Práva v Stredoeurópskom Priestore, 2009 , Islamic Law and Law of the Muslim World Paper No. 09-71, Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=1422503.

Ahmed, whose birthday has become a Memorial Day for victims of honour killings. Shafilea, who grew up in Cheshire, was suffocated by her parents at the age of 17 in 2003, for being 'too westernised' and bringing shame on her family. Shafilea had feared being married off in Pakistan. Her parents were jailed for the murder in 2012, and the judge made a point of describing the family's wish that their daughter live in a 'sealed cultural environment' as 'unrealistic, destructive and cruel'.[58]

Shafilea's case mirrors that of Samia Shahid, 28, from Bradford, who was murdered by her father and former husband on 14 July 2016 in northern Punjab.[59] Between 2009-2021, Dr Sadiq Bhanbhro, a male Pakistani Senior Research Fellow at Sheffield Hallam University, conducted in-depth interviews with over 200 men and women in the UK and Pakistan, submitting evidence to the UK Parliament on the subject of honour violence in December 2022. He concluded that his data showed honour to be 'a system of surveillance, normalisation, and examination', imposing 'normalised standards of being chaste, modest, and obedient'. He noted the clan view of women as property, in which a woman is 'a vessel of honour of an individual man or [the] wider group'. Forced marriages and honour killings are techniques of social control imposed on 'non-conforming' and 'disobedient' women and girls by senior clan members 'under the auspices of the honour system'.[60]

[58] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-33516885
[59] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-37258853
[60] Written evidence by Dr Sadiq Bhanbhro was submitted in December 2022 to a UK Parliamentary Committee established to examine the prevalence of honour-based abuse in the UK, and 'the extent to which the Government, police and other services understand the forms of such abuse, and the support in place to help victims'. Available at https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/114470/pdf/.

	All honour-related offences	Female genital mutilation offences	Forced marriage offences	Other honour-related tagged offences
England and Wales	2,755	111	201	2,443

***Table 1*: Offences involving so called 'honour-based' abuse recorded by the police in England and Wales for the year ending March 2024.[61]**

Clan honour codes based on female chastity and modesty are the reason for cultural pressures on women to cover. There is a scriptural mandate for this in the *Quran*, which commands women to 'lower their gaze' and 'not to show off their adornment except only that which is apparent (like both eyes for necessity to see the way, or outer palms of hands or one eye or dress like veil, gloves, head-cover, apron, etc.), and to draw their veils all over *Juyubihinna* (i.e. their bodies, faces, necks and bosoms)…'[62]

Simple head coverings such as the *hijab* have become a common sight on the streets and in the public places of Britain; and, increasingly, many Muslim women are turning to stricter dress codes such as the wearing of the *niqab* (face covering), to emphasise their separateness from the host or majority population. The *niqab* is a radical symbol and is associated with recent manifestations of political Islam in countries such as Egypt,

[61] UK Home Office Official Statistics on so called 'honour-based' abuse offences, England and Wales, year ending March 2024 (Published 7 November 2024), https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-year-ending-march-2024/statistics-on-so-called-honour-based-abuse-offences-england-and-wales-year-ending-march-2024.

[62] '… and not to reveal their adornment except to their husbands or their fathers, or their husband's fathers, or their sons, or their sister's sons, or their sisters in Islam, or female slaves, or old male servants who lack vigour, or small children who have no sense of feminine sex'. Sura 24:31.

where it is associated with the Muslim Brotherhood.[63] Not just a political garment, the *niqab* is also a symbol of clan *territorialisation*. Whether the individual Muslim woman voluntarily wears the niqab or not, her face covering remains the collective expression of clan rule. Women who appear in public are clan property and their dress is a statement of a quasi-legal obligation to be unrecognisable, and closed, to the host culture. This contributes to a culture of violence, hostility, and base inequality for women – even (and sometimes especially) for *non-Muslim* women. Being in public and uncovered renders non-Muslim women immodest according to cultural clan standards based on Quranic or sharia principles. And in areas of the country dominated by clan politics, non-Muslim women become highly vulnerable to increasingly emboldened forms of predation from Muslim gangs of men seeking sexual gratification (and to profit financially) from the exploitation of 'non-clan' women and children. How else to explain the targeting, by British Pakistani male clan operatives in Rotherham, Telford, and Rochdale, of non-Muslim women and children as 'fair game' and 'white slags'?[64] The imperative that women cover is not 'just' a private religious requirement. It is a cultural assertion of a Muslim clan's territorial and legal supremacy. It declares the precedence of an honour-based system over British domestic laws premised on formal equality between the sexes.

