

## Written evidence from National Secular Society [HBA0005]

### 1. Introduction and summary of recommendations

- 1.1. This response is made on behalf of the National Secular Society. The National Secular Society is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organisation founded in 1866, funded by its members and by donations. We advocate for separation of religion and state and promote secularism as the best means of creating a society in which people of all religions and none can live together fairly and cohesively. We seek a diverse society where all are free to practise their faith, change it, or to have no faith at all. We uphold the universality of individual human rights, which should never be overridden on the grounds of religion, tradition or culture. More information about our organisation can be found here: <https://www.secularism.org.uk/about.html>
- 1.2. We strongly support women's rights and sexual equality. Sadly, the subordinate role afforded to women in many organised religions has contributed to abuse and violence against women and girls. This includes so-called honour-based abuse, which is often rooted in religious ideology about gender roles and community norms.
- 1.3. We would like to stress the importance of acknowledging the role conservative religion can play in honour-based abuse and other forms of violence against women and girls. As campaigners Karma Nirvana state: "Honour Based Abuse is more prevalent within communities from South Asia, the Middle East, and North and East Africa. Reports of honour-based abuse can come from "Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Orthodox Jewish and occasionally traveller communities."<sup>1</sup>
- 1.4. All too often, a reluctance to criticise religion results in factors fuelling honour-based abuse becoming willfully ignored out of fear of being labelled intolerant. But in order to end honour-based abuse, authorities must be willing to directly confront the ideology underpinning 'honour' – including religious ideology.
- 1.5. It is also important to acknowledge that, while women are more likely to be victims of honour-based abuse, both victims and perpetrators can be female or male.
- 1.6. In this response, we would like to highlight the specific challenges and barriers faced by victims or those vulnerable to honour-based abuse presented by religion, and make recommendations for overcoming these.
- 1.7. A summary of our recommendations:  
**#1 Charities:** Charity regulators should be given greater powers to intervene when charities promote or condone sexism, misogyny, violence against women or girls, 'gay conversion therapy', or homophobia. Charities that operate sharia councils should also be reviewed. Charities which operate sharia councils that prove detrimental to women's rights should lose their charitable status. Charity guidelines must clarify that charities cannot promote harmful ideologies, as doing so goes against the public benefit requirement. The role of 'the advancement of religion' charitable purpose in promoting misogyny, homophobia and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://karmanirvana.org.uk/get-help/what-is-honour-based-abuse/>

other extremism which contributes to honour-based abuse should be examined, and the status of this charitable purpose reviewed. Schools should be prohibited from promoting ideologies that stigmatise same-sex relationships. There should be no religious exemption from this.

**#2 Education:** All schools, including faith schools, should be required to teach age-appropriate, inclusive, objective and factual information about RSE that is inclusive and does not reinforce sexist stereotypes or gender roles. RSE should not be subject to censorship or distortion due to religious concerns. The parental right of withdrawal from sex education should be repealed, bringing RSE in line with the vast majority of other subjects. The government must legislate for compulsory registration of all electively home educated children with the local authority.

**#3 Religious marriages:** The government must ensure all communities are educated in British law and citizenship, so they are aware that sharia council 'rulings' have no legal significance. The government should adopt all recommendations for reforming wedding law as proposed by the Law Commission, including new offences criminalising officiants who mislead anyone into thinking they are legally married when they are not. The government must ensure all people, especially young women who speak minimal English and/or are recent migrants to the UK, are aware of marriage laws and their rights within a legally-recognised marriage.

**#4 'Blasphemy' and 'apostasy':** The government should promote free speech as a positive value and uphold the right to freedom of expression, including expression about religion. The government should continue to resist adopting the APPG Islamophobia definition, and other attempts to use hate crime or equality laws to silence speech around religion. The government should consider extending its policies regarding the protection of places of worship from hate crime, including funding, to groups which support those leaving religion.

**#5 'Modesty culture':** Authorities should cease activities which celebrate religious 'modesty culture'. They should instead challenge instances of enforced religious modesty culture around the world. The schools admissions code should be amended to prevent schools from imposing religious and sexist modesty culture on pupils and their families.

**#6 FGM:** The law protecting girls and women from FGM should be strengthened by extending them to male and intersex children. This will prevent some forms of FGM becoming legal through gaps in the law.

**#7 Community services for women:** The government should cease any funding programmes that are ringfenced exclusively for religious organisations to deliver public and community services. Any organisations in receipt of government funds or endorsement to deliver public and community services should be explicitly forbidden to proselytise or otherwise discriminate against service users as part of their contract.

**#8 Caste:** The government should legislate to include 'caste' as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010.

**#9 'Conversion therapy':** The government should work to end 'conversion therapy' by exploring both legislative and non-legislative options. This should include preventing registered charities from promoting, facilitating, condoning or carrying out 'conversion therapy'.

## 2. Misogyny fuelled by charities

- 2.1. Charities are required to serve a public benefit and to not promote extremism or other harms. But our research into religious charities suggests that promotion of misogynistic religious ideology which underpins honour-based abuse is disturbingly prevalent.
- 2.2. Charity law across the UK includes 'the advancement of religion' among the list of recognised charitable purposes. This means an organisation can register as a charity simply by advancing an ideology recognised as religious by charity regulators. It does not have to have any other function, such as helping the poor.
- 2.3. Many religions are based on patriarchal values, and this is therefore reflected in the religious charity sector. Many religious charities promote sexist and misogynistic ideas, including female subordination, fixed gender roles and 'modesty culture'. In some cases charities may openly condone abuse and violence against women and girls.
- 2.4. Below are some examples of charities registered under 'the advancement of religion' which we have discovered promoting or signposting misogyny in the name of religion, listed in order of registration date (newest to oldest):

