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Scotland's Domestic Abuse and Forced Marriage Helpline

Zara Gilmour, Head of Helpline

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Who we are

- Managed by Scottish Women's Aid, in partnership with Respect, funded by Scottish Government
- 24/7 confidential support by phone, email, web chat, SMS, and WhatsApp
- Emotional support, information, safety planning, signposting
- Anyone affected by domestic abuse or forced marriage in Scotland

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What is domestic abuse?

- A pattern of behaviour used to gain power and control over a partner or ex-partner
- Includes coercive control, emotional, sexual, physical, financial, technological abuse
- 60,000+ incidents recorded by Police Scotland annually, 81% female victim with a male perpetrator
- Can happen to anyone, in any type of intimate relationship. Most often men abuse women, but can affect people of all genders

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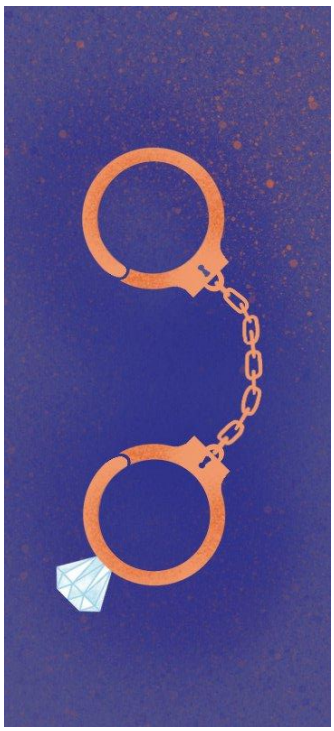

What is forced marriage?

- One or both people don't (or can't) freely agree to the marriage
- Duress is used to force them to go ahead with the marriage, including emotional or physical pressure
- Forced marriage is an abuse of human rights and it is prohibited by all major religions
- Forced marriage is a crime in Scotland

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The work behind Helpline of the Year 2024

- Launched new text and WhatsApp service with National Lottery funding
- Co-designed with survivors and staff to prioritise safety
- 1,000+ messages in first six months
- 14,249 contacts in 2023/24, a 14% rise on the previous year
- 95% of users said they got the support they needed
- *"This service has probably saved my life. It's so accessible when other supports are not."*

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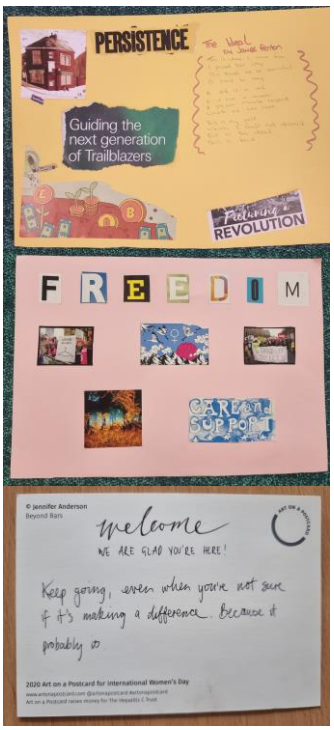
Staff Wellbeing Support Award

- Innovation only works when staff are supported to hold the emotional load and wellbeing is built-in
- Highlight was in-person development day centred on hopefulness and community wellbeing
- 100% helpline staff feel supported in their physical and mental health
- *"The support for my mental and physical wellbeing is immense, and I never feel like I don't matter as a person"*



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Where we are now

- SMS and WhatsApp now embedded as core channels with 500+ texts per month
- Social media ads driving record reach and awareness
- 10,244 contacts in first half of the year, a 48% increase on last year
- Growing helpline team, now over 30 staff
- New structure with Helpline Team Leaders
- Reflecting on our achievement

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Thank you

Zara.Gilmour@womensaid.scot

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