

Top sharia court 'is protecting wife-beater suspects'

From the [*Mail on Sunday*](#)

A prominent sharia court has been accused of "sabotaging" criminal proceedings to protect alleged perpetrators of domestic violence against women.

The Muslim Arbitration Tribunal (Mat) in Nuneaton, Warwickshire, is one of the most influential of about 80 Islamic "councils" in Britain.

It rules on disputes within Muslim communities and says on its website that it can make submissions to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) to "reconsider" criminal charges against men accused of assaulting their partners.

But Southall Black Sisters, a women's rights group, argues that Mat is effectively 'sabotaging criminal proceedings' against men accused of domestic violence by asking the CPS to 'reconsider' any charges.

In a statement, the group wrote: 'The Mat, for example, actively involves itself in criminal proceedings on domestic violence, despite stating that it is unable to deal with criminal offences. It uses its position of power to persuade the CPS to drop charges and to encourage women to reconcile with abusive partners without reference to court orders they may already have or to risk assessments and safety planning.'

Sharia councils and the Mat hold themselves out to be 'courts of law' but they are in fact highly arbitrary decision making forums that use dominant, patriarchal and authoritarian interpretations of Muslim codes which are passed off as

'sharia' laws.'

The Sunday Times reported in 2008 that the tribunal had intervened in six cases of domestic violence. It ordered the men to take anger management classes and undergo mentoring from community elders. There was no further punishment. In each case the women subsequently withdrew the complaints they had lodged with the police.

Lord Macdonald, former director of public prosecutions, told The Sunday Times: 'When a formal criminal charge is laid it is not appropriate for an extrajudicial institution to bring the victim and her alleged attacker together to seek a 'resolution' beyond the control of the UK courts and certainly not where that institution itself has a questionable approach to the rights of women and to their supposed place in society.'