Charity name: **Moray Coast Baptist Church**

Charity number: SC051952

Year registered: 2022

Summary: A sermon on this charity's website by the church's pastor said "it's not fitting or proper for a woman to exercise authority over men" and that the role of women is "to submit to the authority and leadership of your husband, and to bring up godly children". It also said the "primary function" of a woman is "to be married, to have children, and to tend to household affairs – the cooking, the cleaning, the washing up". It added: "Society would be a lot better if women would submit to their husbands and tend to their children and take care of their home. The world wouldn't be in the mess that it is in today if that were the case."<sup>2</sup>

Charity name: **Utrujj Foundation**

Charity number: 1196901

Year registered: 2021

Summary: An article on the charity's website written by its founder, main teacher and one of its trustees said a man "has the permission to 'strike'" his wife as part of "a process to salvage a marriage" and that the "right to beat" wives is "part of a process" if a wife is "undermining her husband's authority".<sup>3</sup>

Charity name: **Holiness Revival Movement Worldwide Europe (Horemow Europe)**

Charity number: 1194619

Year registered: 2021

Summary: A passage in one leaflet on Horemow Europe's website explicitly blamed women's fashion choices for contributing to rape, saying: "What does it mean to look sexy

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2022/10/nss-refers-christian-charity-to-regulator-over-misogyny>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2022/01/islamic-charity-advises-on-when-and-how-to-beat-women>

anyway? It is simply to appeal for or suggest sex by the way you dress and apply make-up. No wonder there is increase in rape today and people are not addressing the real problem. You who dress like this is [sic] a strong contributor to the problem.” The website also said trousers are “the uniform of a harlot” and wearing trousers helps a woman “to market her commodity to get the opposite sex aroused as they view the shape of her private part”<sup>4</sup>.

Charity name: **Ghamidi Centre of Islamic Communication**

Charity number: 1192764

Year registered: 2020

Summary: A lecture published on the charity’s website entitled “The Right to Beat Wives” said it is acceptable for a husband to “punish” his wife if she challenges his authority, provided it does not “leave any sign of wound” on her<sup>5</sup>.

Charity name: **IslamBradford**

Charity number: 1154340

Year registered: 2013

Summary: This charity’s homepage included a link to a website called 'New Muslim Guide' which says a Muslim woman “must be attentive to her husband's sexual needs” and that a woman who rejects her husband's “legitimate sexual advances” is committing “a monstrous sin”.<sup>6</sup>

Charity name: **The Christadelphian Sunday School Union**

Charity number: 1097921

Year registered: 2003

Summary: This charity is a Sunday school for children. The contents of their website reflect what they teach children. They include statements like “A woman is subject to her father, and then to her husband” and “If we are honest, most women are better than men at preparing an ecclesial supper, talking to children and old people etc. and men are, in general, better at most of the more leading roles.”<sup>7</sup>

Charity name: **Bolton Central Islamic Society**

Charity number: 1041569

Year registered: 1994

Summary: In 2019 this charity’s website was found to link to an external site which implied that wives cannot unconditionally refuse sex with their husbands.<sup>8</sup>

Charity name: **Croydon Mosque and Islamic Centre**

Charity number: 285030

Year registered: 1982

Summary: Articles on this charity’s website promoted the subordination of women by telling wives and daughters to wear burqas and encouraging them not to leave the home.<sup>9</sup>

Charity name: **Thamesdown Islamic Association**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2021/07/christian-charity-faces-investigation-over-promotion-of-misogyny>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2021/01/new-islamic-charitys-website-says-same-sex-attraction-is-a-disease>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/04/nss-refers-islamic-charities-promoting-extremism-to-regulator>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/11/christadelphian-charities-condoning-violence-and-promoting-misogyny>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/04/nss-refers-islamic-charities-promoting-extremism-to-regulator>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/06/islamic-charities-push-death-for-apostates-and-female-subjugation>

Charity number: 276549

Year registered: 1978

Summary: A downloadable book on this charity's website promoted marital rape: "The conjugal act is the right of the husband and the woman cannot deny him this right without any valid reason". On the subject of husbands beating their wives, it said that "mild hitting is allowed, but not on the face". It also said husbands should forbid wives from "freely mixing" with strangers, reading novels, or leaving the house without permission.<sup>10</sup>

Charity name: **Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland**

Charity number: SC003545

Year registered: 1944

Summary: This charity's website says: "The woman then is under authority – under male authority. Female subjection requires that she submit to that male authority. The man's authority means the woman's submission." It adds: "The woman's femininity of character fits her more for subjection and for child nurture, the man's masculinity more for headship and his own sphere of the external workplace. Yes, there are differences of personality within manhood and womanhood, but except when grievously distorted by an ungodly culture such as our own, there are certain features of character which are feminine and certain that are masculine."<sup>11</sup>

- 2.5. Charities are entitled to tax breaks because they are meant to provide a public benefit. Organisations promoting abuse and violence against women, and the misogyny that fuels such abuse, are clearly not providing a public benefit. Steps must be taken to ensure no organisation that promotes violence against women or girls or other forms of misogyny can become a registered charity – regardless of any religious ethos.
- 2.6. Concerningly, we believe 'the advancement of religion' charitable purpose may prevent charity regulators from taking action against charities promoting misogyny or other harmful ideologies, if it can be demonstrated the ideology is part of the charity's religious beliefs.
- 2.7. Earlier this year the Scottish charity regulator OSCR declined to uphold a complaint made by the NSS about deeply homophobic, sexist and anti-vaccine Facebook posts by East Kilbride Christadelphians on the grounds that their statements were "in accordance with their religious beliefs"<sup>12</sup>.
- 2.8. OSCR guidance says registered charities "must actively provide benefit". Furthermore, an organisation may fail the charity test if it causes "actual or likely detriment or harm". It is clear charities such as East Kilbride Christadelphian Ecclesia are promoting ideology likely to cause detriment or harm, while its benefit to the public is unclear at best.
- 2.9. That OSCR is unable to prevent a charity from promoting harmful ideologies due to those ideologies being in accordance with the charity's religious beliefs demonstrates that 'the advancement of religion' charitable purpose is a barrier to charity regulation and must therefore be reviewed. If the government is serious about combatting misogyny and other

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/06/islamic-charities-push-death-for-apostates-and-female-subjugation>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.fpchurch.org.uk/about-us/what-we-contend-for/distinctions-between-male-and-female/the-distinct-roles-of-men-and-women/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2022/06/regulator-fails-to-act-on-religious-charitys-homophobic-anti-vax-memes>

extremist ideologies, it should ensure that they are not perpetuated by the organisations that it treats as charitable.

