

CREATING A CLEAR PATHWAY FOR PRACTICE:

WORKING TOWARDS MORE EFFECTIVE RESPONSES
TO SURVIVORS OF FORCED MARRIAGE

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imkaan

RIGHTS of
WOMEN
helping women through the law

Contents

Executive Summary

| | |
|--|---|
| Sector engagement | 1 |
| Challenges and barriers | 1 |
| The need for continuous learning and development | 3 |
| Gaps in a robust organisational response | 3 |
| Evidence of promising practice | 4 |
| Access to specialist legal advice and information | 4 |
| Lack of work in schools and other educational institutions | 4 |

| | |
|-------------------------------|----------|
| Acknowledgements | 5 |
|-------------------------------|----------|

Full Report

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 6 |
| Format of the day | 7 |
| Approach to evaluation | 7 |
| Limitations | 7 |
| Sector engagement | 8 |
| Numbers of professionals who have been trained on forced marriage | 10 |
| Number of professionals who use the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) multi-agency guidance | 10 |
| Challenges and barriers to responding | 11 |

Appendix

| | |
|------------------|----|
| Appendix 1 | 24 |
| Appendix 2 | 26 |
| Appendix 3 | 27 |

Executive Summary

This report documents the findings of a series of events held in Cardiff, London, Manchester and Sheffield by Imkaan and Rights of Women to reflect on local and regional responses to forced marriage in 2015. This project follows our previous analysis of legal and support responses to forced marriage reported in “This is not my destiny”. Reflecting on responses to forced marriage in England and Wales (Imkaan and Rights of Women 2014).

Our key learnings from these events were as follows:-

Sector engagement

The events attracted a range of agencies across different sectors. The types of agencies most likely to attend included violence against women and girls (VAWG) organisations and refuge providers, both mainstream and BME-led (n=20; 19 %), representatives from the criminal justice system (CJS) (n=15 at 14%) and local authorities (n=14 at 13%).

Overall, there were lower rates of attendance from statutory health services and a notable absence of the education sector across all of the events. The lack of educational input, aside from an Ambassadors’ network of teachers in London, was further highlighted in the workshop feedback where a number of participants identified the important role of schools and other educational institutions in crisis-based interventions, early intervention, and prevention.

Challenges and barriers

a) Internal:

Internal organisational factors emerged in relation to development and internal management of work on forced marriage, e.g. managing priorities and workload; lack of critical reflection and supervision; failure to locate responsibility for the work with a senior enough manager or lead. Gaps in and lack of consistent partnership working were also identified as a barrier to good practice.

b) Knowledge:

Access to practice-based knowledge to improve current responses was raised. For example, some participants admitted not knowing what to ask victim/survivors, whom to refer them to, feeling unclear about the specific roles and responsibilities of different agencies, and to having a lack of trained staff. A lack of clarity around what ‘consent’ means in the context of forced marriage was also flagged up as an area where professionals would benefit from further advice or support.

c) Interaction with women and girls:

Organisational contact with women can still too often result in poor and inconsistent treatment of women and girls, with a number of organisations raising concerns about racism, discrimination, questioning the authenticity of young women’s accounts and experiences .

d) Funding and resources:

There were specific concerns about the lack of investment in and availability of frontline specialist support services across the country to address both the short and longer-term needs of women and girls, e.g. refuge provision, outreach, advocacy

and support with access to housing and education.

e) Under-use of current criminal offences:

There were a number of concerns about the under-utilisation of the range of potential existing criminal offences, such as offences under the Protection of Harassment Act 1997. This was linked to a concern that whilst forced marriage is recognised as part of a continuum of violence against women and girls which covers a range of existing criminal offences this did not always result in action being taken by the police. This is a well-known problem for the police dealing with calls or reports of domestic violence. In addition to the new criminal offences there are a range of other offences often committed in forcing someone to marry. Participants raised concerns about the complexity of the new legislation, and the evidential difficulties for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in securing a conviction, an adverse consequence of this being that some parents felt more confident about coercing women into marriage, without the fear of punishment.

f) Deterrence in reporting due to the new criminal offences on forced marriage:

Police officers and BME women's organisations shared their concerns about some women 'going off the radar', following initial contact with the Police. It was raised that in situations where the police had (correctly) advised women about potential prosecution of parents via the new criminal offence¹ (prosecutions which could possibly proceed without her consent), women and girls had disengaged with the police officer providing

¹ See Rights of Women website for full details about the criminal offence: <http://rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-information/family-law/forced-marriage-law/#The%20criminal%20offence%20of%20forced%20marriage>

support. This was often as a consequence of women's fears about the potential repercussions and feelings of conflict that inevitably arise in connection with the prosecution of close and loved family members. This highlights a serious issue around the nature of reporting and the negative repercussions of criminalisation which requires urgent consideration, as it can result in vulnerable women not accessing appropriate support and returning to situations of violence.

g) Cultural assumptions/stereotypes:

A number of participants described 'culture' as a challenge in their practice when thinking about the barriers to responding to forced marriage. Whilst there were some encouraging discussions to illustrate that survivors do not necessarily fall into any 'typical community' there is an on-going tendency to frame forced marriage as a problem of 'culture', and as a phenomenon which only impacts on particular Black and minority ethnic groups, i.e. specific groups within South Asian communities which can and does lead to racist/discriminatory practice. Whilst forced marriage can have a disproportionate impact on some groups, forced marriage is more appropriately placed and dealt with by placing it on the continuum of VAWG, which highlights the interconnections with other forms of abuse that are likely to co-exist in the same family environment. In this way, professionals would be more alert to potential vulnerabilities and support needs of women and girls. A number also felt that preconceived stereotypes about 'culture' and 'community' also prevent the development of wider, more effective and inclusive strategies of community engagement.

h) Organisational culture and values:

References were also made about the negative impact of the culture and values of some organisations, which can operate in ways that are contrary to what women and girls want or indeed view as justice. These factors can present barriers to women engaging with support services e.g. policing priorities versus victim/survivor expectations.

The need for continuous learning and development

94% stated that the events were highly relevant to their practice and found the space useful for accessing research and promising practice on how to respond, information on the roles of different agencies as well as opportunities for networking with other agencies across the sector. However, a significant number of professionals were participating as ‘learners’ rather than practitioners and policymakers with prior experience of working on forced marriage, and the event feedback suggests that a number of professionals still only have basic levels of awareness and knowledge on how to respond to forced marriage, with a significant number recognising that more work is required individually and organisationally to improve local responses.

