



**Forced Marriage and Domestic Violence among South  
Asian Communities in North East England**

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## SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

This study looks at forced marriages and domestic violence within South Asian communities in Newcastle, Sunderland and South Tyneside, and examines the following research questions:

- Experiences, hopes and perceptions of marriage among South Asian women and men.
- Experiences of domestic violence in arranged, forced and love marriages, and links between forced marriage and domestic violence.
- Identification of areas for positive development for agencies and organisations.

The report is divided into six sections<sup>2</sup>. The first section will place our report in the context of current debates on the subject, and explain our methodology. Section 2 concentrates on the mapping and assessment of domestic violence services for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities in Sunderland and forced marriage services in Sunderland, Newcastle and South Tyneside. Section 3 examines the experiences of married women and men. Section 4 analyses the experiences and expectations of single women and men and young people. Section 5 examines the views of community leaders. Section 6 concludes the report by drawing out recommendations for action and research from this study and points to gaps in services and knowledge.

### 1.1: BACKGROUND AND CURRENT DEBATES

The issue of forced marriage is one that is of both national and international interest and focus (FCO, DoH et al., 2003; Schmidt and Jakobsen, 2004; Home Office, 2006). In the UK, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) commissioned a study on forced marriage in 2000, where a distinction is made between arranged and forced marriage, and a forced marriage is defined as a marriage where one or both parties do not consent freely to the marriage; entry into such a marriage is accompanied by physical, mental and/or emotional duress and coercion from family members. In contrast, an arranged marriage is where the family arranges the marriage, but both parties give their free and full consent (Uddin and Ahmed, 2000). Existing research indicates some of the complex interplay and differences between forced and consensual arranged marriages (Shan, 1991). However, some literature points out that the differences between arranged and forced marriages can sometimes be fuzzy and inchoate (Caroll, 1998).

The prevention of forced marriage is identified as part of a wider ‘strategy to ensure that all people can live without fear, whether from racist attacks or from domestic violence’ (Uddin and Ahmed, 2000: 4), which identifies a connection between coercion, entry into marriage, racism and domestic violence. Other documents from the FCO and

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<sup>1</sup> This research would not have been possible without the help of various individuals and organisations in the North East, including Parveen Akhtar and Pummi Mattu from DIVA, Young Asian Voices, Northumbria Police, Monjer Rashid and Mohammed Zaman, We would also like to thank all the participants who were interviewed during the study.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this report, we use codes devised for women, men, young people and community leaders in order to anonymise the interview data. Therefore details of ethnicity, religion etc are not given other than where it is considered relevant to the analysis, and where anonymity can be totally guaranteed.

DoH make a direct link between domestic violence and forced marriage, conceptualising forced marriages as a form of domestic violence in itself, and contributing to domestic violence after marriage (FCO and DoH, 2003). Strategies suggested to reduce forced marriage are similar to those used for tackling domestic violence, such as improving interagency cooperation (Interrights *et al.* 2000; HO 2003).

Some research suggests that UK families from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh generally tend to reproduce their caste and sectarian communities, underpinned by regional and linguistic identities (Barot, 1998). Conversely it is suggested that while parents forcing young people into marriage believed that they were upholding the cultural practices of their country of origin, in reality practices and traditions there had 'moved on'. Therefore it is suggested that forced marriage is a product of the diasporic experience and not a 'traditional practice' (Home Office, 2000; Phillips and Dustin, 2004).

Feminists argue that forced marriage violates human rights, and as a form of domestic violence is heavily gendered in its impact, as it disproportionately affects young women (Siddiqui, 2002). In terms of ethnicity, currently available data from the Forced Marriage Unit indicates that forced marriage is prevalent in all South Asian communities, although there is some evidence that it also occurs in other communities (FCO and HO, 2005). However, there is a general perception that this is an issue that is predominant among Muslim communities, which feeds into the generalised Islamophobia in the UK, especially in the aftermath of 9/11 and 7/7. Marginalised communities therefore express concern about state interest in forced marriages, seeing it as a veiled threat against arranged marriages, and research indicates the need for community initiatives to be carried out in a culturally sensitive manner (Samad and Eade, 2002).

There have been recent proposals to create a specific criminal offence of forced marriage, leading to a national consultation on the issue. The consultation paper points out that there is no specific offence in the UK of 'forcing someone to marry' (FCO and HO, 2005: 8); however there are provisions within criminal and civil law to deal with the range of offences committed during forced marriage. These include kidnapping, false imprisonment, assault, sexual offences, harassment, child cruelty and failing to ensure school attendance. The consultation document suggests that legislation may have some disadvantages, such as having a disproportionate effect on the BME population, which can be interpreted as an attack on specific communities, potentially increasing the alienation of victims from their families. However, it could also be beneficial in preventing forced marriage by having an important deterrent effect and empowering young people. The debates on forced marriage also have an impact on immigration debates. The current proposal by the Home Office (2006), to raise the age for a sponsor or spouse entering the country from 18 to 24, implies that forced marriages have a primarily overseas dimension which needs immigration interventions.

## 1.2: METHODOLOGY

The study took place over a period of 18 months (September 2005–Feb 2006) and focused on Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian communities in Newcastle, Sunderland and South Tyneside. It used multi methods including surveys, telephone and face-to-face interviews, and focus groups.

The research began by conducting a mapping exercise of services for domestic violence in Sunderland<sup>3</sup> and forced marriages in Sunderland, Newcastle and South Tyneside. Telephone and face-to-face interviews were conducted with members of different statutory and voluntary agencies working in the areas of health, housing, support, advocacy, criminal justice and community development, including those working primarily or solely with ethnic minority communities.

Women and men who were married, divorced or separated were interviewed to elicit data on their experiences of marriage including, where relevant, experiences of domestic violence. Interviews were semi-structured; individuals were encouraged to tell their stories and hence some data is not comparable across the sample(s). Given the sensitivity of the topic under research we sought access to men, women and young people through community, women's and youth organisations.

A sample of men and women who had experienced forced, arranged and love marriages were interviewed in order to understand perceptions and experiences of marriage; the context in which their marriages took place; and the impact of their experiences. A further sample of single men and women were interviewed in order to explore their views and understandings of marriage and their own prospective marriages. Additionally, focus groups with young people (aged between 10 and 22 years) were conducted, to understand their views and expectations about marriage, and a semi-structured interview schedule was used to elicit data about the respondents' aspirations with regard to marriage. A vignette which described a young woman experiencing 'emotional pressure' to enter into marriage was employed. The use of vignettes is regarded as a useful heuristic device which can elicit a discussion about an issue in such a way that is removed from personal experience, but allows for the input of personal experience if desired.

Breakdown of Interview Sample:

	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
Single <sup>4</sup>	13	17
Arranged Marriage	17	13
Love Marriage	3	1
Forced Marriage	4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>32</b>

In addition, we interviewed four community and religious leaders/representatives from Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian communities to ascertain their views on forced marriages.

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<sup>3</sup> Earlier needs assessment studies on domestic violence provision in Newcastle (Wigglesworth et. al. 2003) and South Tyneside (Gangoli et. al. 2005) have examined the provision of services for BME women in these areas.

<sup>4</sup> This includes young people under 16

The study has collected unique data on marriages, domestic violence and experiences of forced marriages for the North East.

## SECTION 2: SERVICE PROVISION FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND FORCED MARRIAGE

### 2.1: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SERVICE PROVISION IN SUNDERLAND

Representatives of fifteen agencies in Sunderland were interviewed in order to assess their policies on domestic violence for BME women. These included three statutory agencies, eight voluntary organisations and four that defined themselves as community organisations. Of the fifteen agencies, ten (66%) used a domestic violence definition in their work. However, only six (40%) agencies had specific guidelines for BME communities, and eight (53%) agencies acknowledged issues for BME women within their definition of domestic violence. These included acknowledgement that domestic violence happened across ethnicities, the specific forms that domestic violence could take within BME communities and the specific needs of BME communities with regard to domestic violence. Organisations working with BME communities did not always work on domestic violence even though they acknowledged it as a problem:

*Don't have a policy ... because organisation not set up to deal with domestic violence though (in) work, we came across issue ... (Youth organisation)*

Ten (66%) organisations provided a direct service to BME women and children experiencing domestic violence. The type of services offered included help lines, outreach services, counselling, legal support, policing, accommodation and interpretation services. Thirteen (87%) organisations referred women and young people experiencing domestic violence to other agencies, primarily to the police, social services, health and a local domestic violence refuge.