- 2.10. For more information about the problems caused by the ‘advancement of religion’ charitable purpose, please see our 2019 report:

<https://www.secularism.org.uk/charities/charity-report.html>

- 2.11. **Recommendations:**

**- Charity regulators should be given greater powers to intervene when charities promote or condone sexism, misogyny or violence against women or girls. Charity guidelines must clarify that charities cannot promote misogynistic ideologies, as doing so goes against the public benefit requirement.**

**- The role of ‘the advancement of religion’ charitable purpose in promoting misogyny and extremism should be examined, and the status of this charitable purpose reviewed.**

### 3. Faith schools and relationships & sex education (RSE)

- 3.1. Teaching children that women and men are equal, that all forms of abuse including violence against women or girls are unacceptable, and how to protect themselves from abuse is essential to combat honour-based abuse. Unfortunately, government policy regarding relationships and sex education (RSE) undermines this – especially at faith schools.
- 3.2. Under Department for Education guidance, faith schools (schools with a religious character or ethos) in England can teach RSE “in accordance with the tenets of their faith”.<sup>13</sup> Our 2018 investigation *Unsafe Sex Education* highlighted the consequences of this allowance for faith schools. It found that most state-funded secondary faith schools teach a distorted version of RSE, with many schools teaching outdated gender roles and that sex outside of marriage, contraceptives, abortion, and same-sex relationships are morally wrong.<sup>14</sup>
- 3.3. Last year a Herefordshire Catholic school was widely criticised for using *A Fertile Heart* – a faith-based RSE resource for Catholic schools “to ensure the quality of content and that the delivery is in line with Catholic teachings”. It teaches that men are “created to initiate sexual relationships” while women are “receiver-responders”. It also taught that same-sex relationships and contraception are wrong. *A Fertile Heart* is run in all 56 Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Cardiff alone.<sup>15</sup>
- 3.4. Inadequate RSE provision can be a particularly egregious problem in independent faith schools. An Ofsted inspection last year at Jamia-Al-Hudaa, an independent Deobandi Islamic boarding school for girls aged 11-19, found pupils “do not learn about harmful sexual behaviour, consent and respect” in RSE.<sup>16</sup>
- 3.5. Last year an inspection at Beis Hatalmud, an independent Charedi Jewish school in Salford for boys aged 11-16, found pupils “do not understand the law relating to sexual consent,

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<sup>13</sup> <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2017-03-01/HCWS509>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/unsafe-sex-report-april-2018.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-hereford-worcester-56304961>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2022/02/girls-at-failing-faith-school-not-taught-consent-or-respect-in-rse>

exploitation and abuse”<sup>17</sup>.

- 3.6. And in June last year Beis Ruchel D'Satmar London, a Jewish independent school for girls age 3-16, was found not to be teaching any aspect of sex education, “not even reproduction in the context of an academic subject like science”<sup>18</sup>.
- 3.7. There have also been recent examples of schools implementing sexist policies rooted in religious ideas about gender roles. Last November an inspection at King David High School, a state-funded Jewish school, found pupils who attend the school’s girls’ unit (Yavneh Girls) are “separated from all other pupils at the school throughout the school day, including during breaks and at lunchtime”. It also found Yavneh Girls pupils “do not have the same access to extra-curricular activities” as the pupils who attend Yavneh Boys and the main school<sup>19</sup>.
- 3.8. And in May 2021 Ofsted found that boys at Leeds Menorah School, an independent Jewish school, are taught about Jewish criminal and civil law but girls are not. School leaders say boys need this subject for their higher education but it is “less relevant” to girls. Staff also told Ofsted that boys and girls are expected to sit separately in lessons.<sup>20</sup>
- 3.9. RSE lessons may also be censored in schools without a religious character. Government guidance states all schools are required to take “the religious background of all pupils into account” during RSE lessons,<sup>21</sup> creating an unreasonable expectation that faith-based opposition to teaching about healthy relationships may be accommodated.
- 3.10. Additionally, parents are still able to opt their children out of sex education classes. This, combined with the accommodations made for faith schools and schools with large numbers of children from faith communities, will leave behind children from conservative religious backgrounds. It is these children who most need impartial, appropriate education in this area.
- 3.11. The right of withdrawal can be exploited as a loophole by schools which have religious objections to offering sex education. In 2021 Ofsted found all parents had withdrawn their children from sex education at Ateres Girls High School, an independent Jewish school. There are nearly 250 pupils at the school.<sup>22</sup> Ofsted recorded a similar incident this year in another girls’ Jewish school in London<sup>23</sup>.
- 3.12. Last year Jewish counter-extremism group Nahamu highlighted how a lack of RSE contributes to forced marriage in Charedi Jewish communities in a position paper<sup>24</sup>. The paper argues some Charedi arranged marriages fall within the definition of forced marriage under UK law.
- 3.13. The paper says the education of young people in Charedi communities can be “severely limited” because Charedi schools may redact material that is “not consistent with a specific world view”. It adds that the lack of RSE in Charedi schools means engaged

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2022/01/jewish-school-pupils-lack-understanding-of-consent-ofsted-finds>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2021/10/inadequate-faith-school-failed-to-teach-reproduction-in-science>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2022/03/state-funded-faith-school-unlawfully-segregates-girls-ofsted-finds>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2021/07/faith-school-breaching-equality-law-over-sex-segregation-says-report>

<sup>21</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/908013/Relationships\\_Education\\_Relationships\\_and\\_Sex\\_Education\\_RSE\\_and\\_Health\\_Education.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/908013/Relationships_Education_Relationships_and_Sex_Education_RSE_and_Health_Education.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2021/05/all-pupils-withdrawn-from-sex-education-at-independent-jewish-school>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2022/11/faith-school-fails-to-teach-human-reproduction-in-science>

<sup>24</sup> <http://nahamu.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Position-Paper-on-FM-Nahamu-Feb-2021.pdf>

couples “may not be prepared for sexual relations” and are “unlikely to have any meaningful awareness of what it means to consent”. Furthermore, people in Charedi communities may not “understand or recognise abusive behaviours”, including sexual abuse, marital rape or domestic abuse.