The need for stronger co-ordinated responses in local areas was reinforced by the fact that whilst 67% stated they had already received training on forced marriage very few of these were accredited courses delivered by forced marriage experts from specialist organisations which also form part of on-going and structured professional

development opportunities. Furthermore, only 35% of participants (excluding Wales) had or currently used the FMU’s multi-agency statutory guidance² which is surprising given that it has existed for a number of years and should at a minimum, be used as a basic foundation for developing more holistic local, integrated cross-sector responses to guide the work on forced marriage.

Gaps in a robust organisational response

Overall, awareness, confidence, understanding and practice appear to be inconsistent in the geographical areas where the events took place and some of the barriers professionals described could increase the vulnerability of women and girls in the absence of internal agency measures that prioritise forced marriage. A significant number of participants wanted support to develop their practice in relation to needs-assessment, referral and effective methods for supporting victim/survivors, as well as how to frame sector specific responses, e.g. child protection and health. Gaps in effective multi-agency working also reflect some underlying concerns which centred on professionals not utilising existing tools, such as the statutory guidance, training and research which would assist in the development of structured multi-agency responses.

² Forced Marriage Unit (June 2014). The Right to Choose: Multi-agency statutory guidance for dealing with forced marriage.

Evidence of promising practice

Whilst it was not within the scope of this evaluation to carry out a detailed assessment of regional responses, the event clearly highlighted that where participants made a personal and political commitment to addressing forced marriage, regardless of which sector they worked in, examples of promising practice were apparent in these regions. For example, collaboration between a legal practitioner, the local safeguarding team and a BME organisation that specialises in supporting young women with information about their rights, advocacy, and life-skills support, has enabled a greater number of young women to come forward. Many have also applied for Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPOs). Further work in this area would provide a useful tool for cascading and sharing learning across the sector.

Access to specialist legal advice and information

In general, there is a lack of legal specialists with specific expertise and knowledge of forced marriage, which meant that victim/survivors had fewer opportunities to acquire independent advice and information about their legal rights and options. A secondary factor that caused concern was the absence of and need for additional support, which would assist professionals to apply for FMPOs or explore other legal options with victim/survivors. Further training to support professionals with specific areas of law was also highlighted including FMPOs, (76%); other protective injunctions (non-molestation orders and occupation orders) (65%); criminal offence of forced marriage (63%); immigration law (59%); and child abduction (47%).

Lack of work in schools and other educational institutions

The lack of educational input (apart from representation from a forced marriage Ambassadors Network of teachers in London) was noted by participants themselves who raised the need for more consistent responses from the education sector. This is significant concern, since schools and other educational institutions have an important role in crisis-based interventions, early intervention and prevention work. It is essential that schools play a more proactive role in safeguarding the wellbeing of their students and points to the need for the FMU to host a specific meeting with the Education Minister, OFSTED and education providers (independent, statutory, academies and further education colleges) who currently do offer specialist support and education to consider strategies for improvement. For example, school responses to forced marriage should be built into inspection processes.

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Introduction

“This is not my destiny”. Reflecting on responses to forced marriage in England and Wales (Imkaan and Rights of Women 2014) published last year, alongside an accessible legal guide for victim/survivors by Imkaan and Rights of Women, clearly identified the need for greater knowledge and understanding of forced marriage and improvements to the responses of various agencies. In particular, the workshops held with survivors and practitioners highlighted poor and/or inconsistent practice among some statutory agencies as not only problematic in terms of women’s confidence in existing system(s), but as placing vulnerable girls and women at risk. It was also clear that the services which victims currently rely on the most – specialist black and minority ethnic (BME) women’s organisations – are the least valued and resourced despite forced marriage continuing to be at the forefront of national public policy on violence against women and girls (VAWG). Women’s narratives also reinforced the importance of locating forced marriage within a wider analysis of gender and violence and the importance of pursuing multiple strategies for supporting potential victim/survivors instead of the current emphasis on criminal justice solutions.

The popularity of last year’s events with statutory and voluntary sector organisations provided further evidence of the value of continued dialogue and opportunities for different agencies across the sector to come together to share ideas, practice and solutions in responding to forced marriage.

A further four events were held in Cardiff, London, Manchester and Sheffield in order to:

- increase awareness and understanding of forced marriage, its context and intersection with other forms of violence and discrimination against women as well as the legal rights and remedies available to survivors
- support practitioners to develop and deliver more appropriate and effective responses to forced marriage within their communities
- target statutory services including health, education and police as well as community based organisations and provide a timely opportunity to raise awareness of the recent criminalisation of forced marriage as well as the civil law remedies available to survivors and the revised statutory guidance
- provide a space for improving local collaborative partnerships between statutory and voluntary and community sectors

Format of the day

The format for the events included Imkaan and Rights of Women sharing the key findings from “This is not my Destiny”, a presentation from the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) providing a national context, followed by a panel discussions on the implementation of legal remedies and local responses with representatives from the FMU, BME women’s specialist organisations, family law solicitors and barristers, and police and crime commissioners for South Wales, South Yorkshire and Manchester. In the afternoon participants attended workshops with legal experts and BME women’s specialist organisations to allow for more detailed discussions with participants on reflecting on legal remedies to tackle forced marriage and responding to survivors of forced marriage. These discussions allowed participants to consider current barriers, challenges and opportunities for developing their policy and practice responses.

Approach to evaluation

This summary report is based on the findings of the evaluation from these events, which was designed to capture the following:-

- the barriers and issues that are arising for professionals in their interaction with women and girls affected by forced marriage and to measure the extent to which the events have influenced future practice including the development of multi-agency responses
- the themes and differences that are emerging in practice and provision in the response to

forced marriage across different sectors, for example health, education, criminal justice

The process of evaluation involved a series of participatory exercises during the events and a questionnaire at the end of each event, consisting of a series of open and closed questions. The exercises and forms were designed to capture the impact of the events on the knowledge and awareness of forced marriage, challenges and barriers, opportunities for development and appropriate responses as well as identifying gaps in knowledge and requirements for further support.

