

OUR GIRLS

True Stories About Forced Marriage

Please watch **Our Girl**
a short film about Forced Marriage
Winner of the United Nation 2015 Gold DPI Award
<https://vimeo.com/10088525>

Art by

Tal Rachmin

Words by

Polly Harrar (The Sharan Project)

Asma Ashraf (UCL)

Sara Browne, Fedra Mardani (Ikwro)

Talia Randall (Animage Films)

Created and devised by

Ruth Beni

Contents

5

Forward
by Polly Harrar

6

About the Book
by Ruth Beni

7

Prisoner

21

**Just For Being
a Girl**

29

My Graduation

37

My Life, My Choice

44

**Forced Marriage and
Health**
by Asma Ashraf

54

**Thanks
& Acknowledgments**

55

Info and Addresses

Forward **By Polly Harrar**

Founder, The Sharan Project

I am honoured to be part of this innovative approach in tackling forced marriages. **'Our Girls'** is a valuable resource for so many audiences to better understand the impact and effect harmful practices has on victims of abuse. It also allows for the voices of those who bravely come forward to know they are not alone and it also stands as a testament to the countless women who continue to suffer in silence. Having supported women for over 20 years, I am always looking for new and collaborative ways to raise awareness and respectfully challenge cultural mindsets that have no place in our society, I believe this publication is a powerful tool that can do just that. We all have a role to play to ensure human rights are upheld for everyone and I would encourage all who read **'Our Girls'** to consider how they can help or get involved to ensure these stories are never repeated again.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to all who have contributed to this project with special thanks to Ruth Beni who's passion and commitment has been a true inspiration and highlights how, together, **we can make a difference.**

About the Book **By Ruth Beni**

Director, Animage Films

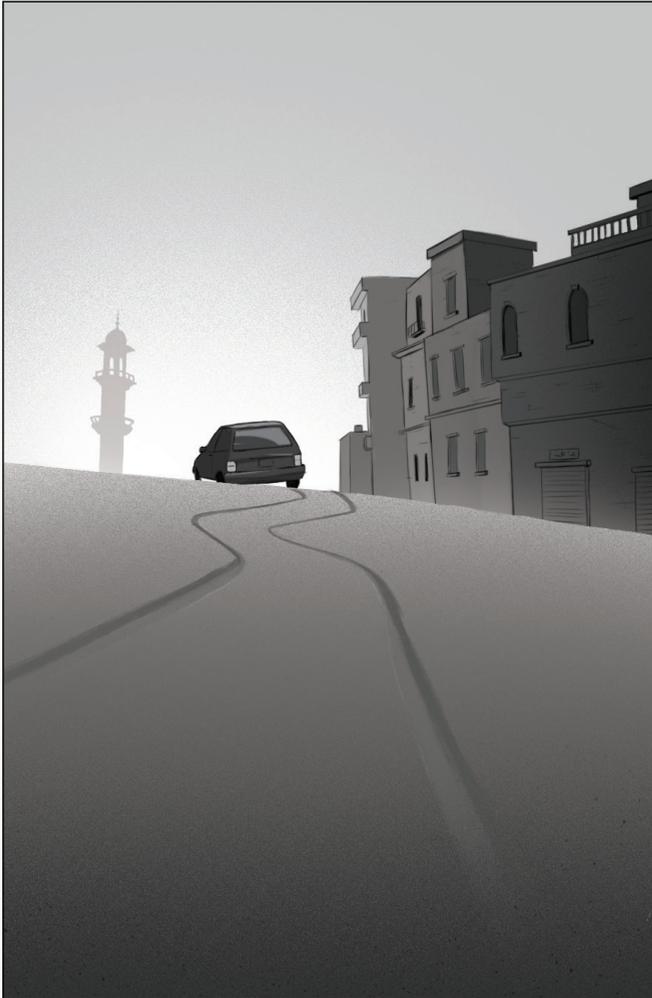
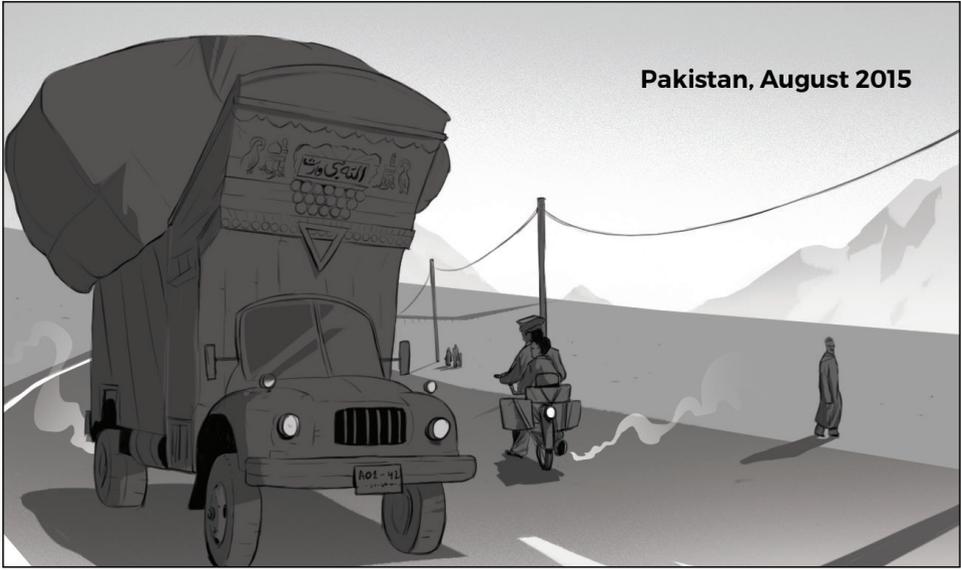
Forced marriage transcends more than one culture and its practice can be found in Asia, Africa, China, the Middle East and the Americas. Alarmingly, forced marriages have also been prevalent in the UK for many years.