- 3.14. There is a “total exclusion” of any reference to LGBT+ people in “both educational and social contexts”. This means LGBT+ people in Charedi communities face “additional challenges” and “very serious issues of consent” when presented with a universal expectation of early, heterosexual marriage.
- 3.15. The paper says “improved education, particularly in schools” in Charedi communities, is the best way to improve compliance with laws prohibiting forced marriage. It recommends that the Department for Education should ensure education around forced marriage is included in mandatory RSE, including in maintained and independent Charedi schools, with support from school watchdog Ofsted.
- 3.16. Until all children, regardless of the religion or belief of their parents, are able to receive objective and well-rounded RSE lessons, we will continue to see children learn stigmatised and sexist religious ideas about sex, which will undermine efforts to combat honour-based abuse.
- 3.17. **Recommendations:**
- **All schools, including faith schools, should be required to teach age-appropriate, inclusive, objective and factual information about RSE that is inclusive and does not reinforce sexist stereotypes or gender roles. RSE should not be subject to censorship or distortion due to religious concerns.**
  - **The parental right of withdrawal from sex education should be repealed, bringing RSE in line with the vast majority of other subjects.**

## 4. Religious ‘courts’

- 4.1. Religious ‘courts’, which offer religious ‘rulings’ that are recognised by religious communities but not by courts of law, can contribute to honour-based abuse, including forced marriage and abuse within marriage.
- 4.2. Islamic marriages are administered by bodies often known as ‘sharia councils’ or ‘sharia courts’. There are concerns that Muslim women, especially those not born in the UK and/or unable to speak English, perceive them as having real legal authority.
- 4.3. Sharia is a system which leaves children vulnerable and discriminates openly against women, undermining their legal and political equality. Sharia councils have been shown to have acted in ways contrary to the law and leaving women vulnerable to domestic abuse<sup>25</sup>. To seek a religious ‘divorce’ a woman must gain permission from these almost entirely male councils, and there are reports of women being denied this request even in cases where she had faced abuse.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/whitewashing-sharia-councils-in-uk/>



4.4. Some sharia councils operate as part of a registered charity. This is concerning, as charities must demonstrate a public benefit, must not cause harm, and must operate according to equality law. A charity operating a sharia council that treats women less favourably than men or compels women to stay in abusive relationships is failing all three of these tests.

4.5. **Recommendations:**

**- The charitable status of charities that operate sharia councils should be reviewed. Charities which operate sharia councils that prove detrimental to women's rights should lose their charitable status.**

**- The government must ensure all communities are educated in British law and citizenship, so they are aware that sharia council 'rulings' have no legal significance.**

## 5. Unregistered religious-only 'marriages'

5.1. We have specific concerns about unregistered religion-only 'marriages', as they leave women and children particularly vulnerable to abuse without adequate recourse for justice.

5.2. This is of particular concern in Muslim communities. Rates of religious 'marriages' (*nikah*) that are not recognised in UK law are especially high in these communities, and a significant proportion of those in such marriages may be unaware they lack the full legal rights and protections of legally recognised civil marriage. If a woman is 'divorced' suddenly, or against her wishes, she can be left homeless and without any money or assets, because the 'marriage' has no legal force, giving her no rights or legal protections.

5.3. We therefore welcome the recommendations put forward by the Law Commission in 2020 to reform the law to help tackle problems that can be caused by unregistered marriages, particularly:

- New offences criminalising officiants who mislead anyone into thinking they are legally married when they are not. This will help protect people, particularly women in Muslim communities, from unknowingly entering religion-only marriages that offer no legal protections.

- Introducing an officiant-based system for the legal recognition of marriage to replace the current restrictive building-based system. This means all weddings would be legally permitted to take place in a safe and dignified location chosen by the couple. This will be particularly suitable for Islamic weddings, which do not traditionally take place in a mosque and often take place at home or in a hotel. This change in rules will therefore remove barriers for Muslims wanting their marriage to be legally recognised.

- Universal legal rules for all weddings, with very few exceptions. Different rules currently apply to Anglican weddings, Jewish and Quaker weddings, other religious weddings, and civil weddings, which creates confusion and unfairness and may contribute to some couples opting for a 'religion only' marriage.

5.4. While these measures are positive steps, we do not think they are sufficient by themselves to tackle the problems caused by unregistered marriages. We believe they must be coupled

with a programme of outreach and education, to ensure that women in especially hard to reach communities, including those who do not speak English, are informed about British marriage law and the advantages of entering a legally-recognised marriage.

- 5.5. Although less widespread, similar concerns have been expressed regarding Jewish religion-only unregistered marriages, which in some cases can leave women trapped in abusive relationships if the husband refuses a religious ‘divorce’ (*get*). We therefore welcome moves to tackle this by recognising ‘get refusal’ as a form of domestic abuse in statutory guidance published this year<sup>26</sup>.

