Refuge

For women and children.
Against domestic violence.

Forced Marriage in the UK

A scoping study on the experience of women from

Middle Eastern and North East African Communities

Acknowledgements
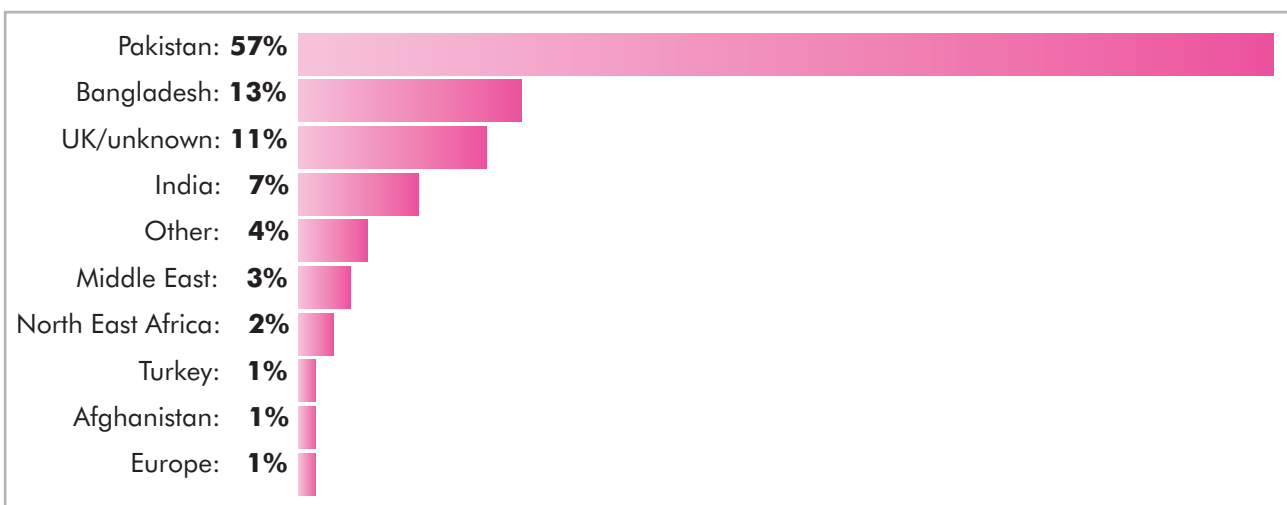
1. Introduction

The majority of forced marriage cases reported to the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) involve women from the Indian sub-continent (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh). This may partly reflect the fact that there is a large and established South Asian population in the UK (FCO et al. 2007). It may also be exacerbated by other demographic factors such as the relatively high proportion of young people in the British Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities who are currently at marriageable age (Samad & Eade, 2002).

It is, however, clear that forced marriage is not just a 'South Asian' issue. Around 12 per cent of cases referred to the FMU in 2008 involved women originating from East Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa (FMU, 2008).

Figure 1: Reports of forced marriage to the FMU (2008)

Pakistan: **57%**
Bangladesh: **13%**
UK/unknown: **11%**
India: **7%**
Other: **4%**
Middle East: **3%**
North East Africa: **2%**
Turkey: **1%**
Afghanistan: **1%**
Europe: **1%**

Although there is a growing body of knowledge about the experiences of South Asian women forced into marriage in the UK, less is understood about the experience of women from other regions.

On this basis, the FMU provided grant funding to Refuge, the national domestic violence charity, to undertake a scoping study of the experience of forced marriage for women in the UK whose families originate from the Middle East and North East Africa. It was agreed that the study would consist of:

1. A research literature review of existing knowledge on forced marriage in the Middle East and North East Africa.

2. Case studies of at least 10 services users from the Middle East and North East Africa exploring their experiences of forced marriage and their support needs.

3. Interviews with at least 6 caseworkers about their experience of supporting women from the Middle East and North East Africa.

The overall purpose of the study was to:

A. Explore the experiences of forced marriage for women in the UK whose families originate from the Middle East and North East Africa.

B. Develop survivor-led recommendations on how Refuge (and other providers) can improve service provision for women from the Middle East and North East Africa who have experienced forced marriage.

2. Approach to the scoping study

In accordance with the agreed outputs, the scoping study was made up of three parts:

2.1 Overview of research literature

A systematic search for research literature was carried out across academic databases and relevant government and voluntary organisation websites. Only a small amount of research literature about the experience of forced marriage for Middle Eastern and North East African women in the UK context was found using this approach.

As such, wider internet research was undertaken in an attempt to capture research on forced marriage originating from these two regions. Web based searches were conducted using the research terms forced marriage and *Middle East, North Africa, East Africa* and *North East Africa* as well as country names. Unfortunately these findings were also extremely limited in scope[1] further highlighting the need for more research in this area.

2.2 Forced marriage case studies – the Middle East and North East Africa

In order to identify cases for the study, members of Refuge's operational staff were asked to report if they were supporting a forced marriage victim from any of the countries listed below. In addition to this, a review of women's case files[2] was undertaken using Refuge's recently established electronic database – the 'Centralised Refuge Information System' (CRIS).[3]

Countries in the Middle East and North East Africa included:[4]

Middle East: Armenia; Bahrain; Iran; Iraq; Israel; Jordan; Kuwait; Lebanon; Oman; Qatar; Saudi Arabia; Syria; Turkey;[5] the United Arab Emirates; and Yemen

North East Africa: Djibouti; Egypt; Eritrea; Ethiopia; Somalia; and Sudan

(See regional map in appendix 1)

In total, seven[6] women within Refuge's accommodation-based, floating support and community outreach services were identified as meeting the sample criteria. Since this fell short of the 10 women needed for the study, external agencies were approached to find additional cases (as agreed in the project risk analysis of the funding bid). Three more victims of forced marriage were identified within the domestic violence services of Ashiana (an organisation which supports South Asian, Iranian and Turkish women) and the Asian Women's Resource Centre, which is increasingly approached by forced marriage victims from all backgrounds.