### 2.2: FORCED MARRIAGE SERVICE PROVISION

Interviews were carried out with forty-nine agencies from the statutory and voluntary sectors (including generic and specialist agencies) as part of the mapping process on services for forced marriages. In total twenty-four of the organisations were based in Newcastle, thirteen in Sunderland, eight in South Tyneside, and the remaining four in other locations in the North-East. The table below illustrates the 'type' of agency involved in this part of the research.

<b>Organisations</b>	<b>Number of Agencies</b>	<b>Percentage of Total</b>
Health	5	10.2
Housing/refuge support	2	4.1
Support / advocacy	13	26.5
Support / advocacy women only	6	12.2
Police / probation / law	4	8.2
Community development	16	32.7
Other	3	6.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100</b>

Twenty-two organisations were open to everyone. However, some of the agencies had specific client groups: fifteen were women only; eight were for young people only; and four had a different specialist client group. Of these, seventeen were dedicated BME only groups.

#### 2.2.1: FORCED MARRIAGE POLICY AND DEFINITIONS

As the table below indicates, only seven (11%) agencies had a forced marriage policy.

<b>Organisations</b>	<b>FM Policy</b>		
	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Don't Know</b>
Health	0	5	0
Housing/refuge support	0	2	0
Support / advocacy	4	8	1
Support / advocacy women only	0	6	0
Police / probation / law	1	2	1
Community development	1	15	0
Other	1	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>3</b>

Most agencies were not aware of official policies and guidelines on forced marriage. Northumbria Police was the only service aware of existing guidelines on forced marriages, a number of relevant staff members having received training on the guidelines. Representatives from three agencies (social services, domestic violence forum and probation) had limited awareness of official guidelines.

*I have never worked on a forced marriages case, I don't know if we have a forced marriages policy. To be honest I should know shouldn't I? I will have to find out and let you know (Probation).*

Only nine agencies had a definition of forced marriage. There was some discussion about the ambiguity about defining what force meant in the absence of physical force.

*I think there is the a blunt sort of forced marriage where the woman is dragged kicking and screaming shouting "no" and there is no doubt that that is a forced marriage. But, that is not by and large what is being described to me. When it's*

*being described to me it's being described as saying, 'I said no and I said no and then I said yes, because me mam was upset or I was frightened.'*  
(Support/Advocacy BME)

Another issue discussed was the gendered nature of forced marriage. It was suggested that forced marriage was more likely to happen to girls than boys, and that it was linked to perceptions of marriage for young women as a form of control over their sexuality.

*There are issues of young women having relationships which the family doesn't accept and can lead to be taken abroad for marriage. That I believe is where most forced marriages happens. Girls have very little support and are unaware of help available... But boys have more time before marriage, I haven't heard of a case where a boy has been taken back home for marriage* (BME youth group).

Three workers from BME-only groups commented on the hidden nature of forced marriage, and the lack of discussion within communities, families and community organisations on the issue. There were concerns that discussions on forced marriage could engender community backlash against specialist support groups.

*We don't work on it because older people in the community will think that we are exploiting young women and telling them to rebel against their family.* (BME Women's Group)

*...this type of discussion can backfire if the family or community find out that the youth group is offering advice on forced marriages.* (BME youth group)

While BME agencies expressed their reservations about working on forced marriage, a representative of a generic women-only agency explained that they explicitly did not want to work on the issue due to the tension between supporting women and the racist and imperialist overtones of white women supporting BME women in a paternalistic way:

*For us as white women, the issue of looking like white imperialists while recognising the problems of BME women in our areas is difficult. There's always the fear of being accused of being racist by BME women.* (Women's group).

There is therefore a tension between recognising that forced marriage is a serious issue requiring intervention and deciding which organisation is most appropriate to work on it.

#### 2.2.2: CASES OF FORCED MARRIAGE

The data from this study clearly indicate that forced marriage is a current issue. The police estimate that in Newcastle alone, they deal with one case of forced marriage every month and that it is exclusively women who are referred.

*Most of the cases of forced marriages we get are self referrals. I have never dealt with a man experiencing forced marriage. We get an average of one case a month in Newcastle.... Most of the cases are from Pakistan. There have been a couple of*



*cases involving Sikh families, and one from an Iranian family...* (Police Community Liaison Officer)

Excluding police figures, all the other agencies estimated that they dealt with thirty cases of forced marriage per year: support/advocacy dealt with nineteen, women's agencies six, health one and the law agency one.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.2.3: SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

The respondents were asked for opinions regarding the proposed legislation on criminalising forced marriage. Most were not aware of this proposal, or of the consultation. After an explanation of key points, the general view was that the proposed law was not necessarily a positive development. There were concerns that it could be construed as potentially racist legislation. A police representative felt that it could be counter-productive because it could be a disincentive to people reporting forced marriage, as it would implicate their family members in criminal proceedings. Furthermore, as identified by a police representative, existing laws adequately address the issue of forced marriage if victims are willing to come forward. A worker from a support/advocacy group for BME women and men suggested that the focus should extend to looking at the wider picture including the gendered nature of forced marriage, and the general lack of services for BME women, especially first generation immigrant women:

*I'm much more interested in what services are offered to women when things go wrong than in legislating. It seems to me is that the biggest bit of legislation they could do is get rid of the two year rule rather than starting legislating about forced marriage. (Support/Advocacy BME)*

### 2.3: CONCLUSIONS

While domestic violence provisions for BME women in the area of study were limited, there were even fewer provisions for forced marriage. Most agencies were not aware of official policies/guidelines on forced marriage. While BME agencies were aware of the issue, and the need to work on it, there was little work done. Forced marriage was seen as a gendered issue, with more women experiencing forced marriage and suffering more serious consequences from it. Most agencies did not welcome the proposed legislation criminalising forced marriage, suggesting that it would be counter-productive and unenforceable.

## SECTION 3: EXPERIENCE OF MARRIAGE

### 3.1: WOMEN IN MARRIAGES

Twenty-three women between the ages of twenty-four and seventy-two years who were married, divorced or engaged were interviewed during the course of the research. Four women in the sample defined their marriage as forced, sixteen as arranged and three as

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<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that there were thirty different cases as the same case could have been presented at different agencies.

love marriage. Nine respondents described their ethnicity as Pakistani, five as Bangladeshi, seven Indian, one Malaysian and one Sri Lankan.

### 3.1.1: SLIPPAGE BETWEEN FORCED, ARRANGED AND LOVE MARRIAGE

The research found no link between ethnic origin and nature of marriage. The four women who defined their marriage as forced were taken abroad to be married, which substantiates concerns that cases of forced marriage often have an overseas dimension (Home Office, 2006). However, it is important to note that in eleven cases of marriages defined by the interviewee as arranged, there was some element of force acknowledged during the course of the interview (additionally, five out of these eleven have no overseas dimension):

*It never occurred to me to have an opinion or a wish in the matter...My parents met his parents and decided everything. No one consulted me...(W.AM.1)<sup>6</sup>*

This slippage between arranged and forced marriages was an extremely complex area, which some respondents discussed at length:

*(W.AM.2): I was given a choice [about my marriage], my father did sit down with me and discuss it but I could see the pressure that he was under and I agreed. So is this a forced marriage then?*

*Interviewer: How do you see it?*

*(W.AM.2): Well I was given the choice but if I look at why I said yes then I could say it was forced.*

The nature of coercion within some forced marriages and in some marriages defined as arranged is the result of social expectation and emotional pressure from the family:

*[Marriage] was something which, I suppose being brought up, and everybody else around you, girls you get married as the only thing you are working towards is that one day you will get married and that's it. I suppose I wasn't forced into a marriage but having that drummed into you, well not drummed in to you but having that, that's what happens in life, you get married. (W.AM.6)*

In one case of forced marriage, the woman accepted the husband, and is now happy in the relationship:

*[Our relationship now] is ... fantastic, it's taken a lot of hard work ... He's turned out to be a best friend as well as a great husband, he's not your typical Pakistani husband, he's not controlling, he's not violent in any way, I couldn't have chosen a better person for myself to be honest with you. He's absolutely fantastic. I'm certainly not promoting forced marriages, what I'm saying that they do happen but there are choices of what a girl can do, whether a girl is strong enough to make*

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<sup>6</sup> All the individual women and men have unique identifiers. The first letter is W or M to represent Women or Man. This is followed either by AM – Arranged Marriage; FM – Forced Marriage; LM - Love Marriage; S – Single. The number denotes the number of the person in their sample.