5.6. **Recommendations:**

**- The government should adopt all recommendations for reforming wedding law as proposed by the Law Commission, including new offences criminalising officiants who mislead anyone into thinking they are legally married when they are not.**

**- The government must ensure all people, especially young women who speak minimal English and/or are recent migrants to the UK, are aware of marriage laws and their rights within a legally-recognised marriage.**

## 6. Free speech and ‘apostasy’

- 6.1. We would like to highlight perceived ‘blasphemy’ and apostasy (leaving or changing one’s religion) as potential motivations for honour-based abuse. In some strict religious communities both are regarded as serious ‘offences’ – indeed, in several theocratic countries, both are punishable by death<sup>27</sup>. And in some communities, criticising religion, including aspects contributing to honour-based abuse, can result in intimidation and violence.

- 6.2. These ideas may be promoted by registered charities. In 2019 we found the website of the charity Islamic Centre Leicester said the punishment for ‘apostasy’ is death<sup>28</sup>. IslamBradford, which registered as recently as 2013, hosted a link on its homepage to a website which said Muslims who leave Islam and do not rejoin “will be killed”<sup>29</sup>. Bolton Central Islamic Society’s website was found to link to an external site which condoned the execution of those who leave Islam.<sup>30</sup>

- 6.3. Unfortunately, groups which exist to protect and assist individuals who have left religion receive very little support, despite being targeted by extremists. We are aware that members of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, which exists to support those who have left or who wish to leave Islam, has been continuously targeted with threats, including death threats<sup>31</sup>. For this reason, many of their meetings and events are forced to be held under strict security. While government funding exists specifically for places of worship

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<sup>26</sup> <https://www.thejc.com/news/news/new-government-guidance-recognises-get-refusal-as-domestic-abuse-6bWRJwnMQ9r77E9oUMR58K>

<sup>27</sup> <https://fot.humanists.international/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/06/islamic-charities-push-death-for-apostates-and-female-subjugation>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/04/nss-refers-islamic-charities-promoting-extremism-to-regulator>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/04/nss-refers-islamic-charities-promoting-extremism-to-regulator>

<sup>31</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20170805072321/http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1555263/New-group-for-those-who-renounce-Islam.html>

targeted by hate crime, no such funding exists for groups for those who have left a religion, despite the frequent hate crime<sup>32</sup> such individuals face.

6.4. The problem is compounded by attempts to silence those critical of religious communities, including women's rights activists within those communities, by accusing them of 'anti-religious bigotry', 'Islamophobia' or other forms of intolerance for criticising religiously-sanctioned forms of sexism and misogyny. This has a severe chilling effect on women's ability to speak out about their experiences honestly and openly. Authorities must protect the right to free speech of those who challenge any practice or ideology, religious or not, that harms women and girls or undermines their equality and human rights.

6.5. We have particular concerns about the pressure being applied to adopt the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims' 'Islamophobia' definition, which conflates race with religion and can be used to silence criticism of Islam. This helps foster the idea that Islam must not be subject to criticism or scrutiny while at the same time silencing criticism of aspects of Islam that may contribute to honour based abuse. Groups and individuals which have publicly criticised the definition include Civitas, the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, the Network of Sikh Organisations and Christian Concern, Richard Dawkins, Pragna Patel, and Peter Tatchell<sup>33</sup>.

6.6. **Recommendations:**

**- The government should promote free speech as a positive value and uphold the right to freedom of expression, including expression about religion.**

**- The government should consider extending its policies regarding the protection of places of worship from hate crime, including funding, to groups which support those leaving religion.**

**- The government should continue to resist adopting the APPG Islamophobia definition, and other attempts to use hate crime or equality laws to silence speech around religion.**

## 7. 'Modesty codes'

7.1. Religious 'modesty codes' for women are part of the ideologies underpinning honour-based abuse. They impose different standards on women and men and reinforce patriarchal subordination of women. Perceived failure to obey these codes can motivate honour-based abuse. When women are told they must cover themselves up to avoid harassment, abuse or violence from men, this amounts to victim blaming and apologism for perpetrators of violence against women and girls.

7.2. We are concerned that hardline religious groups attempt to silence criticism of 'modesty culture' by portraying such criticism as hate speech. For example, the All-Party Parliamentary Group's 'Islamophobia' definition says Islamophobia "is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness".

7.3. Hijab is an 'expression of Muslimness', and so criticising the hijab could be interpreted as 'Islamophobic' under this definition. Indeed, many of those who have spoken out against

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<sup>32</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20170912074528/https://www.theguardian.com/global/2015/may/17/losing-their-religion-british-ex-muslims-non-believers-hidden-crisis-faith>

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/05/islamophobia-definition-unfit-for-purpose-say-campaigners>

Islamic modesty codes have been labelled Islamophobic<sup>34</sup>.

7.4. To compound matters, aspects of the state support and reinforce religious modesty codes. Despite the appalling way in which compulsory hijab is used to subjugate women in countries like Iran and Afghanistan, in 2018 the Foreign Office encouraged its staff to mark 'world hijab day'<sup>35</sup>.

7.5. Furthermore, the state enables state-funded schools to impose sexist religious modesty codes on its pupils and their families. The Office of the Schools Adjudicator consistently permits Jewish faith schools to have admissions codes specifying female pupils and their mothers must dress according to very strict religious modesty standards. For example, Beis Yaakov Jewish High School, an all-girls state-funded Jewish school in Salford, specifies that mothers and girls "will dress at all times in accordance with the strictest standards of Tznius (modesty)", which includes prohibiting "figure hugging dresses", "very brightly coloured" clothing and clothing made from "trendy" fabrics. Additionally, mothers must completely cover their hair "at all times", sleeves "must cover the elbows at all times", and tights "should be worn at all times and it should be apparent that they are being worn".<sup>36</sup>

#### 7.6. Recommendations

**- Authorities should cease activities which celebrate religious 'modesty culture'. They should instead challenge instances of enforced religious modesty culture around the world.**

**- The schools admissions code should be amended to prevent schools from imposing religious and sexist modesty culture on pupils and their families.**

## 8. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

8.1. We welcome progress made in protecting girls from female genital mutilation (FGM) which, despite frequent claims to the contrary, is in part motivated by religious and cultural beliefs. However, the UK is still a long way from eliminating this form of honour-based abuse.