Breakdown of interviews:
- Seven women from Refuge's services:
- One woman chose to be interviewed directly
- Three women asked that their caseworker represent them
- Three women had already exited Refuge's services so their caseworkers were interviewed[7]

- Three women were supported by Ashiana and the Asian Women's Resource Centre
- All three women were represented by their caseworkers

A semi-structured qualitative interview template was developed (see appendix 2) posing the same questions to the nine caseworkers (speaking on behalf of women) as those posed to the one woman who chose to be interviewed. This ensured that, as far as possible, the answers given by the caseworkers accurately represented the actual experience of the women they supported and not their own interpretation of women's experiences.

As a further safeguard the interviewer asked that the women's case files and statements written by the women to statutory agencies such as housing were made available wherever possible. This allowed the caseworkers to check details they could not remember and allowed the interviewer to triangulate the study findings.

The qualitative findings were analysed using the framework approach developed by the National Centre for Social Research (Ritchie et al. 2003).

2.3 Interviews with caseworkers

Middle East: To explore the experiences of supporting forced marriage survivors whose families' originate from the Middle East, two staff members of Ashiana's specialist forced marriage service agreed to be interviewed.

North East Africa: At the time of interviewing, Refuge employed a specialist Somali outreach worker and she had contact with women from Somalia as well as other North East African countries such as Djibouti. Refuge also runs a specialist refuge for women and a focus group discussion was held with all 5 members of staff.

Overall, 8 caseworkers were interviewed about their experiences of supporting Middle Eastern and North East African women experiencing forced marriage. This exceeded the 6 caseworkers that had been agreed.

Furthermore, in order to maximise learning for the scoping study, the opportunity was also taken to ask the caseworkers speaking on behalf of the women in the research sample about their 'general' experiences of supporting survivors of forced marriage from these particular backgrounds.

3. Research literature review

3.1 Defining 'forced marriage'

Forced marriage is understood to be 'a marriage conducted without the valid consent of two parties, where duress is a factor' (Home Office, 2000). The Court of Appeal has ruled that the test for 'duress' is whether 'the mind of the [victim] has in fact been overborne, howsoever that was caused'.[8] It is recognised that duress can include physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional pressure (HM Government 2008).

The Government makes a 'clear distinction' between forced marriage and arranged marriage based on the issue of choice. In arranged marriages the families of both spouses take a leading role in choosing the marriage partner, but the choice of whether or not to accept the arrangement remains with the prospective spouses. In forced marriage, there is no choice – one or both spouses do not consent to the marriage or their consent is extracted under duress.

Commentators such as Samad & Eade (2002) and Phillips & Dustin (2004) argue that, in practice, this distinction is not so clear cut. 'Choice' is, in fact, a variable that operates along a continuum – between marriages imposed on individuals against their will and those arranged on their behalf with their consent. Somewhere in the middle of the continuum therefore will inevitably be 'grey areas' (Phillips & Dustin, 2004:11).

For instance, Khanum (2008) identifies what she calls 'false marriage'. This is marriage by deception, where a young person may be tricked into giving consent to marriage through providing false information or withholding critical information about the other party (such as the prospective spouse's age, educational qualifications, wealth, habits, disabilities, drug addiction etc.). In this scenario Khanum (2008) questions whether a person's consent can really be said to be free and full if it is based on information which has been deliberately falsified or obscured.

In addition, the recently published multi-agency practice guidelines for handling cases of forced marriage recognise that certain groups 'cannot' consent to marriage because they do not have the capacity to do so. This includes children[9] as well as vulnerable young people and adults with learning or physical disabilities. This is of particular concern as Eversley & Khanom (2002) note that young people who are perceived to have poorer marriage prospects are more likely to face forced marriages; yet physical, sensory or learning difficulties may be among the reasons why marriage prospects may be perceived as poor.

3.2 Forced marriage in the UK

Forced marriage in the UK often takes three forms: an individual who fears they may be forced to marry in the UK or overseas; an individual who has already been forced to marry in the UK or overseas; and a spouse who has come to the UK as a result of a forced marriage. Despite the serious nature of forced marriage in the UK, it is difficult to gain an accurate picture of its scale. This is not only due to under-reporting which is common for all crimes of violence against women, but also due to the failure of agencies to record accurate statistics (SBS, 2001).[10]

Although some sources estimate that there are around 1,000 cases of forced marriage in the UK every year, commentators argue that this is likely to be merely 'the tip of the iceberg' (SBS, 2001). The Government's FMU dealt with around 1,600 reported incidents of suspected forced marriage in 2008 and Revil & Asthana (2008) report that as many as 3,000 women may be forced into marriage in the UK every year.

Whilst boys and men are affected by forced marriage, the issue impacts girls and women in far larger numbers (UNICEF, 2005). Statistics from the Forced Marriage Unit in 2008 show that 85 per cent of its caseload was made up of women and girls aged between 13 and 30.

Furthermore, girls and women forced into marriage may experience it with greater intensity than males if they also experience other forms of violence. For instance, in some communities women may have to undergo female genital mutilation before being able to marry (HM Government, 2008) whilst others may be subject to repeated rape until they become pregnant and ongoing domestic violence from their spouse and/or his family (HM Government, 2009).