A follow-up survey was sent to approximately 50 participants to examine whether there had been any shifts in thinking and practice following the events. A small number of participants responded to the survey (n= 14; 32.6%) and this was supplemented by a small number of one-to-one interviews (n=7).

Limitations

The report is based on an analysis of the findings across four regional events: Cardiff, London, Manchester and Sheffield. The first event which took place in Cardiff, flagged up a number of areas around the existing levels of knowledge about forced marriage as well as access to opportunities for learning and development. Therefore, questions were amended to gather information on levels and types of training accessed and the extent to which professionals had or are currently using the FMU forced marriage statutory guidelines as a basis for

furthering their work on this issue. Consequently, the responses to these questions do not fully reflect those attending all of the events. However, they still point to significant gaps in knowledge and practice, which would merit further exploration. In particular, it would be useful to consider in more detail the specific barriers and enablers to developing strong multi-agency approaches to forced marriage within the wider context of VAWG. A small number of responses were received in relation to the follow-up survey, which was designed to capture any particular shifts in thinking and practice following the events. More time would be required overall to engage with professionals and map those changes fully which was not possible within the timeframe of this project.

Sector engagement

A total of 131 people attended all four events, and 86 evaluation forms were completed.

Participants were from different sectors, and for the purpose of the report, were grouped into 10 categories:-

- academic (higher education institutions)
- CJS (criminal justice system) which included Police Commissioners and representatives from the Independent Police Commission, and the probation service
- legal practitioners (solicitors, barristers and paralegals)
- statutory health services
- housing and housing support services, including providers
- local authorities - although we do not know how many staff attended from the different sections of the local authority, we are aware that there was representation, at least, from safeguarding adults and children, domestic violence team, and social services
- specialist VAWG services including refuges (both generic VAWG and BME VAWG services)
- women's organisations
- non-statutory children and young people services
- miscellaneous - a range of organisations including teachers who were part of the forced marriage Ambassadors' Network; a support service for people with learning disabilities; a service for people with drugs and alcohol issues based in a prison; a community regeneration charity, as well as representation from a Regeneration Board; Victim Support; the Department of Work and Pensions; a national relationship counselling service; an integrated community service for survivors of domestic violence and substance misuse; a European funding office; along with a couple of organisations supporting refugees and asylum seekers.

The breakdown of the sectors of participants for the individual events has been provided in Appendix 1.

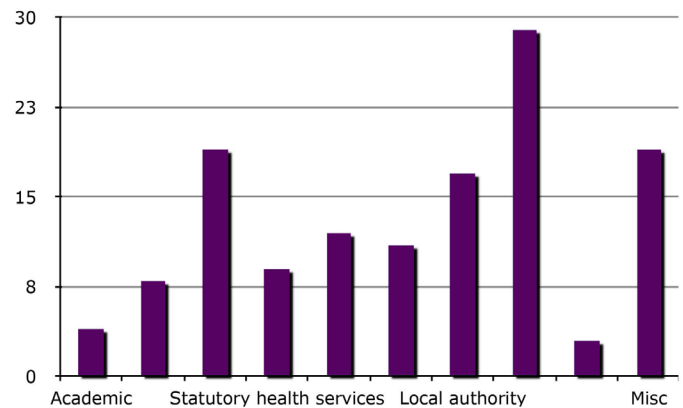
When looking at sector attendance the highest number of participants was from:

- Specialist VAWG services including refuges (generic VAWG and BME VAWG services) consistently formed one of the top three highest number of attendees from sectors represented at the events (n=29 at 22 per cent).
- The next highest number of participants included representatives from the CJS (n=19 at 14.5 per cent), which was second equal with organisations that fell into the miscellaneous sector, while the third highest number of professionals attending the events was from the local authority (n=17 at 13 per cent).

Overall, when viewing the sector attendance figures, participation from the following sectors was consistently low or absent:

- statutory health services (apart from the Sheffield event) (total n=9 at seven per cent)
- education professionals, in terms of the formal educational structures, was missing from every single event. The absence of adequate representation of educational institutions was reinforced by participants themselves who raised the need for more consistent responses from the education sector during a number of the panel discussions and workshops.

Sector attendance



A table of the total number of attendees from each of the 10 sectors can be found in Appendix 2 of this report.

Numbers of professionals who have been trained on forced marriage

Participants at the London, Manchester and Sheffield events were asked whether they had ever received any previous training on forced marriage*. The answers collated can be seen in the table below:

67% of participants stated they had received previous training on forced marriage

| Region | % trained (no of responses) |
|------------|-----------------------------|
| London | 52% (n= 25/36) |
| Manchester | 61% (n=23/33) |
| Sheffield | 50% (n=22/35) |

*This question was not asked at the Wales event.

Comments were also collected about the nature of training the participants had received, where the training took place and the length of training.

- Where attendees ticked the 'yes' box to state that they have attended training on forced marriage, feedback varied, with much of the training attended being one-day events, and with very few being delivered by specialist organisations with expertise on the issues. Some of the training was non-specific, with the forced marriage element forming a part of other training, for example DAPA training.
- Very few of the courses attended by participants were accredited and a number considered attending conferences, briefing sessions, and seminars as training. Other examples cited as training included 'personal research and collaboration with agencies', while another as 'numerous inputs from professionals and victims'; 'a half-day training on honour -based violence', which was attended five years ago; training as a part of other events, however not specifically on forced marriage.

Based on the responses received overall, this highlights concerns about what the participants considered to be training, the quality of training received, and the level of up-to-date knowledge they were able to acquire as part their development. Whilst it is not within the scope of this project to identify the specific organisational barriers and enablers that prevent professionals from not having access to on-going specialist, accredited training which meet specific professional standards, the responses provided do however flag up a significant issue related to professional development in particular, what is deemed as an appropriate knowledge base for responding to the issues.

Number of professionals who use the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) multi-agency guidance

Participants were asked whether they had ever used or applied the forced marriage statutory guidance in their day-to-day work.