8.2. Worryingly, some religious organisations registered as charities in the UK may be using religion to condone FGM. In 2019 the NSS referred the registered charity IslamBradford to the Charity Commission for linking to a website that said FGM "is neither a bad practice or harmful, if it is done within moderation".<sup>37</sup>

8.3. We are also concerned that religious lobbyists are attempting to change laws around the world to permit comparatively 'minor' forms of FGM, such as nicking the clitoris with a needle or scissors.<sup>38</sup> They argue that these forms of FGM are less invasive or harmful than

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/opinion/2017/11/a-lesson-in-silencing-dissent-the-controversy-of-hijab-in-schools>

<sup>35</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2018/02/nss-criticises-foreign-office-for-fetishising-the-hijab>

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/opinion/2021/03/faith-based-school-admissions-pave-the-way-for-sexist-and-unreasonable-demands-its-time-to-end-them>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/04/nss-refers-islamic-charities-promoting-extremism-to-regulator>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/opinion/2018/09/genital-cutting-the-search-for-health-benefits-is-disingenuous-and-inconsistent>

male circumcision, which continues to enjoy a presumed exemption from the law.<sup>39</sup>

8.4. All forms of non-consensual, non-therapeutic genital cutting are painful, traumatic, and carry risk of serious complications. They also violate the fundamental human right to bodily autonomy. Extending laws prohibiting FGM to male and intersex children would help safeguard against any attempts to create legal 'loopholes' for 'minor' forms of FGM.

8.5. **Recommendations:**

**- Steps should be taken to ensure registered UK charities do not publish or signpost material that promotes or condones any form of FGM.**

**- The law protecting girls and women from FGM should be strengthened by extending them to male and intersex children. This will prevent some forms of FGM becoming legal through gaps in the law.**

## 9. Community services

9.1. We have specific concerns about the push to outsource community services to religious groups – including services for women.

9.2. Many religious organisations do not support gender equality. This may take the form of barring women from leadership roles within the organisation and/or teaching that women are subordinate to their husbands or other male relatives. They may also oppose access to contraception and abortion, both of which may be essential to victims of honour-based abuse. Public bodies should not outsource public services aimed at challenging violence against women or girls to organisations which do not support the principles of gender equality.

9.3. The push to outsource public services to religious groups has caused concern among those working specifically on women's issues. The government's launch of a £1 million 'faith new deal' pilot fund last year exclusively for faith groups that provide community services attracted criticism from former executive director Pragna Patel of Southall Black Sisters (SBS), which defends the rights of women in ethnic minority communities. She said SBS has to "constantly contend" with faith groups that claim to deliver services to women and children subject to domestic abuse but in reality puts them "at further risk of abuse and harm". She said public funds should go to community groups, "especially those working on unpopular issues within their communities such as violence against women and girls".

9.4. Indeed, one of the charities funded under the scheme is All Souls Serve the City, which exists to "advance the Christian faith" in London, for its 'Tamar' project. According to the charity's website, Tamar is "a team of volunteer women who aim to restore hope to people exploited in the sex industry".

9.5. There is evidence evangelism may be part of Tamar. Their website says their work includes offering "prayer for individual need"<sup>40</sup>. A support worker job description on the charity's

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<sup>39</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/ojs/article-abstract/40/3/508/5862902?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

<sup>40</sup> <https://asstc.org.uk/tamar>

site says it is “essential” to be an evangelical Christian for the role, for which key tasks include “conducting one to one Bible studies”. By contrast, experience with supporting women involved in the sex industry and safeguarding reporting is not essential. The job description says Tamar “seek to bring gospel hope and biblical truth to those who find themselves homeless, women involved in the sex industry including those who are trafficked and exploited”<sup>41</sup>.

- 9.6. Selma Taha, current executive director of SBS said in regard to Tamar: “We are appalled that the government should have set aside funding specifically for religious groups to provide such sensitive services when many organisations, with years of expertise and experience in the Violence Against Women and Girls Sector, are facing funding crises. Evangelical proselytising is the more egregious end of a spectrum in which religious-based services, in any case, are not an appropriate solution for supporting women who may be judged for not conforming to gender stereotypes.”
- 9.7. A number of similar charities have also registered recently. One is Azalea, a charity which says it provides support to women involved in sex trafficking. Its website says the organisation “was established in prayer” and that prayer is “essential for the fulfilment of the vision that we will see an end to commercial sexual exploitation and sex trafficking”. It says prayer is “always offered” to the vulnerable sex-trafficked women its volunteers work with, and the prayer is “almost always accepted”.<sup>42</sup>
- 9.8. According to a 2020 report from the Universities of Sheffield and Leeds, faith groups should avoid proselytising when working with victims of modern slavery. The report found some survivors who had sought help from religious organisations had experienced pressure to attend religious services because they felt it was a requirement of the support. The report concludes that all organisations in contact with potential survivors of modern slavery should implement the ‘non-proselytisation clause’ of the Human Trafficking Foundation Slavery and Trafficking Survivor Care Standards.<sup>43</sup>

9.9. **Recommendations:**

**- The government should cease any funding programmes that are ringfenced exclusively for religious organisations to deliver public and community services.**

**- Any organisations in receipt of government funds or endorsement to deliver public and community services should be explicitly forbidden to proselytise or otherwise discriminate against service users as part of their contract.**

## 10. Caste

- 10.1. Perceived ‘caste’ is also a factor in many honour-based abuse cases across the world. As recently as November, it was reported in UK media that in India, a man murdered

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<sup>41</sup> <https://tamarwestminster.org/images/Tamar-Support-Worker-Job-Description-Apr-2022.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/opinion/2021/07/helping-the-public-shouldnt-mean-pushing-religion-on-people>

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/media/8409/download>

his daughter after she married a man from a different caste<sup>44</sup>.