The Forced Marriage Unit and partner agencies identify a number of motives that lead some families to force their children into marriage (HM Government, 2009) including:

- Controlling unwanted sexuality (including perceived promiscuity or being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender)
- Controlling unwanted behaviour, for example, alcohol and drug use, wearing make-up or behaving in a 'westernised manner'
- Preventing 'unsuitable' relationships e.g. outside the ethnic, cultural, religious or caste group
- Protecting family honour or 'izzat'
- Responding to peer group or family pressure
- Attempting to strengthen family links
- Achieving financial gain
- Ensuring land, property and wealth remain within the family
- Protecting perceived cultural ideals
- Protecting perceived religious ideals
- Ensuring care for a child or vulnerable adult with special needs when parents or existing carers are unable to fulfill that role
- Long standing family commitments
- Assisting claims for UK residence and citizenship

According to Hester et al. (2008), forced marriage is unlikely to manifest itself in identical ways across all cultural groups. Their study found that the triggers and motivations for forcing someone into marriage vary widely across cultural groups and can include: poverty and bride-price among some African communities; control over sexuality in South Asian, Middle Eastern, Chinese and African communities; and immigration in South Asian, Middle Eastern, Chinese and African communities.

Whilst practices such as forced marriage may decline when communities move to a different legal, economic and social environment, it may also be the case that coercive marriage practices are actually preserved by families, despite their demise in their country of origin. In this case parents may believe that they are upholding the customs of their home country even though practices and values there might have changed (Gangoli et al., 2006).

3.3 Forced marriage across communities

The research literature on forced marriage in the UK focuses primarily on South Asian and Muslim communities. But discriminatory marriage practices and other abuses of women are endemic in many cultures and across religions. As Mayer (1995) argues, the international norms enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights and their sentiment goes against many of the discriminatory traditions which have long been entrenched across legal systems - including within both Western and Islamic states. Violence against women is therefore a global problem 'linked to traditional hierarchical power relationships between men and women and parents and children' and can occur in any communities where these relationships exist (Khanum, 2008:44).

Hester et al. (2008) further highlight how the issue of forced marriage is complex and multilayered, depending upon the community, the culture within the community, the family situation and notions of tradition within the family. Their research reveals that a wide range of communities outside of the South Asian diaspora experience forced marriage, including: orthodox/fundamental religious communities in the UK; Irish traveller women; Armenian, Turkish and some mainland Chinese communities; Eastern European communities; African communities (such as Eritrean, Sudanese, Sierra Leonean and Mozambiquean); and African Caribbean communities. This is consistent with evidence presented to the Government during a consultation on the criminalisation of forced marriage – *A Wrong Not a Right* (FCO et al. 2006). Although 65 per cent (n=45) of forced marriage cases were identified by respondents as being from the Indian sub-continent, many other geographical locations were also mentioned once, including: Egypt, Poland, Malaysia, Kenya, Ireland, Nigeria, Jordan, Yemen, South East Asia, Greece, Syria and Africa (FCO, 2006).

Research undertaken in Luton also observed that forced marriage 'happens among other minorities as well, especially from Africa, the Middle East and parts of Eastern Europe' (Khanum, 2008:17). The Khanum (2008) study uncovered examples of forced marriage cases from the Somali community that had been identified by women's groups, as well as a small number of cases which had been referred to Luton Women's Aid involving women from South African and Nigerian backgrounds.[11]

When Iman & Eversley (2002) explored the extent and consequences of forced marriage among the Bangladeshi and Somali communities residing in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, all but one of eleven interviewees reported that they had not encountered forced marriage in either their professional experience of working with the Somali community or in their personal experience of living in the UK.

The one interviewee who reported forced marriage in the Somali community was a Bengali worker interviewed in connection with exploring forced marriage in the Bangladeshi community, not the Somali community. Although the worker had not encountered any cases personally, he reported that he had heard 'stories in the community' of three Somali forced marriage cases. These included: an 18 year old girl whose parents were not happy with her lifestyle; a girl suspected of 'fooling around'; and a 17 year old boy who had been involved in drug and alcohol abuse.

Denial of forced marriage happening within some communities in the UK context was a finding within research undertaken by Brandon & Hafez (2008). An advice worker based at a Somali community centre stated that the practice did not exist outside of the country. But another interviewee in the Brandon & Hafez (2008) study referred to what she called 'semi-arranged' marriage in the Somali community, in cases where 'a person is not forced but pressured to marry a second cousin or someone from the same tribe'.

Finally, the study by Brandon & Hafez (2008) uncovered evidence of forced marriage referrals from Africa and Eastern European Communities and reported that forced marriage is high in the Turkish and Kurdish communities where women are forced to marry cousins, members of their tribe and extended family in order to reinforce kinship networks business ties and tribal alliances. Indeed the UN Human Rights Council (2007) has noted that a transnational dimension to forced marriage in Turkey has become increasingly visible, with some girls whose families have migrated from Turkey to other countries being forced to marry Turkish men.

3.4 Summary

Despite evidence suggesting that forced marriage is happening in a wide range of communities, the brevity of this literature review suggests that there appears to be an overwhelming lack of research on women's experiences outside of the South Asian community.

4. Discussion of case study findings

4.1 Overview of women's forced marriage experiences

This section discusses the forced marriage experiences of the 10 women who met the sample criteria. Four of the women originated from countries in the Middle East including Turkey (n=3) and Iraq (n=1). The remaining six women originated from countries in North East Africa including Somalia (n=4), Sudan (n=1) and Eritrea (n=1).[12]

Since the participant sample was drawn from specialist services for women experiencing violence, all of the cases outlined within the report concern women and girls. This reflects the majority of forced marriage cases, but it is worth noting that the forced marriage caseworkers from Ashiana spoke about coming across male victims of forced marriage in their generic outreach work.

In addition, the process of identifying forced marriage cases across Refuge's services through the electronic database highlighted one case in which the case notes stated that the husband of a woman being supported by Refuge told her that he had only married her because of 'cultural duty'.

4.2 Patterns in forced marriage

The forced marriage survivors within the participant sample were aged between 17 and 31 – an age range consistent with the FMU's experience that most cases involve young women and girls aged between 13 and 30. Two of the women were born in the UK; four women came to the UK during early childhood; and four women came to the UK in adulthood.