*those choices is up to her... I thank Allah everyday for marrying a fantastic husband. (W.FM.1)*

In several cases of arranged marriages, the couples developed deep feelings of love for each other soon after the marriage was fixed:

*I didn't have any fears, actually found it exciting. When you are young, you don't worry about things. Over time it seemed the right thing to do. We have had a happy marriage and I love him a lot so don't have any regrets about it at all. (W.AM.13)*

### 3.1.2: SHARAM AND IZZAT

Research on domestic violence within BME communities points to the importance of culturally specific concepts of *izzat* (honour) and *sharam* (shame) in preventing women from articulating their experiences of violence. *Izzat* and *sharam* play an important role in persuading young women that they should marry according to their parents' wishes, and to continue to live within a forced marriage.

*I agreed to the marriage as I respected my parents' wishes and their honour, I didn't want to upset them but sometimes in order to keep your parents happy you can end up ruining your own life. (W.AM.1)*

Concepts of family honour and shame also influence women into forcing their children into socially acceptable behaviour. A Pakistani woman whose son had got his girlfriend pregnant admits that she used these concepts with her son:

*And I did talk about all the shame stuff and the izzat stuff, and I did talk about it to him, I'm not saying that I didn't, I did say to him that this is going to be really bad, and it's going to be shameful on the family...and then I said that, what kind of life will that child have, and you know, what are you going to be saying to the people then as you get older, you know all sorts of stuff. (W.AM.3)*

### 3.1.3: IMPACT OF FORCED MARRIAGE ON FAMILY RELATIONS

Women experiencing forced marriage found that their relationships with their parents deteriorated following the marriage. A woman forced into marriage felt that her mother had betrayed her by forcing her to get married, even though she was now content with the marriage:

*I love her but I hate her. I can't trust her, me and mum were so close, not like mother and daughter, we'd do girly things but friends don't do that to each other, I should have been able to trust her. But I can't forgive her, even six years on, deep down I'll never forgive her for what she's done. I would never do that to my children. (W.FM.1)*

In one case where the forced marriage had ended in a divorce the young woman found herself isolated from her natal family, even though she had come back to stay at her parents' house after her marriage broke down.

*My mum helped him [husband] a lot, and supported him a lot, but even to this day, she will say it was my fault... Do you know, that's what I can't understand. That depresses me, really badly... It was very, very, very hard moving back, because I felt like a guest.*

*The room I used to sleep in, wasn't mine anymore... Sometimes in that room I feel like this isn't my house, do you know what I mean? (W.FM.3)*

#### 3.1.4: ACCESS TO SERVICES IN CASES OF FORCED MARRIAGE

As noted above, very few statutory or voluntary agencies have an understanding of forced marriage, or provisions to deal with individual cases, and our research indicates that victims of forced marriage are not aware of, and do not access, statutory or voluntary services. In our sample, none of the forced marriage victims approached the police or social services, but health services, women's refuge services and housing were contacted. None of the cases received an adequate response and the specific issues of forced marriage were not dealt with. To illustrate, one woman approached her GP to discuss her symptoms of depression following her forced marriage, and the GP shared this discussion with her parents, thus violating her trust:

*[the doctor] knew my mum and dad for year...not just as a family doctor, and he even actually discussed me with my mum... That was a really bad week because I couldn't speak to my mum at the time so I confided in the doctor and he went and, well, my mum came home one day and says 'what have you been saying to the doctor about me?' (W.FM.3)*

The woman was also referred to a counsellor but did not find her helpful because the counsellor did not adequately understand the issue:

*I only had one counselling but she, I don't think she understood us... she admitted she's never spoke to any Asian people before. (W.FM.3)*

#### 3.1.5: PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGE

##### *Difference between forced and arranged marriage*

An important aspect of the research was the ways in which respondents conceptualised forced marriage, and how the difference between forced and arranged marriage was understood. In most cases women recognised the difference between forced and arranged marriage as being related to consent:

*Well the difference to me is not having an opinion really. You are marrying him and that's it. You can't say yes and you can't say no. You just have to do it. That to me is being forced into something. Whereas arranged, arrangement is yes or no. (W.AM.10)*

Arranged marriage was seen as an important and acceptable aspect of South Asian culture:

*I don't think there is anything wrong with arranged marriages...it's just a way of introduction really... Some people will probably end up going to night clubs and pubs and meeting people there, that's just an alternative way, a more sort of accepted way of doing it in our culture. (W.AM.7)*

One respondent who had been forced into marriage, and was now divorced, believed that she would want to have an arranged marriage in future. In general, arranged marriages

were viewed as having advantages over love marriages in terms of providing safe options for young people to find a partner.

*I went for the arranged marriage option. Because I just think in a way there are people there, your aunties, uncles, mum and dad, they are checking out the whole family for you. They are checking things that if you met a guy in the street you would just fall in love with and you wouldn't think to check his financial situation or his background. You just go for his looks or whatever, his charm... so when you go through an arranged marriage you know you are very secure because it has all been checked out. (W.AM.10)*

In contrast, forced marriage is understood as a misuse or misinterpretation of cultural values and religion. There was a perception from Muslim respondents that their religion did not permit forced marriage. Some respondents felt that forced marriage was used as a tool by parents to control the sexuality of their children:

*There are times when force comes into where children, either male or female, don't have a say and we put it down to culture and religion but it isn't just in culture or religion... their offspring have to do as they say... the girl has gone wild so she has to be taken to what ever country to get married. If they don't agree that's where they are forced to do things they don't want to do. (W.AM.6)*

Respondents understood that forced marriage involved physical and emotional coercion, including what is seen as 'emotional blackmail' (W.LM.2) or 'mental pressure' (W.AM.9).

### *Clash of Cultures*

Two respondents believed that the problem of forced marriage in the UK was the result of a clash of cultures, and was an issue of immigrant parents fearing that their children would get too 'westernised', thereby losing their identity. A woman in her thirties, who had been married twice, felt that she could understand why some parents would force their children to get married if their children were transgressive, and that it had its roots in wanting to preserve their cultural identity:

*I mean growing up in this society is quite hard if you are not white and even if you are born and brought up here we still have values and cultures, cultural identities that are different from the white counterpart... I don't know how to explain it, we are not white and we will never be white so there is no point in acting like we are white. No offence to anybody. But there is no point in acting like we are something that we are not.. So therefore to go off and do something that you know for a fact your parent would hate or your family would hate. (W.AM.10)*

There was a perception, therefore, that forced marriage was, to some extent, a product of the immigrant experience, even though the countries of origin had 'moved ahead' regarding respecting the rights and choices of young people. A woman from India whose daughter had a love marriage found that the marriage was more acceptable to her relatives in India than in the UK.

*Sometimes I was thinking people in here is not more advanced ... people living in India is more advanced... People still have the... mentality, you know like they're thinking like 50, 40 years old, you know like 50, 40 years ago, people's thinking is just the same. (W.AM.16)*

### *Hidden Nature of Forced Marriage*

Some respondents from Hindu and Muslim communities denied that forced marriage was an issue in their community:

*There is no forced marriage in our community. Other communities in Newcastle – I am sure it occurs. It must happen with people who are not so well educated, more traditional. (W.AM.12)*

Others believed that it was a hidden problem, and was in reality more widespread than was commonly believed.