For most of us it is hard to believe that young people in the 21st Century are still being subjected to the cruel abuse of forced marriage. I have come across many heart-breaking stories of young women and girls whose lives have been ruined by this cruel practice. In this book we have portrayed just four of these stories. These are all actual case histories, only the names have been changed.

I hope that by continuing to expose the magnitude of what is essentially a global hate crime against women and girls this brutal abuse of human rights will eventually cease to exist.

Prisoner

The Story of Shazia

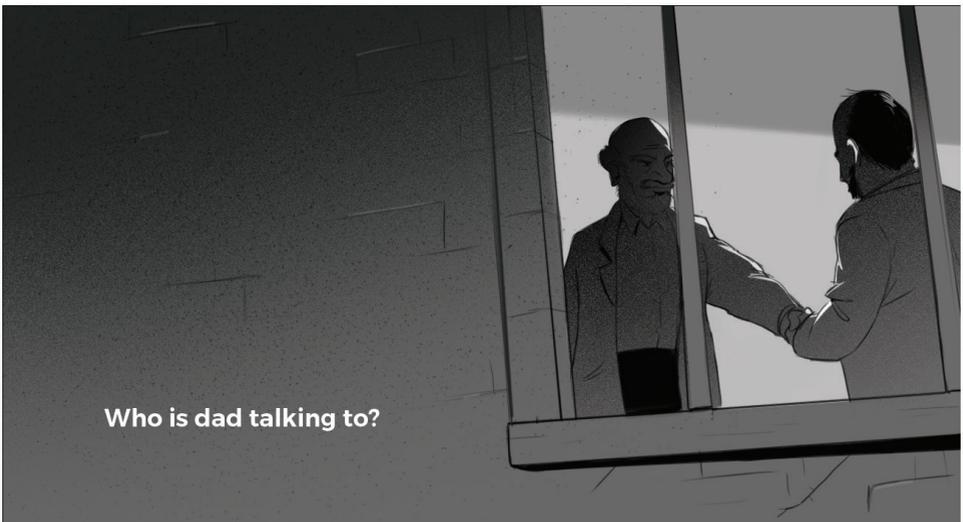




This isn't where auntie lives?



Why is dad going into that house?



Who is dad talking to?