Many countries, both across Europe and in the Muslim-dominated world, have banned, or have sought to ban, the *niqab*.[65] At the recent Reform Party Conference,

[63] 'Battle of the niqab moves to Egypt', The Arab Weekly (28 October 2018), https://thearabweekly.com/battle-niqab-moves-egypt.
[64] See Joint Faith Group Response to Religiously and Racially Motivated Sexual Grooming Gangs (12 April 2023), https://nsouk.co.uk/joint-faith-group-response-religiously-and-racially-motivated-sexual-grooming-gangs/, which notes the remarks of Judge Gerald Clifton, when sentencing men in Rochdale in 2012, who observed that 'Muslim men had targeted their victims because they were not part of the offenders' 'community or religion'.' See also Bindel, 'Dangerous rise in Sharia courts in UK'.
[65] The Spectator has listed the following countries which have legal restrictions on wearing full-face coverings in public – mostly in the context of public buildings: Algeria, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chad, China, Denmark, France (general ban in public), Gabon, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. In Afghanistan, the wearing of a burqa or niqab (which has a slit for the eyes) is compulsory for women. See The Spectator, 'Behind the Veil' (14 June 2025), https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/how-many-countries-have-banned-the-burqa/.

Sarah Pochin MP, along with head of policy, Zia Yusuf, backed calls to ban full-body and face coverings in public, on grounds that face coverings (i) prevent immigrants from integrating, (ii) engage public safety issues, and (iii) are 'not British culture'. Pochin and Yusuf are right on all three counts.[66]

The multiple and repeated attempts by different countries worldwide to ban Islamic face coverings (European and non-European, Islamic and non-Islamic) support the assertion that coverings for women can be used as symbols of a clan legal system operating in competition with the domestic (state) laws of the host nation. In Bulgaria, where the *niqab* was banned in 2016, the ban followed national concerns about a very small Salafist community of Roma in the southern city of Pazardjik. A preacher from Pazardjik named Ahmed Musa, a convert to Islam, began teaching that strict adherence to Islamic scripture meant rejecting democracy and the legal sovereignty of the democratic state. Musa urged women in 'his' community to wear the *niqab*. Musa appears to have travelled to the West, from whence he brought a radical Islamic ideology back upon his return. He was later prosecuted for spreading religious hatred and his story demonstrates the way his clan deployed sharia dress codes of female modesty and subjugation to assert a legally separatist, ethno-religious identity.[67] Musa's case offers a warning from the Bulgarian state to the British one: ban religious face coverings or defer to clan law.

[66] 'Burka ban should be in our manifesto', The Telegraph (4 September 2025), https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2025/09/04/sarah-pochin-burka-ban-manifesto-reform-only-female-mp/; also GB News, 'Reform UK edges closer to burka ban as Zia Yusuf sets record straight on 'huge impediment to assimilation'', 7 September 2023, https://www.gbnews.com/politics/reform-uk-conference-burka-ban.

[67] See Mila Mancheva and Rositsa Dzhekova, "Risks of Islamist Radicalisation in Bulgaria: a Case Study in the Iztok Neighbourhood of the City of Pazardzhik", Working Paper for the Center for the Study of Democracy, February 2017, https://csd.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/publications_library/files/23175.pdf.

5.Conclusions & Recommendations

In 2018, the UK Parliamentary noted, in an independent review of sharia councils, that those proposing to ban them had provided 'no counter proposal or any solution for anyone seeking a religious divorce'.[68] The suggestion that there is no clear solution to the problem of sharia councils and sharia law, which are assertions of a parallel legal system under clan rule, is false. British law is premised on formal equality – that must include women's equality. No one living under British law is entitled to seek a religious divorce at the expense of this foundational legal principle. If Muslim clans and sharia councils are permitted to operate regimes of sex discrimination with impunity, then British law is not only undermined, but the territories over which it has jurisdiction are ceded (to de facto foreign laws). The sharia question is first and foremost a question of both women's equality and British sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security.

Below is a list of legal and policy recommendations by the Women's Policy Centre. It is designed to enable successive UK governments to tackle the root causes of sharia-related discrimination and women's inequalities, which are now endemic across the state jurisdiction.

[68]https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a750e8040f0b6397f35d531/6.4152_HO_CPFG_Report_into_Sharia_Law_in_the_UK_WEB.pdf.

WPC Policy Proposals

- No legal, or quasi-legal recognition for religious marriages and divorces via sharia councils.
- Divorces must be obtained by means of a civil arrangement that is legally binding.
- Sharia councils to be dismantled: they are wholly unnecessary.
- Urgent legislation to ensure that every religious marriage is registered under British law, bringing to an end the currently operational two-tier marriage system.
- Couples in community-approved marriages that are not recognised under domestic law will not be able to apply for, or receive, state welfare payments (such as universal credit or married couple's allowance); and no automatic right of inheritance or financial benefit will accrue to couples from such marriages (e.g. when seeking to transfer assets free from capital gains tax).
- Ban face coverings in public.
- Explicitly outlaw first cousin marriages and sex-selective abortions as part of a new Women's Equality Legal Charter, to be drafted as a statement of Britain's international treaty obligations as a signatory to the CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979).

End