The cases were also consistent with the three different forms of forced marriage that are identified within the literature:

1. An individual who fears they may be forced to marry in the UK or overseas (seven cases)
2. An individual who has already been forced to marry in the UK or overseas (two cases)
3. A spouse who has come to the UK as a result of a forced marriage (one case)

The men that the women were being forced to marry included: immediate and distant cousins, men in their families' country of origin who were deemed to be 'suitable' i.e. from the right tribe or desired ethnic/religious background. Several of the women also told their caseworkers that their intended/actual husband was considerably older than themselves.

Nine out of the 10 women[13] in the participant sample were Muslim. This was to be expected since the Middle East and North East Africa are predominantly Islamic regions. Other forced marriage survivors identified within Refuge's electronic database and who came from different geographical regions, reported different religious backgrounds including Christianity and Hinduism (see appendix 3).

4.3 Motives and triggers for forced marriage

The motives for forced marriage disclosed by the women in the participant sample were broadly consistent with those identified within the literature review and included:

- Controlling unwanted behaviour i.e. drinking alcohol and behaving in a 'westernised manner' (three cases)
- Preventing 'unsuitable relationships' (two cases)
- Attempting to strengthen family links (one case)
- Achieving financial gain i.e. through bride price (one case)
- Protecting family honour or 'izzat' (one case)

Two of the case studies did, however, highlight an additional motive for forced marriage which is not identified by the literature: the family being unhappy with their daughter/sister/niece living independently as a single woman/mother although this may come under the broader heading of 'transgressing perceived cultural ideals'.

In terms of identifying 'triggers' for forced marriage, a very strong theme was of young women coming to the end of their education. This may be because family members are concerned about the young person becoming independent. It may also be connected to young people no longer being in a system which might 'ask questions' about their whereabouts and wellbeing.

> *"When I graduated from University my family were lost, terribly confused about what I would do here and upset with my future plan decisions. They didn't want me to become an individual before marriage; they started forcing me into getting married"*
> *(Yasemin)*

4.4 The role of family in forced marriage

The women reported to their caseworkers that they were forced into marriage by family members including: parents, brothers, aunts and uncles. There was also evidence of duress being exerted by members of the extended family, including an aunt, a sister, several grandmothers and a grandfather.

At the same time it is important to note that the women and young girls also told their caseworkers about family members who played supportive roles to try and stop them from being forced into marriage. This included male family members such as siblings and cousins as well as current boyfriends.

4.5 The use of duress

Again, examples of the types of duress that women reported experiencing to their caseworkers were consistent with those contained with the literature on forced marriage and included:

- Physical abuse
- Threats to kill
- Emotional abuse
- Threats to send back to home country
- False imprisonment
- Monitoring of movements
- Financial abuse: interference with education and access to money

Whilst, in the majority of cases, the women reported not having experienced abuse from their families before being forced into marriage, there were several cases where the threat of forced marriage was identified as being, of itself, part of a pattern of wider abuse that they experienced (including female genital cutting).

The women never gave up hope that the duress being put on them by their families would stop. Two of the women reported that they tried to 'put up' with the forced marriage situation but experienced other forms of abuse which compounded the violence they were experiencing i.e. sexual assault, having no control over child bearing.

Escape from the threat of/an actual forced marriage was seen as being the 'last resort'. The women reported using a number of avoidance strategies (see below) for as long as they could and this was sometimes successful for a number of years.

4.6 Avoidance strategies

Women reported using various coping strategies to try and 'avoid' being forced into marriage. The most common was attempting to prolong education for as long as possible. In one case this was only possible because of the support the young woman received from her college. Because her parents were doing all they could to interfere with her education, including denying her travel money, the college would top up her Oyster card and give her vouchers for lunch so that she could continue to attend.

Another avoidance strategy that women considered was running away. For example, one young woman had accessed the support of a Connexions worker at the age of 15 and together they had packed an 'emergency bag'. However she did not leave home for another 5 years – managing to cope until the forced marriage was imminent.

In fact several women took this course of action when the marriage was imminent. One woman was forced to sleep on the street until she was able to access help via the FMU. Another woman wanted to run away but was unable to do so because her family would not leave her on her own; she had even considered jumping out of an upstairs window.

Additional strategies mentioned included: spending time with family and friends, avoiding the perpetrator(s) of abuse i.e. locking self in bedroom; pretending to conform and 'go along' with the marriage in order to try and regain some space for action; trying to retain control of their passport where possible; and exploring what support options were available.

Unfortunately the continuous pressure being exerted in several of the cases was such that the women felt they had no choice but to enter into the forced marriage:

> *"My family continued to put pressure on me to marry my cousin and gave me the ultimatum of either going back to Iraq to live with them or marry my cousin, but they said I was not allowed to continue to live alone; eventually I had no choice but to enter into a forced marriage"(Janan)*

4.7 Accessing support

Informal sources of support were mentioned. Several women went to stay with other family members in order to escape forced marriage; and one woman forced into marriage and taken abroad was able to e-mail a friend in the UK about what was happening.