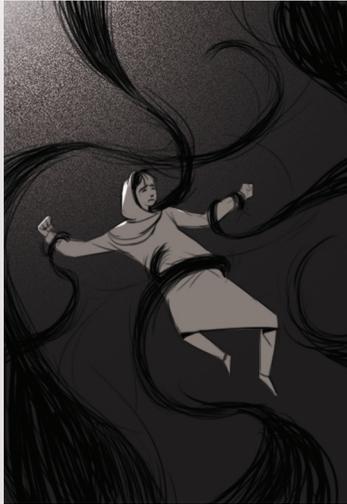
Rapunzel was my favorite fairy tale
when I was little.

You know the story?
About a girl locked up in a tower?

In my darkest days...
I wanted to kill myself.



Living in this awful nightmare with this horrible man, I dreamt that someone would come and rescue me, and that it's only a matter of time!

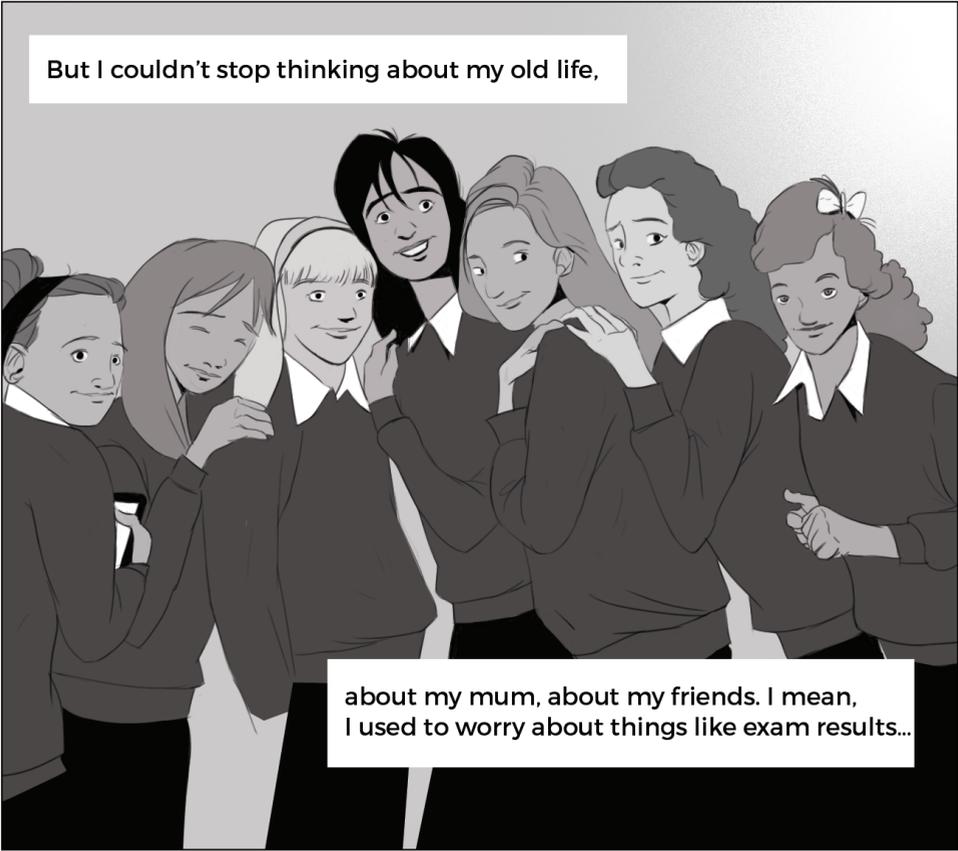


I couldn't bear to take one more single breath in that place...



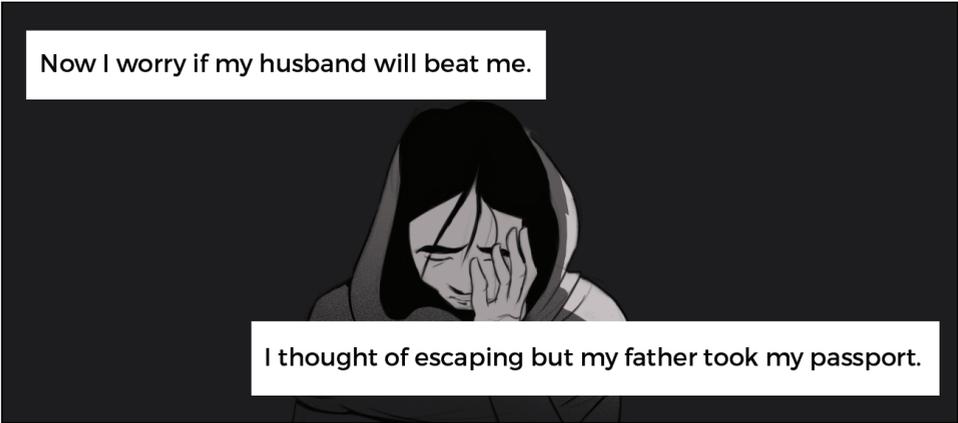


At 19 years old I became a mother.