Only 35% of participant's had used and/or currently use the guidelines

Although, the use of the FMU guidance on their own does not provide an adequate context within which to fully assess the nature of those responses or whether agency responses are sufficiently robust and inclusive in approach, nonetheless, the application of guidance in policy and/or practice appears to be significantly small. Where participants chose to elaborate on their answers, this indicated that some had not considered looking at the guidance, were planning to, rarely used them or did not consider them relevant to their specific role, i.e. as policymaker. The under-utilisation of the guidance is surprising given that it has existed for a number of years and provides a useful reference

point for organisations to further develop local responses. Whilst it was not within the scope of this project to explore the specific reasons as to why the guidelines were being under-utilised, as highlighted earlier, a number of those attending the events had not received adequate levels of training and development. Therefore it is likely that this is one of the factors that may influence the extent to which professionals are both confident and proactive in developing local responses.

| London | Manchester | Sheffield |
|------------|------------|-----------|
| 40% (n=10) | 48% (n=11) | 41% (n=9) |

*This question was not asked at the Wales event

Challenges and barriers to responding

Participants at the four events discussed the challenges and barriers they experienced in their work on forced marriage. The following issues were the most frequently raised across the events:-

1. Organisational: internal and wider barriers

- Internal issues included organisational factors such as the pressures of meeting funding targets; managing priorities; and lack of critical reflection or supervision.
- Some participants also made reference to the problematic responses of some agencies as an on-going concern. For example, prejudices and misconceptions about young people or a particular BME community; fears of racism and about the response of the police or local authorities; fear of not being believed. The issue of no recourse to public funds was identified as a specific barrier in three out of four of the events; this included references to an over-reliance on voluntary sector agencies to provide support to women, in the absence of support

from other statutory or mainstream voluntary sector agencies.

2. Organisational: partnership

- Education system issues included the discrepancies or inadequacies in the education system in term of addressing forced marriage. Also inconsistency in practice by professionals in education was highlighted as a challenge.
- A range of issues were raised in relation to partnership working, other than the lack of partnership working, this included poor communication and a lack of shared knowledge. Participants emphasised the fact that forced marriage is not a single event but a 'long journey' which requires a range of agencies working effectively together to provide advice and support.
- Sometimes BME specialist women's organisations can encounter reluctance from statutory partners to invest in, develop and deliver programmes of training and community engagement work.

“

Forced marriage is a 'long journey' which requires a range of agencies working effectively together to provide advice and support.

3. Organisational: knowledge and practice

- While gaps in personal knowledge included not knowing the processes linked to referral and needs assessment, a number of participants identified gaps in knowledge. These included: not knowing what questions to ask, inconsistent knowledge and understanding of forced marriage and not knowing what best practice is. People also noted a lack of knowledge of the available options for support or pathway(s)

of assistance, and/or lack of knowledge about who to contact, as well as feeling unclear about the specific roles and responsibilities of agencies. A lack of will to have training and education, as well as a lack of staff training or understanding, also emerged as a factor.

- The understanding of consent and a victim/survivor's experience of coercion was an area identified as a challenge which required improved responses in the education sector. One of our speakers posed the question "How do we think about consent to marriage? Is it an enthusiastic yes? What are the consequences of no?" Practitioners need to consider what work needs to be done to improve their own understanding of consent and the dynamics of the abuse used in forced marriage in order to identify how to work with both victim/survivors and perpetrators.

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How do we think about consent to marriage?

Is it an enthusiastic yes?

What are the consequences of no?

4. Organisational: funding and resources

- Various funding issues emerged in discussion which included gaps in current service provision, for example, the lack of specialist BME women's services, the limited availability of refuges, and a lack of outreach workers and after care provision. There was also a suggestion that 'competing' issues, such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM) and child sexual exploitation (CSE), had resource implications which would then have repercussions on the prioritisation of forced marriage work. Identifying these forms of violence together as part of a continuum of VAWG would prevent this.
- Inadequate provision of and investment in quality interpreting services to support victim/

survivors was also identified as a key gap.

5. Barriers experienced by women and girls

- Many participants also made reference to barriers that are internal to women and girls, as well as to the wider communities. For example, there were concerns about the repercussions of disclosure from family members and some had also observed disengagement from specialist services since the introduction of the criminal offence of forced marriage.
- A number of barriers experienced by young people were identified, including access to support within the education system and/or a lack of awareness of their rights and options.
- A lack of investment in appropriate responses for learning disabled victim/survivors was also highlighted.

6. Legal responses

- A concern that forced marriage is only relevant to policing was raised. Agencies need to move away from seeing the legal remedies as the only solution and instead view legal responses as only one part, if at all, of a necessary response.
- Forced marriage is part of a continuum of violence and this must translate within a legal context. Legal advocates need to look at forced marriage within a range of potential legal remedies, both civil and criminal.
- However, there were a number of concerns about the under-utilisation of the range of potential existing criminal offences, such as offences under the Protection of Harassment Act 1997. This was linked to a concern that whilst forced marriage is recognised as part of a continuum of violence against women and girls which covers a range of existing criminal offences this did not always result in action being taken by the police. This is a well-known

problem for the police dealing with calls or reports of domestic violence. In addition to the new criminal offences there are a range of other offences often committed in forcing someone to marry. Participants raised concerns about the complexity of the new legislation, and the evidential difficulties for the CPS in securing a conviction, an adverse consequence of this was that some parents felt more confident about coercing women and girls into marriage, without the fear of punishment.

- Police officers and BME women's organisations shared their concerns about some women 'going off the radar', following initial contact with the Police. It was identified that in situations where the police had (correctly) advised women about potential prosecution of parents via the new criminal offence³ (prosecutions which could possibly proceed without her consent), women and girls had disengaged with the police officer providing support. This was often explained in the context of women's fears about the potential family repercussions and feelings of conflict that inevitably arise in connection with the prosecution of close and loved family members. This highlights a serious issue around the nature of reporting and the negative repercussions of criminalisation, which requires urgent consideration, as it can result in vulnerable women not accessing appropriate support and returning to situations of violence.
- A lack of specialist family solicitors with an awareness, understanding and commitment was identified. Participants in Cardiff were not able to identify any specialist solicitor working in the area therefore a number of specialist BME women's services had no option but to refer women from Wales to a specialist in London.