The women also mentioned to their caseworkers a number of external agencies that helped link them into specialist domestic violence/forced marriage services. These included:

- The police
- College
- A GP
- A housing department
- A worker at a child's playgroup
- Various British Embassies
- The Forced Marriage Unit

In eight of the cases, the presenting issue was escaping the threat of/or an actual forced marriage. However two women accessed services because of domestic violence:

"I thought that I would just have to get on with it. It was his choice to have the children. I didn't want what came with marriage but I had to do it. He first raised his hand to me just after I gave birth to the eldest but he couldn't do anything because the midwives were there. Then his sister threatened that she was going to take my eldest son away. I didn't want to be there in that situation – I knew I had to get away" (Faizah)

4.8 Barriers to accessing support

Accessing support was not always easy. The women told their caseworkers that a number of barriers had existed which deterred them from accessing help. The following examples were given:

- Bringing 'shame' on the family for involving outsiders
- Not wanting to upset family and/or get them into trouble
- Desire to keep a 'low profile' due to family having sought political asylum in the UK and fearing negative repercussions by calling the police
- Concerns that family members would kill them in the name of honour
- Not wanting to highlight to the community what was happening
- Being scared that involving an outside agency would make things worse
- Family members 'scaring' the woman about the response of outside agencies by suggesting it would be negative/harmful
- Family members threatening to send them back 'home' if they tried to access help
- Mistrust of outside agencies based on prior experience (i.e. the police)
- Having limited proficiency in English
- Not knowing that support existed

4.9 Defining forced marriage

Nine of the 10 women were able to make a 'clear distinction' between arranged and forced marriage. But one woman reported that she did not know that she had the right to say 'no' to the marriage. She was clear in her own mind that she did not want to get married and felt that she had been 'bought' by her husband's family and 'sold' by her family because a dowry was involved. However she believed that she had no choice but to get married:

"I had no choice; they were very insistent. They were talking to me all the time – asking 'why won't you marry him?' I said that I wanted to keep studying but they convinced me I'd still be able to do that after I got married. They told me I had no other reason not to marry him… and I had no other excuses." (Faizah)

4.10 Women's support needs

4.10.1 Emotional support

The most common support need expressed to the women's caseworkers (60 per cent of the study sample) was the need for emotional support through counselling and access to psychological/mental health services. This included support around self blame - helping women deal with their feelings of guilt/betrayal for leaving and in some cases bringing 'shame' or 'disgrace' on their families.

Women also sought support around reconciling 'being themselves' and standing up for their rights with the reality of cutting all family, cultural and faith ties by not conforming with expectations. This included assistance in rebuilding personal and cultural identity; and coming to terms with the abuse they experienced from their families.

"I find it difficult to travel freely because I get scared of seeing my family relatives and scared of getting hurt by them physically, even getting killed…but I constantly think about my family and feel like I betrayed them…sometimes I feel that my life is over and my family will never understand me and forgive me. At times I feel like going back to my mother's house…I miss them so much" (Yasemin)

4.10.2 Addressing social isolation

Around 50 per cent of the women in the participant sample expressed feelings of isolation from family members, friends and the wider community. The fear of being 'found' by family members constrained their ability to develop new support networks.

For instance, one woman was worried that interacting with other Turkish Cypriots would lead to her brothers finding out where she was. This had an impact on her ability to practice her religion since she was scared about going to the local mosque on her own, knowing that people would ask questions about her 'Western' dress and the fact that she was a single woman.

4.10.3 Specialist services

Two of the women expressed to their caseworkers a need to access services catering specifically for women who have experienced forced marriage and for women from the same cultural background. Because the services they accessed did not meet these needs their feelings of isolation were exacerbated.

One woman in particular, struggled with having little contact with women from her own background; and when another Iraqi woman came to the refuge their relationship became claustrophobic and strained. Although she looked into seeing whether she could transfer to another refuge, the only space available was in a location where she would have had even less opportunity to interact with women from similar backgrounds.

4.10.4 Safety planning

Over a quarter of the women in the sample remained in danger due to the risk of honour based violence. Women reported to their caseworkers that their families were making attempts to find them (i.e. via telephone calls, e-mails, stalking, reporting them as 'missing' to the police) and had genuine concerns about what would happen if they were found.

Indeed one woman was forced to move to another refuge because her brothers were trying to find her and she feared that they would kill her. She received an e-mail from a friend to say that they had been searching for her in areas of the country with high populations of Somali people, including where she was living. She also expressed concerns about a Somali family who lived next door to the refuge and who she thought might be from the same tribe and recognise her.

Two of the women also reported fears that their siblings might be forced into marriage in the future.

4.10.5 Financial support

Over a quarter of the women required assistance in relation to accessing financial support. The No Recourse to Public Funds rule was a particular issue for one young woman in relation to determining what support would be available for her if she left the family home.

4.10.6 Immigration issues

Linked to the No Recourse to Public Funds rule above was support needed in relation to determining immigration status.

4.10.7 Accommodation

Several of the women required support in relation to housing. For instance, one woman experienced difficulties with the housing department since it did not understand that she was still at risk in her local area, despite her husband living in another country. This was because she feared being found by her aunt and uncle and being made to return to Iraq. In fact the Forced Marriage Unit ended up having to write a letter to the housing department confirming what had happened.

4.10.8 Substance misuse

At least one of the women in the participant sample had very high support needs because of what she had experienced and was using alcohol as a means of blocking out being forced into marriage.

5. Interviews with caseworkers

5.1 Experience of supporting women from the Middle East

The two caseworkers from Ashiana who work within a specialist service for South Asian, Turkish and Iranian women (which includes a refuge specifically for victims of forced marriage) estimate that around 35 per cent of the women they support are from the Middle East.[14]

5.2 Experience of supporting women from North East Africa

The focus group discussion with five caseworkers in Refuge's specialist accommodation for African and Caribbean women revealed only two known forced marriage cases in which women came from a North East African background. In both cases, the women concerned were from Somalia.

At the same time Ashiana also highlighted that they sometimes receive referrals and enquiries from/or about North East African women being forced into marriage, despite the fact that these women are outside of Ashiana's client group. For instance, the service recently received a phone call from the boyfriend of a woman who had been taken to Somalia to be married because her father had found out about their relationship and the boyfriend was concerned for her safety. The Ashiana caseworkers further noted how they were getting disclosures from Somali and Moroccan girls through their outreach work in schools. They observed that the Somali community was particularly hard to penetrate, but that the girls who did approach them were usually desperate for their support.