But I couldn't stop thinking about my old life,

about my mum, about my friends. I mean,
I used to worry about things like exam results...



Now I worry if my husband will beat me.

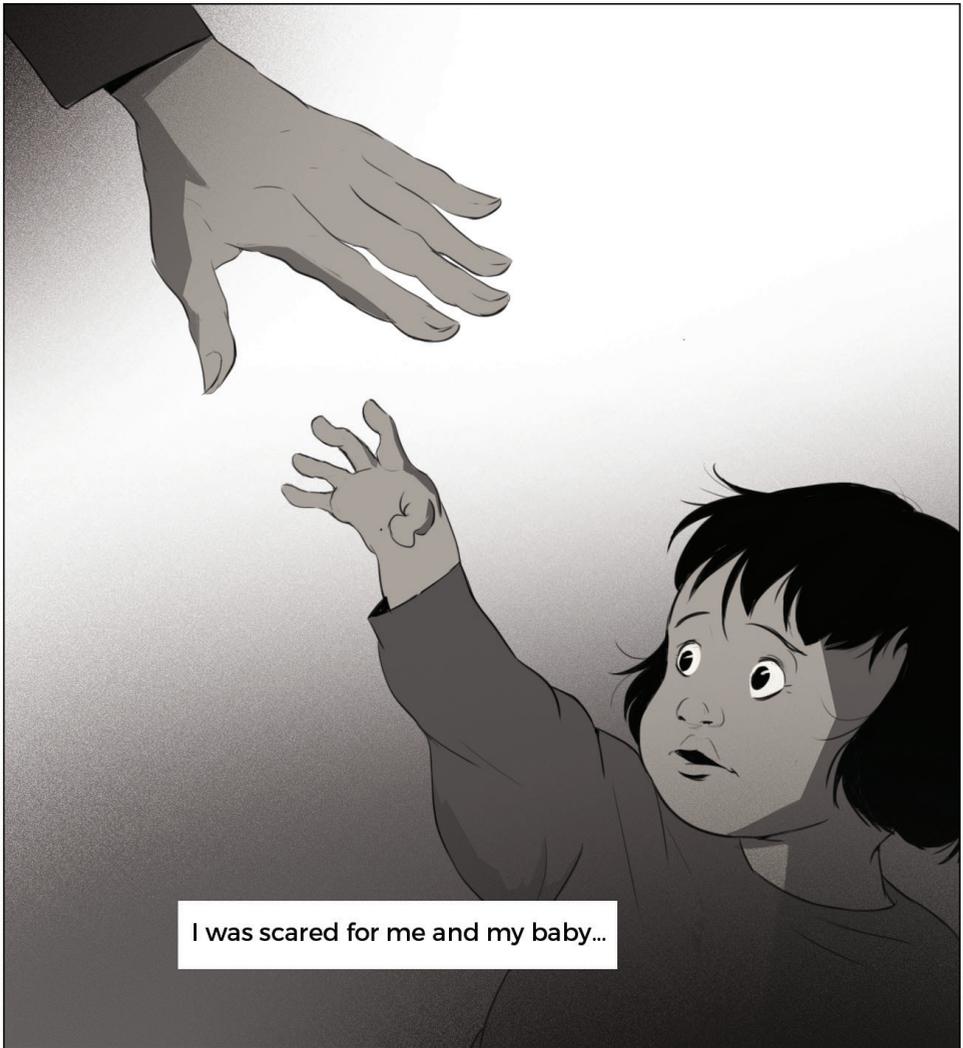
I thought of escaping but my father took my passport.



But then, one day...



Someone arrived in the middle of the night.



