

# Campaign to drive out child abuse

**Published Date:** 22 March 2009

By David Leask

THEY call it the Rooster or Murgha, perhaps one of the most ingenious forms of corporal punishment devised.

For centuries, children in the Indian subcontinent who misbehaved were forced to adopt the agonising, almost yogic, stance. They would squat down, put their hands behind their calves and then try and pull on their ears.

Once, when the tawse was still wielded in Scottish schools, the Murgha was relatively common in British mosques and their schools, madrassahs, where thousands of children learn the Koran and Arabic almost every evening.

Not any more, say Scotland's leading Muslims. Corporal punishment is now largely a thing of the past. But how do we check?

Scotland on Sunday today revealed that as many as four out of five madrassahs north of the border have not been carrying out checks to root out people who should not be working with children. A campaign has been launched to get mosques, madrassahs and other sporting and faith groups in the black and ethnic minority community to register with Disclosure Scotland, which vets volunteers and workers.

The campaign is the brainchild of Ali Khan, chairman of Roshni, a Glasgow charity that raises awareness of child abuse in all minority communities, not just Muslim ones, that mainstream groups find harder to reach.

"There is no particular problem with child abuse in mosques," he said yesterday. "There are about 50 madrassahs and mosques in Scotland. Many may be aware of the disclosure requirements and many may not be aware. Our job is to make them aware and assist them where we can."

Roshni's campaign – which comes on top of Scottish Government efforts to drive home child safety messages – began before an imam in Dundee was accused of hurting a child. But the alleged incident has focused attention on the issue within the Islamic community, especially as its leaders look to modernise madrassahs.

Osama Saeed, chief executive of the Scottish-Islamic Foundation, said: "Where mosques are not complying with regulations on child protection, they should start doing so, and we have found mosques and imams ready and willing to do so."

The foundation is looking at ways that madrassahs, increasingly run by Scots-born or educated imams rather than elderly men from Pakistan, can also help children with their core skills, English and numeracy.

Khan, meanwhile, does not just want to sign the mosques up for Disclosure Scotland, he also wants to pioneer child protection training inside them.