5.3 Defining forced marriage

The caseworkers at both Ashiana and Refuge noted that the women they support are often confused about the definition of forced marriage. For instance, one of the Ashiana caseworkers noted that *'our clients look to us to define'* what is meant by forced marriage. She gave one example of a university educated woman who was confused if she had experienced a forced marriage because she knew the man she was being forced to marry and because she had initially agreed to the marriage before later changing her mind. Another example in Refuge's CRIS system showed that a woman defined her experience as *'being forced into an arranged marriage'*.

It also became clear through the focus group discussion with caseworkers in specialist refuge accommodation for African Caribbean women that some communities outside of the South Asian diaspora may not recognise/use the term 'forced' marriage. Their discussion revealed that the word 'forced' is rarely used to describe marriage in Africa. Rather, the caseworkers spoke about how young women describe being *'silently pushed towards'* marriage by their families. Similarly the outreach worker for Somali women observed that the Somali community refers to *'voluntary, arranged marriage'* yet acknowledges that there is an element of 'persuasion' by the family.

5.3.1 'False' marriage

Several of the caseworkers described cases consistent with the definition of 'false marriage' suggested by Khanum (2008). Examples of arranged marriages were given in which families had withheld critical information about the other party (such as mental illness and drug addiction[15]) as well as having built up a 'good picture' of what life will be like with the husband, even if the family was aware that this would not be the case.

For instance, the outreach worker for Somali women spoke about a case involving a woman from Djibouti. Both the families knew that her husband had a serious drug problem but this was not communicated to her and she only discovered what was going on after she got to the UK. The outreach worker said this kind of scenario was common with families who were trying to cover up issues such as drug use and mental illness.

A floating support worker also flagged up this kind of scenario, referring to a woman she was supporting from Egypt. The woman had entered into an arranged marriage but had only discovered that her husband had mental health issues after coming to the UK. Although she ended up leaving him because of physical abuse and threats to kill, she would meet him roughly every 3 weeks in a public space so that they could phone home together.

5.3.2 'Forced to stay' in marriage

The study findings also suggested the concept of being 'forced to stay' in marriage. The caseworkers working with African Caribbean women observed that many of the women they work with because of domestic violence often say that they can not leave their marriage because of how their families will respond.

5.4 Women's support needs

In terms of support needs, the caseworkers spoke about how women have to reconcile fighting for their rights (i.e. in terms of marrying who they want and leading the life they want to) with having to cut all family, cultural and faith ties as a consequence. Believing that this was often a process that women internalised, all the workers felt that it would be extremely valuable to have a counsellor available to support women with this process.

> "Who she knows and what she knows about herself has changed radically; what she understands about her family relationships and those dynamics have changed completely – everything has been turned upside down and she doesn't know which way is forward and how she'll get there" (Ashiana caseworker)

Counselling was believed to be particularly important for women who had experienced sexual abuse and women who had multiple support needs. One of the caseworkers in the specialist African Caribbean service observed that it was difficult supporting high level needs within a domestic violence service where women, despite being from the same cultural background, have all kinds of different experiences; including domestic violence, forced marriage, trafficking, FGM, HIV and mental health.

Another issue identified by the caseworkers was 'isolation' as a result of leaving behind/being ostracized by family and friends as well as the wider community. The generic refuge workers spoke about the challenge that exists when women fleeing forced marriage are located in an area that is not culturally diverse and how this can make finding support networks difficult. Whilst staff in the generic refuge services observed that all the women using the service share the common experience of fleeing violence, it was believed that women struggled when there were no 'like minded' women whom they could identify with culturally and who really understood their situation.

For these reasons, the generic refuge workers thought that the women they were supporting may have benefited from being supported in specialist refuge accommodation. Similarly, the specialist forced marriage caseworkers noted that the women they support place a high value on culturally specific services and observed how women in specialist services were able to reach out to others who *'are fleeing the same sort of thing and have the same sort of problems'* and who speak the same language.

5.5 Similarities in relation to supporting South Asian women

When discussing the support needs of Middle Eastern and North East African forced marriage survivors, the caseworkers spoke about how struck they were by the similarities in culture that they saw. For instance, the caseworker at the Asian Women's Resource Centre observed how they were increasingly taking referrals for Middle Eastern and African women and how the pressure exerted by the extended family was very similar to the South Asian community.

Similarly, in discussing the case of supporting a Somali woman forced into marriage, a caseworker commented on how it reminded her of supporting a South Asian woman who had been forced into marriage because they both had to face the choice of either conforming to their family's demands or having no ties or contact with the family through not conforming.

One of the Ashiana caseworkers also saw parallels between the experiences of South Asian women and Middle Eastern women:

> *"Even if you're not from that background you know straight away, you can see the similarities. Maybe the language may be different or the dress may be different but deep down the problems are the same…it's a male dominated society and women are expected to do as they're told and if they break away from that then their life is in danger."(Ashiana caseworker)*

Having said this however, it was noted that the women's support needs vary according to their vulnerability and needs as an individual; for instance, one woman may have little outside support and very high support needs compared to another who is going through the same thing but has a wider support network. This suggests that outside support may mediate emotional need.

Another observation from one caseworker was that, in her experience, women from all backgrounds will only seek external help if they have experienced very severe abuse. It was her feeling that many women accept forced marriage as part of their culture since it brings up less hurt, pain and anger.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

6.1 Recognition of forced marriage as an issue across all communities

Analysis of Refuge's case load in order to identify participants for the study reinforced previous research findings that forced marriage is not just a 'South Asian' issue (Hester at al., 2008; Khanum, 2008). In fact, when compared to the caseload of the Forced Marriage Unit, it is interesting to note that less than half of the forced marriage survivors (42 per cent) supported by Refuge (between September 2008 and June 2009) were from South Asia, compared to around three quarters (77 per cent) of the Forced Marriage Unit's caseload in 2008 (see appendix 3 for breakdown of all forced marriage cases). Refuge also appeared to be supporting a more diverse group of forced marriage survivors than the Forced Marriage Unit, including women from West Africa (i.e. Nigeria, the Congo and the Ivory Coast).