10.2. The phenomenon of caste discrimination and oppression exists in the UK, as evidenced by a report by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research<sup>45</sup>. Despite this, and despite continuous calls from groups representing those vulnerable to caste discrimination (Dalits), the government has refused to recognise caste as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010, largely influenced by groups representing conservative and high-caste Hindus<sup>46</sup>.

10.3. As a result, those facing caste discrimination the UK have very little legal protection. Caste-based hate is also not explicitly recognised in hate crime laws. This increases the vulnerability of certain communities to caste-motivated honour abuse.

10.4. **Recommendation:**

**- The government should legislate to include 'caste' as a protected characteristic in the Equality Act 2010.**

## 11. 'Gay conversion therapy'

11.1. 'Gay conversion therapy', the attempt to make LGBT+ people heterosexual, is always motivated by homophobia and religion is usually a contributing factor. According to the 2018 National Faith & Sexuality Survey by the Ozanne Foundation, amongst respondents who said they had been advised to attempt to change their sexual orientation, over half had been told to do so by a religious leader.<sup>47</sup>

11.2. In conservative religious communities, attempting to change one's sexuality may be strongly tied to defending a family or community's honour, as being LGBT+ is often considered a source of shame. In these cases, conversion therapy should be considered honour-based abuse.

11.3. There are many forms of conversion therapy, some of which are violent in nature. Whatever forms they take, all conversion therapy should be considered abusive because of its underlying homophobia, and because of the very high risk of causing harm to the victim. Of those respondents with experience of attempting to change their sexual orientation in the Ozanne Foundation's survey, well over half said they had suffered from mental health issues and nearly a third said they had sought counselling to help them recover from it. Mental health issues included attempting suicide, self-harm, eating disorders, anxiety and depression.<sup>48</sup>

11.4. We welcome the government's commitment to legislating against conversion therapy. However, we are concerned that the government's plans will not target registered charities which offer forms of conversion therapy which will remain legal (i.e. 'consensual'

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/dad-shoots-daughter-mum-helps-28577820>

<sup>45</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/85522/caste-discrimination.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/85522/caste-discrimination.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/faith-shaped-holes-how-religious-privilege-is-undermining-equality-law.pdf>

<sup>47</sup> <https://ozanne.foundation/faith-sexuality-survey-2018/>

<sup>48</sup> <https://ozanne.foundation/faith-sexuality-survey-2018/>

talking therapy and prayers for adults), or charities which promote homophobic ideologies fueling demand for such 'therapy'.

11.5. Charities which perform, or have performed, activities that could be classed as conversion therapy include Core Issues Trust<sup>49</sup>, Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries International<sup>50</sup> and Winners Chapel International<sup>51</sup>.

11.6. There are numerous examples of registered charities which do not promote conversion therapy directly but do promote the homophobic ideology that fuels the practice. Some of the more egregious examples include the following, listed in order of registration date (newest to oldest):

Charity name: **Ghamidi Centre of Islamic Communication**

Charity number: 1192764

Year registered: 2020

Summary: A lecture published on the charity's website said homosexuality "cannot be allowed" because "there are people who lose their senses and are inclined to killing others" and that "we're not going to allow killing because of the reason that there is somebody who has a problem in his mind or is mentally ill". The lecturer said homosexuality "needs to be stopped, it needs to be curbed" and if there are "people who are suffering from diseases which are causing them to be inclined to do things which are illegitimate, we need to cure such patients".<sup>52</sup>

Charity name: **The Faith Movement**

Charity number: 1188137

Year registered: 2020

Summary: An editorial on the charity's website says homosexual "temptations" result from "a confusion of the affective and the erotic faculties" that "may be deeply rooted in neurosis". Another blog on the website compared the arguments of those who support equal civil rights for LGBT+ people with "those of slaveholders and those involved in the slave trade". It said "reparative therapy" (another term for the harmful practice of 'gay conversion therapy') is an "option" for gay people.<sup>53</sup>

Charity name: **IslamBradford**

Charity number: 1154340

Year registered: 2013

Summary: This charity's website was found in 2019 to host a link to a website that said men who have sex with other men are "to be executed" and calls homosexuality "a great and abhorrent evil". It said punishments for homosexuals include being "burned with fire", "thrown down from a high place" and "stoned to death".<sup>54</sup>

Charity name: **Bolton Central Islamic Society**

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<sup>49</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/uk-council-for-psychotherapy-consensus-statement-on-conversion-therapy.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/echo-goes-undercover-gay-cure-13468107>

<sup>51</sup> <https://www.itv.com/news/2018-11-12/an-itv-news-undercover-investigation-exposes-the-uk-church-that-claims-you-dont-have-to-be-gay>

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2021/01/new-islamic-charitys-website-says-same-sex-attraction-is-a-disease>

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/opinion/2020/04/charity-and-homophobia-shouldnt-mix>

<sup>54</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/04/nss-refers-islamic-charities-promoting-extremism-to-regulator>



Charity number: 1041569

Year registered: 1994

Summary: In 2019 this charity's website was found to link to an external site which said gay people should be executed.<sup>55</sup>

Charity name: **The Preston Muslim Cultural Centre**

Charity number: 518584

Year registered: 1987

Summary: In 2019, the NSS found this charity's website had a downloadable book that said homosexuals are "to be killed by the sword".<sup>56</sup>

Charity name: **East Kilbride Christadelphian Ecclesia**

Charity number: SC010420

Year registered: 1977

Summary: In 2022 the charity posted a series of homophobic memes, including one depicting the destruction of the biblical cities Sodom and Gomorrah with the words "teach kids LGBT history". According to some interpretations, God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah as punishment for homosexual activity among their inhabitants. Another was a picture of a wolf in rainbow sheepskin, with the words "it's OK, we only want equality"<sup>57</sup>. Another was a picture of a Pride parade with the caption: "Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire"<sup>58</sup>.