### *Gendered Differences in Expectations and Experiences of Marriage*

Many respondents believed that expectations of marriage differed for men and women. A woman whose love marriage was not accepted by her parents commented on the double standards of gendered expectations:

*My brothers had love marriage, but they [parents] accepted. Man's they accept, woman's they don't accept. (W.LM.1)*

While respondents accepted that both men and women could be, and were, forced into marriage, two respondents believed that fewer men than women experienced forced marriage. Additionally, men and women felt the impact of forced marriage differently due to the power relations within marriage, and the higher status that men enjoyed within the family.

*I notice that here, what is happening, if a son or a daughter is growing up, what does a parent do? They take their sons or daughters to India or Pakistan or Bangladesh...to marry. And sometimes the son, especially I am talking about the son, the sons have an affair with white girls, and the mother thinks that, or the family think that they arrange a marriage for him and he will forget that girl... And he refuse to marry so this is also a forced marriage...And he goes back to Bangladesh where he marries and then when he comes back here and the wife comes either at the same time or after a few months and then he start, you know... abusing his wife, sometimes the wife never says this to the in-laws. Even she doesn't say to her family back home in Bangladesh... And she suffered and suffers a lot. (W.AM.8)*

### 3.1.6: EXPERIENCE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Thirteen women in the sample had experienced domestic violence<sup>7</sup> (DV), in some cases both before marriage from parents and/or brothers, and after marriage from husband and in-laws (see table below). The DV included physical abuse, verbal abuse, restricting the woman's movements, and mental abuse, including suspecting the woman of infidelity and excessive possessiveness.

Type of Marriage	Number of Women	DV Prior to Marriage	DV Post Marriage
Forced	4	4	2
Arranged	16	-	7
Love	3	1	2

In all cases of forced marriage, the woman had experienced domestic violence from her extended family prior to the marriage. This included emotional pressure, coercion and abduction. In some cases of arranged marriages, women experienced pressure to enter the marriage but this was not defined or conceptualised as DV. In one case of love marriage, the woman suffered physical abuse and confinement prior to the marriage from her natal family.

There was no link between type of marriage and experience of post-marriage DV, and not all cases of forced marriages resulted in DV situations. As in earlier studies (Gangoli *et al.*, 2005), we found that first generation immigrant women were least able to gain access to services, for reasons including language problems, lack of familiarity with resources and institutionalised racism.

### 3.1.7: SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE AND CONCLUSIONS

Some respondents believed that proposed laws to criminalise forced marriages would be beneficial and would help young people suffering forced marriage. However, there were concerns about whether the law could be misused by young people, or misinterpreted by the mainstream non-minority community, who did not understand differences between arranged and forced marriage:

*Lots of mistakes are possible on interpretations of what forced marriage is ... my concern is that people who don't know the culture and community shouldn't be in a position to judge ... whether [the marriage] was forced or not. (W.AM.13)*

The research highlights the slippage between forced, arranged and love marriage, indicating the need for research on differences between these forms of marriage. It also indicates the gendered expectations and impacts of marriage for women and men, and the

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<sup>7</sup> We understand domestic violence to include physical, mental, emotional and financial abuse and violence perpetrated by intimate partners and extended family, including parents, siblings, parents-in-law. Following the Home Office definition of forced marriage (2003), forced marriage is understood as a form of domestic violence.

importance of cultural concepts like 'sharam' and 'izzat' in the nature of marriage. Forced marriage is seen as a misinterpretation of culture. Another key finding is that while forced marriage is a form of domestic violence, there is no evidence from this research to suggest that there is a strict causal link between intimate partner domestic violence and the nature or 'type' of marriage.

### 3.2: MEN IN MARRIAGES

In total there were sixteen men in the sample, including one who was engaged to be married at the time of interview. Of these, thirteen men defined their marriages as arranged, one said it had been an introduction, one had a love marriage and one defined his marriage as forced. Regarding ethnicity, ten men were Bangladeshi, three Pakistani, one Sikh, one Kashmiri and one of mixed origin (Indian and Pakistani). The age range of the men was between twenty-five and fifty-eight years.

#### 3.2.1: PERCEPTIONS OF MARRIAGE

Three men said that, prior to the marriage, they had had no expectations of marriage or about their future wife. Among the rest of the sample, expectations and perceptions of marriage were varied but the general assumption had been that they would have an arranged marriage. Two who had had an arranged marriage said they would have preferred a love marriage. Three men spoke about the kind of person they had hoped to marry, and the importance of compatibility and education.

*When I was a student I thought I would want to marry an educated career woman in [country of origin] but that was just my dream. But then I got married and came to the UK. (M.AM.3)*

#### 3.2.2: EXPERIENCE OF ARRANGED MARRIAGE

In all but one case of arranged marriage, the parents had arranged the marriage. Eight of the marriages were arranged in the country of origin, of which one took place in the UK. Five men said that they had considered other proposals but had rejected them or been rejected on the basis of non-compatibility.

#### *Preference for Respondents' Children*

Eleven men in the sample had children, and discussions about what kind of marriages they would prefer for their children were held with six men. All six men said that it was important for them that their children's partners were of a similar background. The three Muslim respondents expressed a preference for their children's partners to be Muslim. One Sikh man added that similar backgrounds were desirable for communication purposes as different backgrounds often clashed.



Two men said they were concerned that their wives would force their children into arranged marriages. One man explained that his wife had already chosen partners for their children against his will, and in another case, the respondent believed his wife's attitude towards marriage was linked to her upbringing in a South Asian country.

### 3.2.3: SLIPPAGE BETWEEN ARRANGED, FORCED AND LOVE MARRIAGE: ISSUE OF CONSENT

While only one man described his marriage as forced, in three cases there were expectations from the family that they would marry, and in two cases, marriage was seen as something for which they had religious obligations. In total, five men experienced coercion to consent, which took the form of emotional and mental pressure by parents. However, these men described their marriages as arranged:

*My mum just wanted somebody from inside the family that I guess she could get on well with ... my father said 'either you do it my way or I'm going to kick you out on the street ... my mum crying all the time, so it was actually very very difficult. So you know I just ... decided to bring it to an end so I said 'yeah, I'll do it'.* (M.AM.5)

*I did have a choice but ... I don't know, its emotional or whatever, but at the time mum was very poorly and basically she wanted to see me married before she passed away. So you could say there was some emotional blackmail in there I guess.* (M.AM.6)

In one case, the participant was pressurised to return to his country of origin and marry a woman chosen by his mother, due to disapproval of his relationships with white women in the UK. His marriage did not last, but he remarried in his country of origin, and was involved in the process. He later went on to marry a white woman but sought permission from his wife to marry again in a religious ceremony. In another case, the respondent defined his marriage as one of introduction but he was not asked for, nor did he give, consent as he did not want to marry the chosen partner. His marriage later broke down after he came to the UK.

Two men felt under pressure to marry as a consequence of the cultural norm that the eldest sibling marries first and the youngest only marries after the older siblings have done so. One of these men had freely consented to an arranged marriage, but married earlier than anticipated.

Linked to issues of consent is the nature of contact between partners before the marriage is arranged. In only one case of arranged marriage did the man know his wife prior to marriage and in two cases, while the respondents were related to their wives prior to marriage, they had no significant knowledge of each other. Eleven participants briefly met their future wives prior to marriage. In two cases the respondents met their future wives only after the engagement, and in one case, after the wedding. In four cases, the men would have preferred time to get to know their prospective partners, but two said that it was not possible due to cultural mores. In two cases, the respondents commented

on the haste with which the marriage was arranged; one said he had expressed his disquiet, but was told it was for the best.

One respondent saw arranged marriages as a compromise, and this was the reason that his marriage had lasted. Others believed that all forms of marriage had potential risks, but arranged marriages could lead to happiness and a strong relationship:

*Not all love marriages work, not all arranged marriages. I've got a friend who got an arranged marriage and he's over the moon, you know. (M.AM.5)*

There are clearly slippages between arranged and forced marriages. As with the women's experiences, some men defined their marriages as arranged, although they were essentially forced, with pressure and expectations from the family. One respondent also spoke of close friendship and affection for his wife prior to marriage, but chose to define his marriage as arranged, illustrating misconceptions about arranged and love marriages.