This may be because forced marriage is not always the 'presenting issue' for women when accessing domestic violence services. The identification of forced marriage may come about later on, when the case worker works with a woman to explore how her marriage came about. As the research demonstrates, some women may not have identified their experience as being one of forced marriage at the time and her community may deny that such a practice even exists (Imam & Eversley, 2002; Brandon & Hafez, 2008).

In comparison, the remit of the Government's Forced Marriage Unit is much more focused. As such, it is likely to attract the attention only of those women and professionals who require immediate assistance in a situation which they clearly perceive as being forced marriage.

6.2 Lack of research into forced marriage across communities

The findings of the scoping study into the experience of Middle Eastern and North East African women forced into marriage demonstrates a worrying lack of existing research about forced marriage outside of South Asian communities. This may help explain why the forced marriage experiences of women from other communities are not always reflected in the media or the communications/policy work of Government and voluntary organisations.

As a consequence of this, women experiencing forced marriage outside of the South Asian community may not recognise and define their experience as forced marriage and may not seek the help they are entitled to. Indeed, the fact that a relatively small number of women from Middle Eastern and North East African backgrounds were identified as accessing services during the study period suggests that this might be the case.

Similarly, if communities deny that 'forced marriage' is an issue which exists and needs to be addressed then appropriate service provision for those women affected by it may not be available. Again, the fact that women and young girls from outside of the South Asian community are seeking help from South Asian agencies around the issue of forced marriage suggests that there is a lack of specialist support services for women and girls experiencing forced marriage from different backgrounds and/or a lack of knowledge that such support services exist.

Recommendations

- All awareness raising material around women experiencing forced marriage should ensure that this is reflected as an issue which impacts women across communities i.e. by using case studies of women experiencing forced marriage across continents; ensuring forced marriage literature is made available in a range of languages and is widely circulated
- Membership of government/voluntary sector working groups/domestic violence subgroups on forced marriage should include representatives from groups working with women across communities

- Training about forced marriage should recognise that it is an issue that affects women across all cultural backgrounds
- Professionals working with abused women should routinely explore the circumstances around how a woman's marriage came about, including exploring what 'forced marriage' is and how it looks in practice

6.3 Access to specialist service provision

The scoping study highlights that there appears to be consistency in women's experience of forced marriage across communities. The findings presented above appear to be broadly congruent with research findings into forced marriage experienced by South Asian women.

Women's support needs also appeared to be very similar across communities. The support needs identified by the participant sample were strongest around provision of emotional support and overcoming feelings of social isolation. In addition, the need for specialist provision (i.e. specific forced marriage services; culturally specific services) was identified as being very important.

This suggests that whilst the service provider response to women experiencing forced marriage i.e. safety planning, immigration support etc. appears to meet the practical needs of women, this is not in itself enough. In order to mitigate social isolation there remains a need for wider availability of culturally specific services.

Recommendations
- Women who have experienced forced marriage should have immediate access to emotional/psychological support services
- Wherever possible, women should be offered specialist accommodation/outreach services in an environment that meets their language, cultural and religious needs
- Culturally specific services for women from non-South Asian backgrounds need to communicate that their services encompass women experiencing forced marriage where applicable

6.4 A coherent approach to prevention

The findings suggest that girls and women need to be clear about what forced marriage is, that it is illegal and that they have a right to say 'no'. Education on this issue needs to explore the concept of duress and the different forms that violence can take (i.e. physical, sexual, emotional and financial). It also needs to explore what these different forms of violence might look like i.e. monitoring of movements, false imprisonment, confiscation of mobile phone, building an overly positive picture of a proposed spouse etc.

Recommendations
- Educational institutions and groups working with girls and women should explore the concept of forced marriage and should provide information on how girls and young women can access support
- Funded awareness raising campaigns about forced marriage should be developed which specifically target women and girls

Enabling help seeking

As well as educating girls and women about forced marriage, educational institutions and other groups working with girls and women play an important role in intervention work and encouraging help seeking.

The girls and women in the scoping study demonstrated using various 'avoidance strategies' to put off the threat of forced marriage, including staying in education for as long as possible. Educational institutions working with girls and women are in an ideal position to create a supportive environment in which girls and women facing forced marriage can speak out. They are also ideally placed to pick up on signs which may indicate that a girl or woman may be facing a forced marriage and should be aware that approaching examinations/leaving education may act as a 'trigger' to forced marriage.

Since the findings of the study further suggest that girls and women are more likely to confide the threat of forced marriage to friends and peers, it is important that education on this issue also provides information to students on how to respond appropriately to disclosure.

Recommendations

Educational establishments and other groups working with young people should:

- Be aware of forced marriage as an issue which affects young people from across communities
- Adhere to the statutory multi-agency guidance for professionals produced by the Forced Marriage Unit which outlines how to recognise that girls/women may be facing forced marriage and how to respond
- Provide support to young women facing forced marriage so that they can employ 'avoidance' strategies around forced marriage
- Create a supportive school environment in which young people are able to disclose forced marriage. This involves identifying and referring girls and women to specialist support services
- Recognise that an enabling role can be played by young males and ensure that they are involved as part of the solution to forced marriage wherever possible

In addition, the survey findings indicated that families forcing girls and women into marriage may threaten to send them to their 'home' country if they do not comply. As a consequence, prevention strategies should include ways of ensuring that girls and women have the Forced Marriage Unit's phone number and/or the phone number of the British Embassy in the country they may be sent to.