Charity name: **Free Presbyterian Church Of Scotland**

Charity number: SC003545 (OSCR)

Year registered: 1944

Income: £3,662,379

Summary: The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland's website refers to same-sex relationships as "heinous", "vile", "great evil", an "abominable practice" and "a lifestyle of disease and death". It website quotes the Bible's assertion that those who wear clothes of the opposite sex are "abomination unto the Lord thy God", and says: "What fearful uncleanness ensues from 'cross-dressing' and other deliberate and extreme 'trans-gender' sins against this requirement."<sup>59</sup>

11.7. We think promoting conversion therapy and other forms of homophobia is incompatible with the legal requirement for charities to provide a public benefit and not to cause harm. Greater scrutiny of the roles charities play in conversion therapy is necessary, including an examination of the charitable purpose of 'the advancement of religion'.

11.8. Unfortunately, charity regulators seem either unable or unwilling to intervene to stop religious charities promoting conversion therapy or other forms of homophobia.

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<sup>55</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/04/nss-refers-islamic-charities-promoting-extremism-to-regulator>

<sup>56</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2019/04/nss-refers-islamic-charities-promoting-extremism-to-regulator>

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2022/02/nss-refers-christian-charity-to-regulator-for-anti-vaxx-memes>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2022/06/regulator-fails-to-act-on-religious-charitys-homophobic-anti-vax-memes>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/opinion/2020/05/scotland-says-it-wants-to-clamp-down-on-hate-but-its-charity-law-helps-to-promote-it>

- 11.9. As mentioned previously, Core Issues Trust (CIT) advocates what it calls “change orientated therapies” for people “who want to move away from homosexual feelings, behaviours and attractions”. The trust says the therapies it promotes “support client goals to prioritise conservative religious values over their same-sex attractions in identity development”.<sup>60</sup> Although CIT rejects the term conversion therapy this activity falls under the definition of ‘conversion therapy’ as set out by the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP).<sup>61</sup>
- 11.10. In 2020 the NSS wrote to the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland to urge it to review CIT’s status as a registered charity. The Charity Commission responded by saying it would not take any action, as it is “not the role of the commission to adopt a position on the charity’s conduct in this matter”. It noted that the Core Issues Trust presents its therapy as “beneficial” and “contests the view that this practice is inherently harmful”. It added: “We note that the practice of conversion therapy / change orientated therapy is not among the purposes of the charity.”
- 11.11. The response appeared to suggest it was not the commission's role to take a position on such therapy while it is legal.
- 11.12. And this year, Scottish charity regulator OSCR indicated it was unwilling to act on the homophobic and anti-vaccine memes posted by East Kilbride Christadelphians (see Section 2 above) on the grounds that their statements were “in accordance with their religious beliefs”<sup>62</sup>.
- 11.13. That charity regulators are unable to prevent charities from promoting homophobia and other extremism due to that extremism being in accordance with the charity’s religious beliefs demonstrates that ‘the advancement of religion’ charitable purpose is a barrier to charity regulation and must therefore be reviewed.
- 11.14. Furthermore, state-funded faith schools can play a role in stigmatising LGBT+ people. As mentioned previously, faith schools are permitted to teach relationships and sex education (RSE) from their religious perspective. This has been seen as a green light for some faith schools, and particularly Catholic schools, to explicitly teach that same-sex relationships are morally wrong.
- 11.15. In our 2018 research, we found examples of state-funded Catholic schools refer to same-sex relationships as “unacceptable”, “against the natural order” and “sexual sins”, and referring to homosexuals themselves as having a “special problem” and being “objectively disordered”. One Catholic school’s RSE policy said families of gay children “should be given respectful pastoral guidance, so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God’s will in their lives.”<sup>63</sup> This suggests advocating celibacy for young gay people, an approach some campaigners have likened to conversion therapy.

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<sup>60</sup> <https://www.core-issues.org/change-oriented-therapy>

<sup>61</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/uk-council-for-psychotherapy-consensus-statement-on-conversion-therapy.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/news/2022/06/regulator-fails-to-act-on-religious-charity-s-homophobic-anti-vax-memes>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.secularism.org.uk/uploads/unsafe-sex-report-april-2018.pdf>

11.16. **Recommendations:**

- **The government should work to end ‘conversion therapy’ by exploring both legislative and non-legislative options. This should include preventing registered charities from promoting, facilitating, condoning or carrying out ‘conversion therapy’.**

- **The Charity Commission should be given greater powers to intervene when charities promote homophobia. Charity guidelines must clarify that charities cannot promote ideologies that stigmatise LGBT+ people, as doing so goes against the public benefit requirement.**

- **The role of ‘the advancement of religion’ charitable purpose in promoting homophobia should be examined, and the status of this charitable purpose reviewed.**

- **Schools should be prohibited from promoting ideologies that stigmatise same-sex relationships. There should be no religious exemption from this.**

## 12. ‘Spiritual’/ ‘witchcraft’ abuse

12.1. Another growing form of violence in religious communities is ‘abuse linked to faith or belief’, sometimes known as ‘witchcraft abuse’. Some cases may also be considered a form of honour-base abuse, and there may additionally be an overlap with ‘conversion therapy’ (see above).

12.2. Abuse linked to faith or belief is defined by the Metropolitan Police as: “...where concerns for a child’s welfare have been identified, and could be caused by, a belief in witchcraft, spirit or demonic possession, ritual or satanic abuse features; or when practices linked to faith or belief are harmful to a child.” This can encompass physical, emotional and sexual abuse, in addition to neglect. Although children of either sex may be affected, in some communities victims of ‘witchcraft’ accusations are usually female.

12.3. As the atrocious case of Victoria Climbié in the late 90s demonstrated, children who are not within the school system and not registered with local authorities are more vulnerable to abuse, including ‘witchcraft abuse’. This is one reason why we support a compulsory register for all children who are educated at home.

12.4. **Recommendation:**

- **The government must legislate for compulsory registration of all electively home educated children with the local authority.**