#### 3.2.4: FORCED MARRIAGE

Only one man defined his marriage as forced, and his marriage ended in divorce. The man had accompanied his father to his country of origin, without any intention to marry. His father, through immense emotional pressure, had forced him to marry:

*It was more like he was maybe crying, putting his hands together, pleading with us, asking us, you know 'you have to get married one time or another, do this for me. You know people are saying this and that' And I was like 'no no no no'. But then I thought to myself just to keep my dad happy I'd say yes. (M.FM.1)*

The respondent's mother was still in the UK at the time and had no involvement in forcing the marriage. Both his mother and extended family were under the assumption that he was happy and consenting:

*(M.FM.1): She asked me am I happy, do I want to get married.*

*Interviewer: What did you say?*

*(M.FM.1): I said to them ... I was like 'let's talk about something else', cos my dad was standing there with me, otherwise I would have said no. But I didn't want my mum to kick off with my dad ... cos I knew if I tell my mum it's not going to happen, that then I might as well say no to my dad now and not even tell my mum. But that's where emotional blackmail came into play, I wanted to help my dad because he was like so low down, that's the lowest down, that's the lowest I've seen my dad. That's why I gave in to him.*

The reason for the participant being forced to marry was his relationship with a woman from outside his community and religion, which parallels other cases of arranged marriage mentioned above. In this case, the man unsuccessfully attempted to sabotage the marriage, and he married without meeting his wife. After the marriage, his father abandoned him in his country of origin without his passport or any means to contact his family and friends. With only rudimentary knowledge of the locality, he was unable to

seek help, and remained with his wife's family. He had no relationship with his wife and returned to the UK with a view to ending the marriage. However, his family encouraged him to maintain a relationship with his wife, and fraudulently arranged a visa for his wife to enter the UK. This young man's marriage lasted for many years, until he filed for divorce. During this time he was under pressure from both his family and his wife to try and develop a relationship, but they finally accepted the end of the relationship. The participant spoke very forgivingly of his family, who will now accept his choice of future wife regardless of background. Both his sister and brother have since had successful arranged marriages with full consent.

### 3.2.5: LOVE MARRIAGE

One man described himself as having entered a love marriage with a white woman who converted to Islam, even though his parents wanted to arrange his marriage. Different cultures and backgrounds impacted on their relationship, and ultimately he believed that his wife's decision to return to her religion meant that their children grew up confused, with conflicting cultures and religions.

*She was unhappy from the start ... she wanted to go to pubs and clubs on her own. The trouble is that the way I was brought up, with the Asian way of thinking, it's not primitive, it's good thinking but some rules and principles can't be bent ... in English culture men and women go out separately. (M.LM.1)*

### 3.2.6: ATTITUDES TO FORCED MARRIAGES

The issue of forced marriages was discussed with all men. There was some ambiguity in their understanding of arranged, love and forced marriage, particularly highlighted by the way some men chose to define their own marriages, reflecting the discussion with the women (see above). All the respondents said that they believed that forced marriage was wrong, Muslim respondents explaining that forced marriage was against the practice of Islam. In one case it was even argued that arranged marriages were not religiously based, although Islam states that partners have to be Muslim. The respondent who had a love marriage believed that forced marriage was a cultural rather than a religious practice, and arranged marriages were based on choice. Three respondents defined forced marriage as a marriage undertaken against a person's will, but one of them argued that defining a marriage as forced or arranged depended on interpretation of events.

While six respondents admitted that forced marriage was a concern in their communities, and some recounted anecdotes, one Sikh respondent argued that forced marriages did not exist in his community, but were more of a concern in Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. However, he admitted that he knew that parents in his community often pressurised their children into marriages, believing that this was best for them.

The reasons cited for forced marriages were deviant behaviour, such as 'unsuitable' relationships; parents wanting their children to marry in the country of origin or within the family; community pressures; and the need to uphold honour in the community.

Some respondents spoke of negative attitudes to arranged marriages in western society, which confused the issue with forced marriages. One argued that ‘*the government is just “picking” on the Muslim community*’ (M.AM.1) and that many people did not understand the concept of arranged marriages.

#### *Domestic Violence (DV)*

Respondents were asked in all cases whether they had experienced DV prior to and during their marriage. In five arranged marriages and the one forced marriage, the process of arranging the marriage was characterised by emotional or mental abuse. The abuse included arguments and pressure from the family, which led respondents to consent to the marriage.

In three arranged marriages, respondents spoke of experiencing DV from their wives, including emotional and physical abuse. A respondent who defined his marriage as arranged, but then described his coercion to marry, spoke at length of the difficult relationship he had had with his wife, in which she had been verbally and physically abusive to him and their children:

*Like I said I’ve never hit her but there has been a moment where a knife flew past my face ... her means of communicating is to shout and not even listening ... She hits my daughter for no reason ... it’s got to the stage where my son and daughter, they just laugh and they come and tell me ‘oh mummy was hitting me but I just laughed at her’* (M.AM.5)

Two men discussed the issue of DV against men in their communities and one explained that he thought emotional abuse could be a problem, although the other thought it was rare, but could be a problem for ‘weak men’.

One respondent who had had a love marriage with a white British woman was a perpetrator of DV. He gave as the ‘reasons’ for his abusive behaviour the incompatibility of western and eastern cultures, poverty and learnt abuse from his father.

#### 3.2.7: SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE AND CONCLUSIONS

Respondents were asked what could be done to help combat forced marriages. Suggestions included education of key figures, such as community and religious leaders, enhanced relevant services, and improved communication between parents and children. Regarding the proposed legislation on forced marriage, only one respondent thought that this was a positive development. The others defined a myriad problems with it, including problems in defining forced and arranged marriage; potential misuse of the law, with young people claiming that their marriage was forced in order to end it; and the possibility of the law being interpreted as an attack against Islam. It was suggested that the government should focus more on human rights and the education of young people.

As with women's experiences, there is some slippage between forced, arranged and love marriage, and while women experience the consequences of forced marriage differently, men also experience coercion at the point of entry into marriage.

## SECTION 4: EXPECTATIONS OF MARRIAGE

### 4.1: YOUNG PEOPLE

We held two focus groups for young people, the first with nine young women aged between ten and sixteen years (average age fourteen), all Muslim and attending local schools. The second group comprised ten young Muslim men (average age nineteen). Some of the participants were attending school, some were at college, some were working and many were doing a combination of work and study.

#### 4.1.1: MARRIAGE AND FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

All the young women aspired to be married by their mid twenties, and there was a specific trajectory for all respondents: school, college, university, travel, and then marriage. In all cases, the assumption was that it would be an arranged marriage or a marriage in which their parents would have a significant input. For the young men the trajectory was less clear, but there was a shared understanding and assumption that they would all get married, although they were less enthusiastic about this prospect.

Most of the young people felt there was potentially a degree of flexibility about their marriage. Some explained that they would be able to tell their parents if they found a suitable partner and others said that their parents would discuss potential partners with them. However, most believed that there were parameters within which they could choose their partners, and in most cases they felt they would marry a Muslim woman/man, because their religion was very important both to them and to their families:

*Because it's not just a religion, it's like a way of life. We're talking about everything like, from when you wake up to when you go to bed, there's ways to do things, how to dress, how to talk, how to behave, everything, and in Islam you're taught this. So if you follow it properly, there's ways to get married, there's things to do and there's things not to do. (FG.M)<sup>8</sup>*

All the young women agreed that they would accept their parents' decisions on partners, even if it meant giving up a partner that they wanted to marry:

- R1: *If my mum said you can't marry him then I wouldn't. 'Cos if they are saying no, 'cos my family means everything to me and if they are saying no then that means he is not the right boy for me.*
- R2: *They know what's best for you. (FG.F)*

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<sup>8</sup> For the young people the identifiers are as follows: FG.M represents the focus group of young men and FG.F is for the female group. In an excerpt from a group discussion the individual respondents are referred to as R1, R2 etc.