Recommendations

Professionals should:

- Recognise the barriers that exist to seeking external assistance and seek to overcome/mitigate against these wherever possible
- Recognise that any disclosure of forced marriage is likely to have been made as a 'last resort ' thus the individual concerned is likely to be at high risk and must be taken seriously

Further research

Whilst the scoping study sought to secure survivor-led feedback on the services provided by Refuge and other providers, in the event only one woman was interviewed directly. This was for a number of reasons including: women exiting the service within short time periods; women preferring their caseworker to speak on their behalf; and because there were time constraints and access issues involved in approaching external agencies. It was difficult to overcome these issues due to the small number of women falling within the sample criteria within the specified timeframe.

As a consequence, Refuge believes that it would be valuable to build on the findings of this scoping study through further research which: involves a greater number of participants; considers the experience of women and girls from a wider range of backgrounds; and takes place over a longer period of time. Ideally such an approach would assist in increasing the direct participation of girls and women.

Appendix 1: Map of the Middle East and North East Africa

www.world-maps.co.uk/continent-map-of-middle-east.htm

Appendix 2: Semi-structured interview template

A: Case studies

1. What is her date of birth/age?
2. What is her religion?
3. Was she born in the UK? If not where was she born and when/how did she come to be in the UK?
4. Did she escape the threat of forced marriage/or was she forced into marriage?
5. Who threatened her with/forced her into marriage?
6. Did she know the reason why she was being threatened with/forced into marriage?
7. Was she clear what a forced marriage is?
8. What forms of abuse/duress did she report experiencing?
9. Who was she facing a forced marriage to/who was she forced to marry?
10. Where was she going to be married/where was she forced to marry?
11. Did she talk about the experience of siblings/other family members in relation to forced marriage?
12. Did she talk to you about any coping strategies that she used to avoid the forced marriage?
13. How was she able to escape the threatened/actual forced marriage?
14. Did she have contact with any agencies in relation to the threatened/actual forced marriage
15. Did she mention any barriers to reporting the threat/actual forced marriage?
16. What was the presenting issue to Refuge/Ashiana/Women's Resource Centre? How did she come to access your service?
17. What did she identify as her support needs?
18. Did she tell you about experiencing other forms of VAW?

B: Case workers

1. What is your experience of supporting forced marriage victims from the Middle East/North East Africa?
2. If yes to experience – can you estimate how many women you have supported from these regions? What countries were they from?
3. If yes, do you see any similarities/differences in terms of a) their experience b) their support needs?
4. If no to experience, have you supported forced marriage victims from any other regions?
5. Any other issues you would like to flag up/discuss?

	Country	Religion		Country	Religion
1	Sudan	Muslim	13	Bangladesh	Muslim
2	Somalia	Muslim	14	Pakistan	Muslim
3	Somalia	Muslim	15	Pakistan	Muslim
4	Somalia	Muslim	16	Pakistan	Muslim
5	Eritrea	Muslim	17	Pakistan	Muslim
6	Iran	Muslim	18	Pakistan	Muslim
7	Turkish Cypriot	Muslim	19	Pakistan	Muslim
8	Ivory Coast	Muslim	20	Pakistan	Muslim
9	Congo	Christian	21	Sri Lanka	Hindu
10	Nigeria	Muslim	22	Afghanistan	Muslim
11	Bangladesh	Muslim	23	Bulgaria	Christian
12	Bangladesh	Muslim	24	UK	None

Appendix 3: Forced marriage cases identified across Refuge's domestic violence services

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1 Boy & Kulczycki (2008) note that, although a number of studies have reported on particular aspects of gender based violence in the Middle East and North Africa, especially honour killings and female genital mutilation, there has been very little research on violence against women more widely

2 A total of 1,425 case files were reviewed

3 A two tiered approach was required since the research period (September 2008 - June 2009) coincided with the launch of the CRIS system; hence the three early case studies identified had exited Refuge's services before they were put on the system

4 This is consistent with research undertaken across the Middle East and Africa by Boy & Kulczycki (2008) where the Middle East and North Africa were considered to include the 22 members of the League of Arab States, Israel, Iran and Turkey. The current study includes 15 members of the League of Arab States (excluding: Algeria; Comoros; Libya; Mauritania; Morocco; Palestine; and Tunisia) Israel, Iran and Turkey and also includes Armenia, Eritrea and Ethiopia

5 Including mainland Turks; Turkish Cypriots; and Turkish Kurds

6 This figure excludes two cases of early marriage: one young woman from Syria who was married at 14; and one young woman from Iraq who fled her home country and was married in Turkey at 15 years old. It also excludes a referral of a 19 year old whose parents were threatening to force her into marriage in Lebanon; her father had recently gone to her college and told them that she had run away – this was not the case; they had beaten her and locked her in the house. She called the police but they said that there was nothing they could do: she called Refuge but chose not to enter into the service on this occasion

7 Women entering into Refuge's domestic violence services routinely provide their consent for Refuge staff to share casework information for quality assurance and analytical purposes. Inclusion of these women's cases was also felt to be justifiable for the purposes of the study: to understand more about an under-researched and under-represented group of women in order to improve the service response they receive

8 Hinari v. Hinari (1984) 4 FLR 232 CA

9 Suggesting that 'child' and 'early' marriage constitutes forced marriage

10 The DCSF and the FMU are currently conducting a study which seeks to measure prevalence

11 Although the African Caribbean interviewees that Khanum (2008) spoke to 'quite categorically' stated that they did not have situations of forced marriages occurring in Luton

12 The study sample was not evenly balanced between women from the Middle East and North Africa since it was not possible to 'control' for the backgrounds of women accessing services during the research period

13 The religion of one woman was not disclosed to the service provider

14 Ashiana works specifically with women from South Asian, Turkish and Iranian backgrounds, although both of the support workers observed that there are fewer Iranian women coming through to their service and that this might be due to the fact that they no longer have a specialist Iranian worker

15 Another of the women Refuge is supporting who entered into an arranged marriage later discovered that her spouse was under 16 years of age

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