7. Cultural assumptions/stereotypes:

A number of participants described 'culture' as a challenge in their practice when thinking about the barriers to responding to forced marriage. Whilst there were some encouraging discussions to illustrate that survivors do not necessarily fall into any 'typical community' there is an on-going tendency to frame forced marriage as a problem of 'culture', and as a phenomenon which only impacts on particular Black and minority ethnic groups, i.e. specific groups within South Asian communities which can and does lead to racist/discriminatory practice. Yet, the linking of forced marriage to fixed ideas about "culture" specifically in relation to BME communities also contradicts nationally available

There's no typical 'community'

data. For example the FMU identified over 88 countries from which allegations of forced marriage have been raised. Some of the

discussion centred on the on-going work required by professionals to reframe preconceptions about "culture" and "community".

Whilst forced marriage can have a disproportionate impact on some groups, forced marriage is more appropriately placed and dealt with by placing it on the continuum of VAWG, which highlights the interconnections with other forms of abuse that are likely to co-exist in the same family environment. In this way, professionals would be more alert to potential vulnerabilities and support needs of women and girls. A number also felt that preconceived stereotypes about 'culture' and 'community' also prevent the development of wider, more effective and inclusive strategies of community engagement.

8. Internal organisational 'cultures' and values:

Some of the discussions also revealed the different ways in which individuals relate to concepts of culture and the different ways in which 'culture'

³ See Rights of Women website for full details about the criminal offence: <http://rightsofwomen.org.uk/get-information/family-law/forced-marriage-law/#The%20criminal%20offence%20of%20forced%20marriage>

can be expressed. Organisational values can result in different expectations between survivors and agencies and some highlighted the negative impact of some organisational cultures and values, which can operate in ways that are contrary to what women and girls want or indeed view as justice. These factors can present barriers to women engaging with support services. For example, some participants referred to a clash between policing victim/survivors and the reality of victim/survivors' needs and perspectives.

9. Supporting more effective responses

Participants repeatedly noted that the events supported the expectations of professionals towards gaining in-depth and up to date knowledge and the legal context on forced marriage. The events provided an important opportunity for discussion and for an improved understanding of available services and guidance on promising practice, which in turn were the core reasons for why participants attended.

94% stated the event they attended was highly relevant to them
83% rated it highly enjoyable,
88% stated that the quality of speakers was high and
87% found the events well organised

Areas highlighted as useful to informing their practice included an insight into how professionals work together, having a better understanding of challenges and barriers that prevent disclosure from women and girls and using that to inform the development of safety-planning strategies with women and girls and having a better understanding of the range of available legal remedies, both civil and criminal.

Attendees stated, for example, that the event offered "more information and practical tools"; "improved... knowledge around legal options available", gave a "better understanding" so that participants were "more aware of services that can help."

They also stated:

"I am more aware of the issue as part of violence against women and girls. I have a greater understanding of why victims can be reluctant to come forward and/or 'escape.'

"The first response is crucial- ensure safety - don't see culture first - complicated when perpetrators are parents."

"Have more knowledge and now able to look from other perspectives but also understand the different ways each organisation may work"

The benefits of attending was emphasised through the follow-up survey and interviews after the events with the majority stating that the events provided opportunities for accessing research, including Rights of Women and Imkaan's work, and updates from the FMU, information about the roles of other agencies and sharing examples of promising practice, alongside opportunities to network with professionals working across different sectors, e.g. health was invaluable.

A number felt that it would help to inform and guide their work on forced marriage in the future.

"Examples of good practice in different parts of country, e.g. Newcastle."

"It highlighted particular research that I will follow up when I get a chance, for example the Gangoli research on children in reception classes."

"There were so many professionals from different disciplines; it was the first time I met someone working in the health sector."

"I learnt more about [Rights of Women] and Imkaan – work I hadn't been aware of before."

Some also provided examples of specific changes

to their practice. The following commissioner has integrated forced marriage within local policy discussions on domestic violence, which will include a discussion on the specific barriers experienced by women and girls.

“I’m a commissioner and work on policy, we have put FM on the agenda for the multi agency meeting (equivalent of the forum). We are also thinking about the impact of criminalisation and community.”

Whilst similar to many others, this health professional describes feeling more able to explain the various available options for support.

“The conference gave me a better understanding on how FMPOs and forced marriage affect people. Previously I didn’t really know what it means. Different organisations have different opinions. Clarified my understanding. Now if I did see someone facing this I could see there is a law, but that this isn’t the only option. Talk through different options and being able to find other people. I got ideas for my own event, and what needs to be addressed [within health].”

“Learning from the event will affect any training that we develop on these issues.”

10. Gaps in responses

However, it was clear that many participants had hoped to leave the conference with more in-depth knowledge on how to establish a clear route for developing their frontline responses, with more opportunities for interaction with specialist BME women's organisations as well as opportunities for hearing more from survivors. For example, when asked what they hoped to get out of their attendance at the event some participants said:-

- A “clear pathway for practice”, and “clear guidance about FMPOs to encourage and support local authority and community groups to use them. [With] related information and tips.”
- An understanding of “ways to assist and give information to victims of forced marriages, also to prevent them from taking place.”

Furthermore, the responses revealed other areas which participants flagged as either their own support needs or where there are gaps in current systems of support. A summary is provided below:

Legal

Improving and increasing the availability of independent experts on forced marriage who can provide courts with reports to support legal proceedings but who are also able to reflect on the issues objectively. This could include the development of an experts database for use by the courts.

Improving the expertise of legal professionals in the regions to increase the availability of specialist legal advice and representation.

Improving women's access to safe opportunities for acquiring independent, specialist advice on legal options and rights outside of criminal justice agencies.

Further guidance and practical support to professionals working within housing, health and social care on the use of FMPOs, the roles and responsibilities of agencies and other available

legal options including recent changes in the law.

Participants were also asked to identify specific areas of support they would require on legal areas (see Appendix 3 for table of responses for legal support). The top five requests for support include:

- Forced marriage protection orders [including a guide for others to take with them] (76%)
- Other protective injunctions (non-molestation orders and occupation orders) (65%)
- Criminal offence of forced marriage (63%)
- Immigration law (59%)
- Child abduction (47%)

“

“Get a better understanding of how FMPOs and legislation is being used.”

“I am an operational police lawyer and FMPOs are not a regular part of the work, however, I deal with officers who come into contact with parties involved in forced marriage and want a better understanding of the area to support officers and victims.”

“Some clear legal guidance about FMPOs to encourage/support local authority and community groups to use them, related information and tips.”

Leadership across all sectors

- Leadership across all sectors, most urgently in areas where responses are inconsistent across housing, education, health and social care.
- Ensuring that responses are not solely framed through criminal justice system interventions.