This was juxtaposed with their belief that their families were progressive and parental involvement was regarded as a positive involvement. There was a tacit shared understanding that arranged marriages were a good thing and to be encouraged.

*Our mum and dad, they love us, they want the best for us, everyone's mum and dad does, every family does, and we're still young, and we make the decisions without even asking them, but you know, ... at the end of the day it's (inaudible) but at the same time you've got to see their point of view as well. (FG.M)*

#### 4.1.2: FORCED MARRIAGE

When asked to define a forced marriage, the group explained that it was when there was no choice, and coercion was involved. It is significant that when asked this, the young women constructed the victim as female:

- R1: *When the girl has no choice.*  
R2: *When the bride-to-be is not happy in that situation. (FG.F)*

Both groups were read a vignette in which a young woman's parents were pressuring her to get married to a man she did not know. The respondents were asked their views on this, and all the young women agreed that this fitted the definition of a forced marriage:

- R1: *The girl isn't given the option of going to do what she wants to do and the parents are pressurising her.*  
R2: *It's emotional blackmail. (FG.F)*

Some of the young men also agreed that this was a forced marriage, as the parents were applying 'emotional blackmail' to 'encourage' the daughter to marry.

While all of the young women agreed that this was a forced marriage, one of the boys argued that it was an arranged marriage. However, when asked to illustrate his answer he revised his opinion and defined it as a forced marriage:

- R1: *Well, the girl doesn't want to get married to that person and the dad is forcing her, so that's forced, arranging it, in fact it's forced marriage.*  
R2: *I agree it's arranged marriage, or forceful arranged marriage.*  
R3: *Yeah, it's a forcefully arranged marriage.*  
R4: *Think it's forced, and it's wrong. (FG.M)*

This illustrates the difficulties that the group had in understanding the differences between an arranged and a forced marriage. When asked why they thought forced marriages occurred, the participants argued that forced marriage were sometimes an act of social control whereby parents used the marriage to curb deviant behaviour, ranging from having friends of the opposite sex, to drinking or smoking:

*Culture communities they believe that if you get married, a kid sorts his head out, you know what I mean? They might get a dossed up kid out there somewhere who's like on the drink and that, religiously, like rough, smoking the reefer round the*

*corner and that, so the parents think, let me take them back home, get them married off and they'll sort them out. The kids come back, they're still (inaudible), still drinking away, you know what I mean? (FG.M)*

The respondents all agreed that forcing someone to marry was wrong, some recounting anecdotes of young people to whom this had happened. They also argued that, instead of being understood as a practice which preserved family values or culture it was a destructive practice which would '*drive their children away*' (FG.M). One young woman gave an extremely disturbing account of a young woman who was raped and then forced to marry her assailant in order to preserve the family honour:

*Cos we know someone who was raped as well and then she was forced to marry the boy. Cos she said 'he raped me' and they wouldn't allow her to go to the police. They said that it would bring disgrace to the family and stuff and then she was forced to marry him. (FG.F)*

Some young men presented a troubling analysis of forced marriage happening only to women who were perceived as needing to be controlled, thereby constructing forced marriage as a necessary and legitimate way to control women:

- R1: *Men don't get forced marriages.*
- R2: *Neither do girls.*
- R1: *Girls do.*
- R3: *The fucked up girls do.*
- R4: *Chained up and forced marriage. (FG.M)*

Some young people felt that there was an incongruity between their parents' and the community's views, suggesting that the wider community put pressure on parents to control their children:

*I don't think it's actually, like Asian parents and stuff, are as bothered about how you do things, but how the Asian community think, oh like they haven't looked after their daughter she has been doing this and that and stuff. (FG.F)*

Many young women had personal experience of surveillance from their community, citing examples of their parents being informed that they had been seen walking with a boy or walking in town with friends.

#### 4.1.3: DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT OF GIRLS/WOMEN AND BOYS/MEN

All the young people commented on the differential treatment of boys and girls and women and men, which included family control over girls' education, suggesting that the girls were monitored much more stringently than the boys:

- R1: *A girl will get a reputation more than a boy will.*
- R2: *Especially Asian girls. People just think 'oh she's a slapper', easy or something but a boy can be with as many girls as he wants, do what he wants and they won't be judging him. (FG.F)*

One young woman made a conceptual link between this differential treatment of females and males to a more fundamental construction of men being more valued than women in general:

*Boys are seen as higher than the girls cos they carry on the family name, they inherit everything, so the girl is seen as minor. (FG.F)*

#### 4.1.4: SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE AND CONCLUSIONS

The young men had a discussion which illustrated a very sophisticated understanding of the interplay between culture and religion: they argued that a new law would be ineffectual because forced marriage is a cultural practice within a religious framework. Thus, a new law would be ineffectual:

*R1: Religious laws don't allow forced marriage.*

*R2: Culture comes in rather than religion, parents think it's okay to have forced marriage.*

*Int: So we don't need a law?*

*R1: religious laws so who's going to abide by English law? (FG.M)*

One of the young women argued that it would be extremely difficult to enforce a law, arguing that she could not consider pressing criminal charges against her parents even if they had forced her to marry:

*I would never go to the police if I was forced. I wouldn't want my parents to go to jail. I'd rather get married and then divorced. (FG.F)*

The young people argued that, instead of a new law against forced marriage, young people, parents and the community should be educated about marriage and rights.

In conclusion, all the young people expected to get married with some involvement from their parents. There was a shared belief that forced marriage was wrong, and that it was a mechanism for controlling young people. There was a sense of the gendered differences in the treatment of and expectations for girls and boys.

#### 4.2: SINGLE WOMEN

Five women who had never been married were interviewed, ranging from twenty-one to forty-three years. Two respondents were Indian, two were Pakistani and one was Bengali. All had different attitudes towards their marital status and their future marriage plans: three were aware that they were soon to have an arranged marriage; one was waiting for her elder sister to marry before she would have an arranged marriage; and one had no intention of marrying.



#### 4.2.1: EXPECTATIONS

All the women explained that the only socially acceptable reasons for a woman remaining single were to pursue higher education or to be a carer, although these would often defer the marriage rather than prevent it. One woman in her forties stated that the reason for her not being married was that there would be no one to care for her father if she did so, because traditionally she would be expected to move in with her husband after marriage. All the women spoke of some family pressure exerted on them to get married, even though their families were seen as flexible and understanding:

*There have been times when I have been pressured because maybe it's after say for example my dad looked into the family and they've actually seen the actual person and in his mind it's the right person. So that's why he feels that he wants to impose and say 'Look this is the right ...' But because I think it's not, even though I've said no, he'll turn back and say fine, but you know that he wanted me to marry into that or marry that particular person. So you are kind of pressured and you do want to do what you think is right to your parents as well as yourself. (W.S.5)*

When asked about who they would consider as a partner, the Hindu and Sikh women had no strict guidelines about whom they would marry but the Muslim women all agreed that they would have to marry a Muslim man. However, one woman was clear she would not consider a proposal from her country of origin, as she felt that there were too many cultural differences, including women being considered subservient to men and being expected to fulfil a strict housewife role:

*I've seen it happen as well... Because the girl's kind of got some freedom here whereas the males that are from [country of origin], they don't understand that freedom. And some males, they don't want their wives to work. You know they just want for them to be at home... over there women are seen to be more traditional, more kind of (inaudible) doing domestic work. (W.S.4)*

All the women spoke of the way the community, including family members in the country of origin, pressured their families to get them married. One of the women spoke of the impact this had on both her and her family and the difficulties that families faced in not capitulating to community pressure:

*I think it's a pressure on the family cos what the community would think about them, that they've lost ... the parents have lost their respect. And then the parents put the pressure on the children. Like if you do something wrong everyone's going to blame the parents. So the community puts the pressure on the parents, but the parents put the pressure on the children. (W.S.4)*

#### 4.2.2: FORCED MARRIAGE

When asked what differentiated an arranged from a forced marriage they said that it was consent, however some of the respondents identified the difficulty in sometimes differentiating an arranged from a forced marriage:

*Brother's girlfriend had an arranged marriage but it was really a forced marriage because she didn't want to. But she did consent but probably didn't have any choice in the matter. So, it was arranged marriage but really forced because she didn't have genuine choice. (W.S.1)*

Another respondent used her friend's experience to illustrate the difficulty in identifying a forced marriage. She explained that her friend was forced into marriage but at the time it was not identified as such. After a lengthy explanation of this situation she then stated that she did not know of any forced marriage cases, thereby illustrating the difficulties in demarcating forced and arranged marriages. One woman discussed the differences between a forced marriage happening in this country and one taking place in the country of origin where a female is taken to get married:

*I think forced marriage would be like if a girl is ... there's a proposal and the parents have chosen this guy and the girl had to get married to him ... even if she doesn't want to...I think it can happen here as well but it's different to when the girl's taken back home. (W.S.4)*

As with young people, there was an understanding that parents sometimes forced their child into marriage as a form of control especially where children were seen as acting inappropriately. One woman also said that cultural and religious reasons were used to validate forced marriages and that they sometimes happened in communities wanting to preserve their traditions:

*Parents force marriage on the child because of the way they were brought up, because they think religiously it might be right because of their tradition and their culture, and they kind of force it upon their youngsters. And secondly sometimes people force it upon their children because they're worried about them going off the rails or turning into ... converting into a western way of life and stuff. Or because they think about their daughter or their son might be with a white ... or another type of religion, going out with someone, and they think they'll end up marrying them. (W.S.5)*

#### 4.2.3: SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE AND CONCLUSIONS

All the women agreed that both young and older people need to be educated if we were to eradicate forced marriage. This could be done through schools, mosques, and wider public information campaigns. This was seen as a much more practical solution than the proposed new law, which was not considered as a very helpful approach. It was regarded as unenforceable, demonstrating a lack of understanding about family relationships, respect and dynamics in South Asian communities. It would be anathema to women to press criminal charges against their parents.

In conclusion, all the single women had experienced family and community pressure to get married, and it was considered unusual for a woman to remain single. Some of the respondents had difficulty in differentiating between arranged and forced marriage.

### 4.3: SINGLE MEN

Six Muslim single men, five Bengali and one of Pakistani origin were interviewed. Aged, between twenty-one and twenty-eight, all expected to be married with some intervention from their parents.

#### 4.3.1: EXPECTATIONS OF MARRIAGE

All participants said they would want time to get to know their prospective partners prior to marriage. Compatibility was vital, but they were aware that social and cultural background would be significant to their parents, conflicting with their own views.

*My own priority would be different from theirs. Mine would be about ... personality and education and kind of social background and then obviously ... then physical attraction and all the rest of it. What I would think with them, it would be purely ... it would initially be about family background. You know the education ... social ... cultural background of the family, their standing in the community. And obviously you've got the whole kind of social hierarchy as well. (M.S.5)*

All men felt that their families would accept a partner they had chosen. But three men felt it was important for their families to be happy and that their partners should be of the same origin and religious background.

Int: *So it's important that your parents are happy?*  
(M.S.7): *Very important as my wife will be looking after my mum and dad the way my parents looked after me.*

The importance of cultural and religious 'match' meant that in one case, a Muslim respondent had broken off his relationship with a Hindu woman for his parents' sake.

Int: *Why did you feel that you couldn't marry this girl?*  
(M.S.5): *Because she wasn't Muslim and because she wasn't Bengali. You know as simple as that. So, that's why I couldn't marry her. Because my parents wouldn't have accepted it. I was thinking about parents.*

Despite constraints from their families, young men had some freedom to choose a bride, relatively more in comparison with single women. They used this to choose women who would fit into their families. Four respondents, who had considered proposals for marriage, had rejected women on the basis of non compatibility, the distance involved in forging a relationship, or educational background, which would conflict with family expectations.

*And then they found a doctor, I went 'no it sort of would not work' cos yeah I'd be alright but my parents wouldn't be you know. Doctor, they'd be as busy as hell she wouldn't have time to come home and do the traditional wife thing. (M.S.5)*

While the single men had some sense of parental expectations, three respondents believed that their parents were not aware of the kind of partner they would want, and one felt that his mother was putting pressure on him to marry, which he was resisting:

*Sometimes I am emotionally blackmailed into getting married. I don't want to get married and they can't force me to do it. I don't want to ruin someone's life just for the sake of keeping my mum happy. (M.S.1)*

Three men spoke of their fear of marriage. One man felt under pressure, because younger siblings were already married, and while he preferred not to marry, he would do so because of religious obligations. One man feared the changes it would make to his lifestyle:

*(M.S.7):It's like as though I feel that I want to be single for the rest of my life.*

*Int: Why do you want to be single?*

*(M.S.7):With the single life you can do what you want, you can work around your own personal interests, in marriage you're on lockdown and committed. You have responsibilities, the home, the wife, the kids. It changes your lifestyle a lot.*

In all but one case, there was a general preference for marrying a woman based in the UK, rather than from the country of origin, due to a belief that in the latter case, there would be cultural and language differences which would lead to problems.

*They have a different sense of humour, we're on a different level to what they are back home. I would have to change and compromise for someone back home ... someone from back home will never understand me. (M.S.1)*

In addition, two men felt that partners from the country of origin would be highly dependent on them because of language difficulties and lack of cultural understanding of the UK. However, one argued that a shortage of social contacts and networks made it difficult to arrange marriages in the UK.

#### 4.3.2: VIEWS ON FORCED MARRIAGE

All men asserted that forced marriages were wrong, and one argued that forced marriages went against the beliefs of Islam, even though media coverage had led people to believe that forced marriages were practised by Muslim communities:

*Nothing to do with Islam, forced marriages. And that's where the media's maybe got that wrong and where the issues arisen, the forced marriage issue that maybe it's an Islamic problem...It's not an Islamic problem at all, it's a culture problem. (M.S.6)*

Forced marriages were the result of pressures and expectations. Two men argued that parents were conscious of community gossip about children who had reached marriageable age, and two suggested that forced marriages took place in the country of origin, because parents wanted to arrange a marriage within the family. One also spoke

of the difficulty of finding suitable matches in the UK because what parents wanted conflicted with young people's ideas:

*But they're very uncompromising on their criteria of what a bride should be. So they think oh well I can't satisfy with the girls I know that potentially can be a bride for my son, so sod it, I'll take them back to Bangladesh and I'll marry them there. Now this is where the forced thing comes into it. The girl or boy might say 'no I don't want to go to Bangladesh and get married I want to get married here'.*  
(M.S.5)

All the single men explained that acts that could be construed as dishonouring the family, such as dating someone or drug and alcohol abuse, could also lead to forced marriages. There was also a recognition that young women were more susceptible to being forced to marry than were young men, as parents feared that in the event of a forced marriage, their sons would leave. Three respondents spoke of the increase in divorce rates, suggesting that young people might enter marriages to please their families, but were not willing to continue living in bad relationships:

*Out of a hundred marriages eighty break up for a good reason and the other twenty break up cos they are looking for a way to get out of the marriage. Kids these days do it the arranged marriage way so they can say that they tried their parents' way and it didn't work.* (M.S.1)

#### 4.3.3: POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

All respondents were asked what could be done to combat forced marriages. One argued that Islam was the only way to deal with forced marriages, and three argued that an increase in communication between parents and children would help. Parents needed to understand that their children were entitled to make informed decisions. Time must also be given to allow prospective partners to get to know each other. While two respondents believed that legal action against parents who forced children into marriage might deter people, one man thought that the problem could not be resolved until the community disapproved of forced marriage.

While some of the respondents were apprehensive about marriage, in general they were happy with the idea of an arranged marriage, particularly if it involved the opportunity to get to know the prospective bride and make an informed decision. It was important for all respondents that their parents were happy and that there was an understanding that their parents would be open to an element of choice. The majority of young men wanted to get married in the UK. There was also a recognition that, while some of them had experienced pressure to get married, young women were often more vulnerable to being forced into marriage.

