



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

This study has been funded by the Northern Rock Foundation, and carried out by the University of Bristol. It looks at forced marriages and domestic violence within South Asian communities in Newcastle, Sunderland and South Tyneside, and examines the following research areas:

- Identification of areas for positive development for agencies and organisations.
- 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.

The study took place over a period of eighteen months (September 2005–Feb 2006) using a range of methods, including surveys and interviews with forty nine agencies in Sunderland, South Tyneside and Newcastle and interviews with four community leaders. In addition, the research involved respondents from Bangladeshi, Indian and Pakistani communities, and included two focus groups with young women and men; interviews with five single women and six single men; and interviews with twenty-three women and sixteen men with experience of marriage.

The main findings

- Most respondents acknowledged the difference between forced and arranged marriage, and arranged marriages were generally seen as positive.
- Slippage between definitions of forced, arranged and love marriage.
- Domestic violence provisions for BME women in the area of study were limited; there was even less provision for those experiencing forced marriage.
- Most agencies were not aware of official policies/guidelines on forced marriage.
- The general consensus among all respondents was that forced marriage was a gendered issue, with more women experiencing forced marriage and suffering more serious consequences.
- There was no consensus on whether forced marriage was a product of 'immigration' or a reflection of cultural practices borrowed from country of origin, though some challenged ideas of countries of origin being 'backward'.
- There was lack of support for proposed legislation criminalising forced marriage.
- Cultural concepts such as '*sharam*' (shame) and '*izzat*' (honour) played an important role in forcing young people into marriage, and keeping women and men in unhappy marriages.

- While forced marriage is a form of domestic violence, there was no evidence from this research to suggest links between intimate partner domestic violence and the nature of the marriage.
- There was a shared belief that forced marriage was wrong and was used to control young people.
- Most respondents saw forced marriage as being against their faith (Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism), and a misinterpretation of culture.
- All young people and most single people in the study expected to get married with some involvement from their parents.
- All but one community leader denied that forced marriage or domestic violence was an issue within their communities.

Recommendations

- Increased awareness of guidelines on forced marriage within statutory and voluntary agencies.
- Culturally specific training on forced marriage and domestic violence within statutory and voluntary agencies.
- Increased and improved services for BME women, especially first generation immigrant women.
- Education of young people on human rights through school programmes, youth work, outreach projects and media.
- Raised awareness and education in communities on young people's rights through media, community and outreach projects.
- Education of the 'host' community about differences between arranged and forced marriage.
- Services to help men who have experienced a forced marriage or want to escape one, and services for men suffering from domestic violence.
- Information readily available to young people who are going abroad and fear the risk of a forced marriage.
- Support services for young people who think they may be at risk of forced marriage.

Pointers for future research

The research indicates gaps in knowledge in these areas:

- The gendered nature of forced marriage.
- Male experiences of forced marriages and domestic violence.
- Assessment of which age groups are more at risk of forced marriages.
- Assessment of the extent of forced marriages in the country of origin.
- Assessment of 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.
- Links between love marriages and the risk of honour crimes.
- Research on wider BME communities on the experience of forced marriage.
- Comparative studies on marriage practices between countries of origin and immigrant populations in the UK.