“

“Schools – consistent response, ensuring new teachers are trained on forced marriage.”

“Working within healthcare to push the issue of forced marriage further up the agenda so that it is given more exposure.”

“Need lead social workers in each dept. with expertise in this area.”

“More referrals need to come through from other sectors health, education.”

“This is not just a police issue, we need to think about effective partnership work.”

professional contexts, e.g. child protection, health.

- More investment in BME specialist women’s organisations that provide immediate support, outreach and after-care services.
- Access to training, information, practical advice and support to understand more about forced marriage and its specific impact, for example, learning disabled groups, Roma women and girls.
- More opportunities for networking, sharing knowledge, case studies and promising practice tailored to the work of different sectors

“

“Hear from the specialists what resources are available and increase knowledge.”

“Understanding referral pathways.”

“Procedures to report and support.”

“Knowledge to support women who may be potentially presenting themselves to my service as being at risk or being forced to marry.”

“Practical case studies and responding in a child protection context.”

“Hear from other organisations that we could signpost/ refer women who have been victims of DV to support.”

“There is a need for specialist services in areas where there is an FM issue.”

“Need for further help/aftercare.”

Access to specialist advice and support

- A better understanding of the specific issues and barriers that impact on victim/survivors including more opportunities to hear directly from survivors.
- Opportunities to learn more about the role and reach of specialist agencies and individuals working in this area and the available support options.
- More support to understand how to take action to support potential victim/survivors including pathways for assessment, referral or signposting and support in different

Research and evidence

Improved systems of monitoring on a local and national level.

Improve access to investment in research and evidence base to inform practitioner understanding.

“

“We need to fill gaps in terms of evidence and research, research as a way forward to work effectively to reduce and prevent.”

“Understand more about research on forced marriage.”

Community engagement

More investment in early intervention and prevention.

Developing broader strategies for the delivery of community engagement to reach affected groups across different equality strands and which are framed within the continuum of VAWG.

More investment in specialist BME organisations to deliver community engagement and training.

More community-based interventions and engagement work with parents as part of preventative strategies

“

“Improve community engagement.”

“Need information on how to work with parents.”

“We need to look for the gaps, which communities are we not reaching in prevention and provision? If we focus on forms of VAWG in silos (CSE, FM, HBV) who falls through the gaps?”

11. Commitments to on-going learning and development

In terms of implementing some of their learning at the event, the majority of the participants made various commitments as to how they intended to respond to forced marriage more effectively in the future. The key areas of future action identified as priority areas included:

Training and awareness-raising: A number of participants stated that they would share what they had learnt at the events to raise awareness within their individual teams and localities where they operate, in order to build the capacity of other team members. A small number mentioned the need to adapt some of the language in their training content following the conference. For some, developing their own understanding of the specific barriers experienced by victim/survivors of forced marriage was a key precursor to developing more responsive strategies. Some also reflected on their individual practice stating that they would seek to “challenge yourself on beliefs and pre-conceived ideas” and take responsibility for challenging and educating others on perceptions and stereotypes.

Partnership: A predominant action identified for future work involved researching the availability of local experts and specialist BME women’s organisations to develop more structured and collaborative ways of working and to further develop their own understanding of the issues and barriers experienced by victim/survivors of forced marriage. A number also pointed to the need for more focussed multi-agency work. For instance, in Manchester where partnership working was a significant theme, this ranged from the need to carry out multi-agency work to include the police and solicitors, to better sharing of information, understanding the variety of services, improving partnership working, to consulting more with voluntary sector specialists.

Organisational: A number stated that they would review current organisational policies and include

forced marriage as a specific priority or action to strengthen their local area response. For some, this involved securing additional funding to develop the work further within their individual organisations. For example, both a participant from South Wales Police and Swansea Council stated their intent of incorporating the issues raised into the strategic development plan. Some also wanted to improve current systems to “reflect communities better in organisational workforce.”

Systems for identifying cases and assessing need:

Some stated that following the conference they would proceed in their personal practice in a more informed way, for example taking into account safety planning at an early intervention stage, or applying heightened awareness of forced marriage when working with domestic violence. Others spoke about reviewing the questions that are asked during initial assessment and developing more robust mechanisms around signposting and referral to other agencies. For example, one participant stated that following the conference, she was able to give a quicker response to forced marriage, and now will be able to refer clients onto other agencies, as well as asking more detailed questions about the circumstances, to be able to identify cases of forced marriage.

12. Reflections and learning from the events

The need for continuous learning and development: The events were designed to create a space for interaction and shared or advanced levels of learning between different agencies and professionals. It became apparent that a number of professionals were participating at “learners” level

rather than as practitioners or policymakers with experience of working on forced marriage. This suggests that a number of professionals, despite statutory responsibilities, still have basic levels of awareness and knowledge about the issues and approaches to offering support and would benefit from on-going, structured opportunities for training and development. For instance, a legal advocate experienced in forced marriage cases made the following general observation from attending the London event,

“Generally forced marriage is high on the political agenda but there can still be a surprising lack of general awareness on what forced marriage means after all these years, which has positive and negative implications – for example not spotting the obvious signs or some women see professionals over-reacting and being authoritarian in their approach.” (Solicitor)

Overall it was apparent that the majority of participants found the events beneficial. It assisted them to interact with a range of organisations, build networks and alliances and most importantly consider barriers and solutions to addressing the needs of survivors. A significant number also reiterated that access to information that would enable them to consider the various legal and non-legal options for support was beneficial. The feedback from the events highlights the importance of providing further opportunities for agencies across different sectors to interact with each other, and also a need for more in-depth sessions, which are targeted and designed to address different and specific ways of working across different sectors, e.g. health, children and young people, legal.

.....
Suggestion for improving practice:
Professionals with a responsibility for addressing violence against women and girls within a policy or frontline role should have access to opportunities for training and development as part of their on-going professional development.
.....

Gaps in a robust organisational response:
Linked to a concern about gaps in knowledge was a concern about the low levels of referrals in some areas of the country which one respondent attributed to professionals not utilising existing tools – research, guidelines, training, and so on, to inform the development of organisational plans and policies or develop effective structures for multi-agency working. Whilst many requested more support to help professionals develop their practice in relation to needs-assessment, referral and effective methods for supporting victim/survivors. Overall, awareness, confidence, understanding and practice appear to be inconsistent in the areas where the events took place.