## SECTION 5: COMMUNITY LEADERS

Four community representatives from different organisations were interviewed, one from the Sikh community and three from the Muslim community. The representative from the Sikh community was a member of the local Gurudwara (Sikh temple); the Muslim representatives were a member of a mosque committee, a politician representing the Muslim community, and a member of a community centre representing a South Asian community. The interviews were concerned with trying to gauge the levels of awareness in communities about the issues of forced marriage and DV, and ascertaining what measures were in place to deal with them.

### 5.1: SIKH COMMUNITY

#### 5.1.1: FORCED MARRIAGE

The Sikh leader believed that his community was very tolerant, with many examples of mixed marriages, and open to outside intervention challenging forced marriage. He explained that Sikhism has an egalitarian view of women and men and was very much against forced marriage, believing that if it did occur, it was within uneducated communities. However, he also accepted that it was very difficult to ascertain the levels of forced marriage because of a policy of non-interference in family decisions, explaining that the community was unable to challenge parental decisions regarding marriage:

*But you can't stop somebody who say I want my daughter to marry so and so. There is nothing that the community can do. If a parent has made up their mind there is nothing that the community can do.*

In order to eradicate forced marriage he advocated education in schools and statutory interventions, rather than reliance on religious bodies. The latter was seen as putting the religious group in a compromised position, which was untenable. He explained that religious bodies were meant to protect their members rather than challenge them and expose any negative practices to a hostile non-community environment. He also believed that forced marriage involved young people from India and thought that immigration policies should therefore be tightened.

#### 5.1.2: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (DV)

The community leader explained that Sikhism condemned DV, and that it did not happen in the Sikh community because *'no one has come to temple and asked for help.'* This suggests a simplistic understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence, and who women are likely to disclose to. Domestic violence was regarded as a woman's issue: if any cases were presented, they would be dealt with by the women's committee.

## 5.2: MUSLIM COMMUNITY

### 5.2.1: FORCED MARRIAGE

The representative from the mosque committee said that he had never encountered any forced marriage cases and believed it only occurred when children were married abroad. He also argued in favour of non-intervention in personal matters. As expected, given the current political context, he expressed the need for the community to work on other issues, such as racism and unemployment.

The representative from the community centre, working with predominantly Muslim members, endorsed and supported arranged marriages where young people were the final decision makers. Unfortunately, he also argued that families and communities should intervene if a woman had chosen an unsuitable partner. As with the other leaders, he supported the idea that forced marriage happened when *'if they have grown up daughters, they take them back home, get them married.'* However, he argued that forced marriage did not happen in his community or in the wider Muslim community. When pressed to discuss the issue of forced marriage, he was cautious and felt that he had to be judicious in his response because of his position: *'I can't talk because I represent the wider community, you know.'* The above responses indicate the complex circumstances in which Muslim communities find themselves, because of the current political situation. The proposed law was seen as an attack on Muslims rather than an appropriate measure to deal with forced marriages. It was considered unenforceable because *'I don't think people would complain against their parents.'*

The politician also supported consenting arranged marriages as a positive method for marrying and was clear in his condemnation of forced marriages. He explained that there were different elements of coercion involved in forced marriage and it was a very much a hidden practice:

*Forced marriage is an issue for my community but is not out in the open as it should be. There are different forms of forced marriage – there's emotional blackmail and force, putting a person in a position where they can't say no. (CL.4)*

Though a member of a major political party and of a statutory body, he was unaware of the government's proposed legislation or of police guidelines on forced marriage. He admitted that forced marriage was still a *'taboo issue'* and had not been discussed either within his political party or at council level, but he believed that the Muslim community found it difficult to deal with the issue because of the current political climate and increasing Islamophobia.

### 5.2.2: DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (DV)

When asked about domestic violence, the representative of the community centre denied its existence within the wider Muslim community and stated that he had *never* heard of a case of domestic violence. The interviewer asked what the community would do if a case

was presented to them and it was explained that the response would depend on the severity of the abuse:

*That depends. That depends on how serious it is. If it is very serious, there are law and order in this country, wife beating law. But if it is something minor then we wouldn't get involved. (CL.4)*

This is clearly an inadequate way to deal with domestic violence: women could be in a vulnerable situation if they disclosed abuse and the community decided against intervention. There was also a suggestion that levels of domestic abuse were exaggerated by the media. However, it was also stated that domestic abuse was not justified, and was therefore unacceptable, and that it contradicted Islamic religious teaching.

### 5.3: SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE AND CONCLUSIONS

All but one community leader denied that forced marriage or domestic violence was an issue within their communities. However, all leaders stated that forced marriage was contradictory to their faiths and believed it usually involved a partner brought from abroad or taken abroad. Forced marriage was generally understood as affecting women more than men. In general, most of the leaders expressed strong patriarchal values about controlling women. However, all leaders welcomed more intervention on the issue despite differences over which was the most appropriate body to deal with it. The Muslim leaders expressed concerns about being able to challenge forced marriage because of current anti-Muslim hostility.

## SECTION 6: CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study reveals that forced marriage is a significant issue for all South Asian communities in the North East of England. There are specific, gendered implications in the practice of forced marriage, with women and girls experiencing forced marriage differently, and with more serious consequences. While forced marriage is a form of domestic violence, this research has found no increased risk of intimate partner domestic violence in forced marriage cases. There is a need for more service provision for both domestic violence and forced marriage cases, and a need for education and increased awareness about the issue in both the South Asian and the 'host' communities. There is, however, little support for the proposed legislation on forced marriage. Further research is needed on non-South Asian minority communities and their experiences of forced marriage and the gendered nature of forced marriage. Comparative research should also be done on marriage practices in countries of origin and those of immigrant populations in the UK.



## 6.1: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 6.1.1: SERVICE PROVISION FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND FORCED MARRIAGE

#### *Conclusions*

- There is limited awareness of guidelines on forced marriage within statutory and voluntary agencies.
- There is a lack of support for proposed legislation on forced marriage.

#### *Recommendations*

- Statutory and voluntary agencies should have culturally specific training on forced marriage and domestic violence, including increasing awareness of existing guidelines.
- Services for BME women, especially first generation immigrant women, need to be improved.

### 6.1.2: WOMEN AND MEN IN MARRIAGE

#### *Conclusions*

- There is a mixed response to proposed legislation on forced marriage.
- There is limited access to services on forced marriage and domestic violence.
- Domestic violence exists in all kinds of marriage

#### *Recommendations*

- Educate young people on human rights through school programmes, outreach/youth work and media.
- Raise awareness and educate communities on young people's rights through media and community development work.
- Educate the 'host' community about differences between arranged and forced marriage.
- Provide services to help men who have experienced a forced marriage or want to escape one, and services for men suffering from domestic violence.
- Provide information for young people going abroad and fearing forced marriage.

### 6.1.3: YOUNG PEOPLE, SINGLE WOMEN AND MEN

#### *Conclusions*

- The proposed legislation is regarded as ineffectual and unenforceable.
- There is a need to work with the older generation on forced marriage.
- The impact of forced marriage is gendered.

#### *Recommendations*

- Educate parents through community work, religious bodies and outreach projects.
- Educate young people through youth work, schools and outreach projects about forced and arranged marriages, and basic human rights

- Provide support services for young people at risk of forced marriage.

#### 6.1.4: COMMUNITY LEADERS

##### *Conclusions*

- There is no support for the proposed law.

##### *Recommendations*

- Education and training on forced marriage and domestic violence should be provided.
- There is a need for community leaders to raise awareness and recognition of forced marriage and domestic violence.

#### 6.2: FUTURE RESEARCH

The research indicates gaps in knowledge in these areas:

- The gendered nature of forced marriage.
- Men's experiences of forced marriages and domestic violence.
- Which age groups are more at risk of forced marriages.
- The extent of forced marriages in the country of origin.
- The extent of forced marriages which take place in the UK.
- Community and cultural acceptance of love marriages and the risk of forced marriage.
- The extent of domestic violence in love marriages.
- The experience of forced marriage in wider BME communities.
- Comparisons of marriage practices in countries of origin and UK BME communities.
- The links between love marriages and the risk of honour crimes.

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