“Only one had experience of FMPOs, and this means that young people (YP) are done a disservice. There needs to be confidence in agencies. Unless YP know their rights, the info needs to be on rights for them to come forward” (BME VAWG specialist)

From a health care perspective, we haven’t particularly grasped the fact that we need to have clear leadership on developing training and providing this and educational

facilitates to student doctors and nurses as well as qualified staff within sexual health and HIV. We do ask about sexual violence, but this doesn’t necessarily cover forced marriage. We need to be trained ourselves to be sensitive and for needs to be explicitly incorporated into the training and education of medical students. (Healthcare professional)

“The police have done a session and the local authority has four sentences about it in their training. Apart from BME orgs who do raise FM, where are the other people’s responses?” (BME VAWG specialist)

.....
Suggestion for improved practice: **Agencies should at a minimum be using the FMU guidance as a basic foundation for developing more holistic local, integrated cross-sector responses both at a policy and practice levels to guide policy from commissioning to service delivery as well as monitoring and evaluation within a wider VAWG framework.**

Suggestion for improved practice: It is essential that professionals (health and social care, education, CJS, mainstream voluntary sector) have a clear understanding of what constitutes consent in cases of forced marriage and where victim/survivors experience multiple forms of violence. Agencies should develop stronger partnerships with specialist BME women’s organisations, where these partnerships do not exist to commission appropriate accredited training and development services.
.....

Emphasis on ‘cultural explanations’ of forced marriage: Whilst a number of participants commented that they found it beneficial to think about forced marriage as part of a wider continuum of violence against women rather than solely as a problem of “culture”, the dialogue also revealed there is still a tendency amongst some professionals to rely on cultural explanations rather than think about forced marriage as part of a wider continuum of violence against women and girls. This can fuel assumptions and prejudices about specific communities and creates barriers to responding appropriately. This was reinforced by a number of participants who described “culture” as a challenge in their practice when thinking about barriers to responding:

“Does [the use of] culture mask abuse?”

“And also cutting through insecurities and lack of confidence on challenging cultural issues.”
(Commissioner)

.....

Suggestion for improved practice: **BME women’s and girls’ experiences of forced marriage should be located within the broader range of different forms of violence they are likely to be experiencing in order for organisations to develop fully integrated responses. This would also support organisations to move away from siloed single-issue responses, which create a hierarchy of need and response. There is a need to consider whether existing pathways of accessing support are adequate and resourced.**

Suggestion for improved practice: **It is**

essential that training and development programmes for staff are both prioritised but also developed by specialists who have competence and experience of developing accredited programmes or tools that are framed in the context of gender, gender inequality and violence.

.....

Evidence of promising practice: Alongside concerns about current gaps in knowledge and practice, the events also revealed some pockets of promising practice or approaches in specific regions. This was more apparent in areas where individuals expressed a strong personal and political commitment to addressing forced marriage and where agencies had established good relationships with a specialist BME women’s organisation and/or practitioner. The events illustrated that there are committed individuals across different statutory or voluntary agencies including police, social workers, and legal professionals working alongside specialist BME women’s services. For example, the collaboration between a legal professional, the local safeguarding team and a BME organisation that specialises in supporting young women with information about their rights, advocacy and life-skills support, has helped a greater number of young women to come forward, many of whom have also taken out FMPOs.

“The political will didn’t exist before but we continued to raise it at meetings through a good link in the safeguarding team and working with a very good solicitor. We now have training, we provide young-person centred advocacy and practical support with housing, education and we also go into schools.” (BME voluntary sector organisation/

young women)

Whilst another health professional talks about:

“Forming forced marriage research network” and co-ordinating a “workshop next month aimed at multi-professional within the health care sector,” further stating that efforts will be made to incorporate forced marriage into future medical training for students at UCL.

Whilst a BME VAWG specialist discusses her work in a local school:

“We did work (Apna Haq and Ashiana) with Imkaan and the peer education project three years back. We did awareness raising in schools in Rotherham, and did work on DV and FM. We have been continuing this work at a school, and the school is delivering DV and FM work itself, and this will be on going in the near future. It’s only one school at the moment, but there are 20 children and eight classes.” (BME VAWG specialist)

The examples provided during the events reinforce the need to further explore and collate evidence on promising practice, which in turn would provide a useful tool for shared learning across different sectors.

.....
Suggestion for improved practice:
Organisations should carry out more effective monitoring and on a routine basis the impact of local interventions and approaches to assess the impact on women and girls and find ways of promoting examples of ‘promising practice’ to other professionals in the sector as an opportunity for enhanced learning.
.....

Access to specialist legal advice and information:

Access to legal advocates with a specific expertise and knowledge of forced marriage was identified as problematic at some of the events, notably in Cardiff, where the lack of family solicitors with experience and knowledge of forced marriage was identified as an area for improvement. Opportunities for survivors to access independent advice in relation to their legal rights and options is also inconsistent. The inconsistent opportunities created further problems, given the complexities that many victim/survivors experience when interfacing with the CJS, e.g. safety, concerns about reporting parents, distrust and poor experiences of CJS agencies, policing priorities against survivor priorities around justice. The absence and need for further guidance and support or tools to assist practitioners with the use of FMPOs and other legal avenues for intervention was also a strong theme.

“We need to do something to increase awareness, understanding, commitment of family solicitors.”

.....
Suggestion for improved practice:
Professional development, both in terms of the law and of the issue of forced marriage, amongst both solicitors and barristers and the judiciary is necessary to improve the practice of legal professionals and ensure that survivors receive an appropriate response to their legal and other needs.
.....

Lack of work in schools and other educational institutions: The lack of educational input, apart from representation from a forced marriage Ambassadors Network of teachers in London, was noted by participants themselves, during a number of the panel discussions and workshops, who raised the need for more consistent responses from the education sector. This is a concern of great significance, since schools and other educational institutions have an important role in crisis-based interventions, early intervention and prevention work. It is essential that schools play a more proactive role in safeguarding the wellbeing of their students. The lack of engagement from the education sector points to the need to improve whole-school approaches to addressing forced marriage with the context of VAWG.

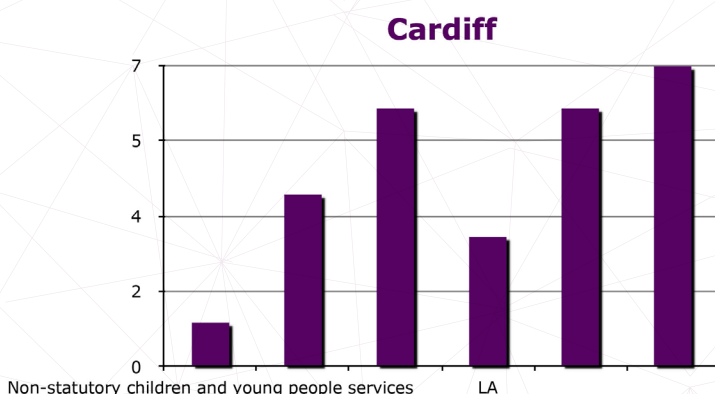
.....
Suggestion for improved practice: The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) should host a specific meeting with the Education Minister, OFSTED and education providers (independent, statutory, academies and further education colleges) who currently do offer specialist support/education to consider strategies for improvement. For example, school responses to forced marriage should be built into inspection processes.
.....

Appendix 1

The breakdown of the sectors from which attendees were from, has been provided below for all of the events. As the graphs from the events show, when we look at which sector the highest number of participants were from, VAWG (violence against women and girls) support services and refuges consistently formed one of the top three highest number of attendees from sectors represented at the events. Further, a higher number of attendees were from generic VAWG services at the Manchester (n=5) and Sheffield (n=4) events.

Overall, when viewing the sector attendance figures, participation from the following sectors was consistently low: health (apart from the Sheffield event); local authority (apart from London).

Cardiff event (18/3/15) – 27 participants



Overall, when viewing the sector attendance figures, participation from the following sectors was consistently low: health (apart from the Sheffield event); local authority (apart from London).

The highest number of participants who attended the Cardiff event was from VAWG services – with a higher number from BME VAWG services (5)

compared to generic service providers (2). The second highest number of attendees was from non-statutory housing support services and from miscellaneous organisations that did not fit into existing sector categories, with six attendees respectively representing both sectors, while the third highest number of participants worked within the criminal justice system. Organisations that fell into the category that constituted the miscellaneous sector included a European funding office, Equalities and Human Rights Commission, Fire and Rescue service, Victim Support, plus refugee and asylum support organisations.

London event (15/4/15) – 36 participants



A greater number of sectors was represented at the London event, with the highest number of participants from the following three sectors: the local authority (n=8), followed by attendees from the VAWG support services sector (n=7) with greater representation from BME services. This was followed by presentation from various organisations in the miscellaneous category (n=5), which included the FM Ambassadors Network, and organisations delivering services to people with learning disabilities and those with drugs and alcohol issues, as well as a mainstream advice and support service.

Manchester event (27/4/15) – 33 participants

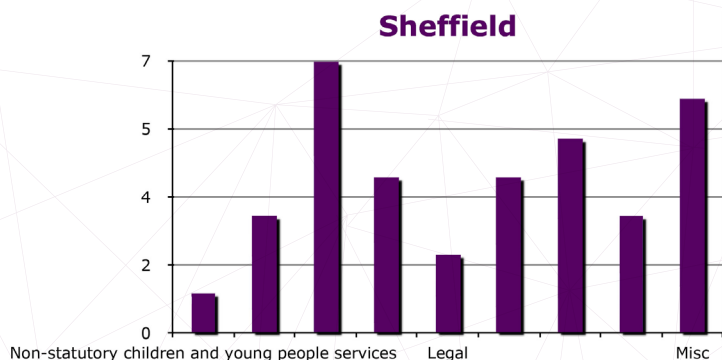
As can be seen from the graph below, the highest number of participants who attended



the Manchester event were from the VAWG support services – both BME and mainstream organisations (n=8), followed by those in the criminal justice system (7), with a slightly lower number in representation from the law category (n=6) who attended the event. Representation from the criminal justice system included police officers, a police and crime commissioner, and an Independent Police Complaints Commissioner, while representation from the law category included practitioners from private practice as well as from the voluntary sector.

Sheffield event (30/4/15) - 35 participants

At the Sheffield event, the highest number of participants attending the event from the sectors was from the statutory health services, followed



by various organisations within the miscellaneous category, which included representation from two regeneration organisations and the DWP. The third highest number of professionals attending the event was from the VAWG support services category.

Appendix 2

Organisations attending the events by sector

Organisations attending the events by sector

| | Sector | Total no of participants (percentage) |
|----|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1 | VAWG support services | 29/ 131 (22%) |
| 2 | CJS | 19/ 131 (14.5%) |
| 3 | Miscellaneous | 19/ 131 (14.5%) |
| 4 | Local authority | 17/ 131 (13%) |
| 5 | Non-statutory housing support services, including providers | 12/ 131 (9%) |
| 6 | Legal | 11/ 131 (8%) |
| 7 | Statutory health services | 9/ 131 (7%) |
| 8 | Non-statutory children and young people services | 8/ 131 (6%) |
| 9 | Academic | 4/ 131 (3.1%) |
| 10 | Women's organisations | 3/ 131 (2.1%) |

Appendix 3

Table of responses for legal support

| | Total number/ total number of returned forms (percentage) |
|---|---|
| Forced marriage protection orders [including a guide for others to take with them] | 65/ 86 (75.6%) |
| Other protective injunctions (non-molestation orders and occupation orders) | 56/ 86 (65%) |
| Criminal offence of forced marriage | 54/ 86 (62.8%) |
| Immigration law | 51/ 86 (59%) |
| Child abduction | 40 / 86 (46.5%) |
| Divorce | 33/ 86 (38%) |
| Children (Contact/Residence) | 35/ 86 (40.7%) |
| Children (Social services intervention) | 38/ 86 (44%) |
| Parental rights | 37/ 86 (43%) |
| Divorce and annulment | 32/ 86 (37%) |
| Finances on ending a marriage | 37 / 86 (43%) |
| Benefits | 39/ 86 (45%) |
| Housing | 37/ 86 (43%) |

Legal advice and information that would be useful when assisting survivors of FM



imkaan

RIGHTS of
WOMEN
helping women through the law