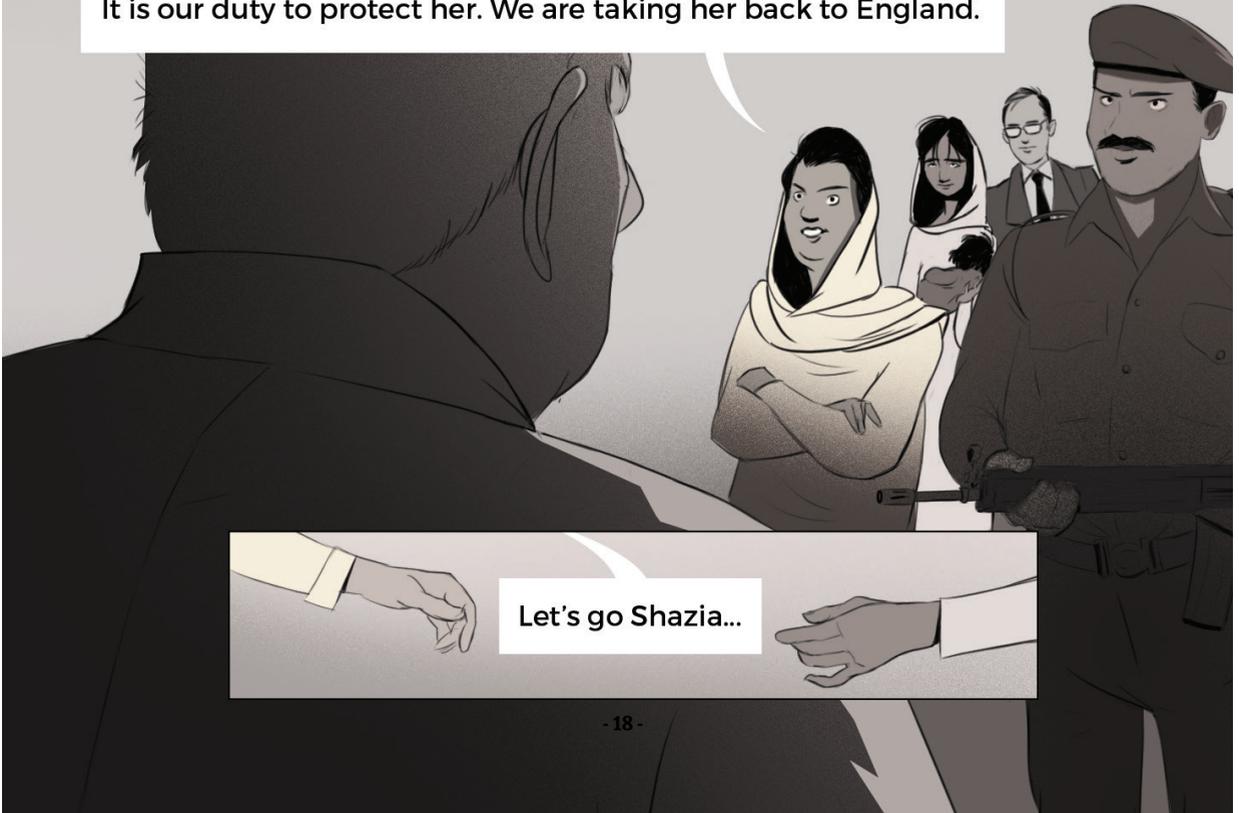
I was scared for me and my baby...



Shazia?



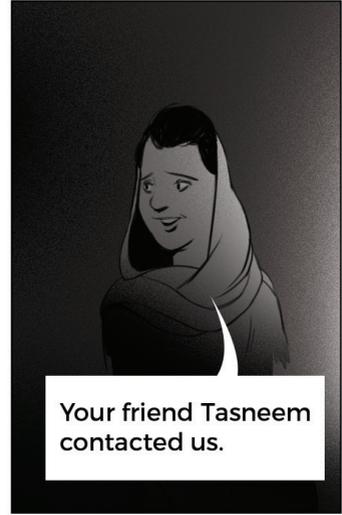
We are from the British Embassy. Shazia is a British Citizen and we have reason to believe that she is here against her will. It is our duty to protect her. We are taking her back to England.



Let's go Shazia...



How did you find me?



Your friend Tasneem contacted us.



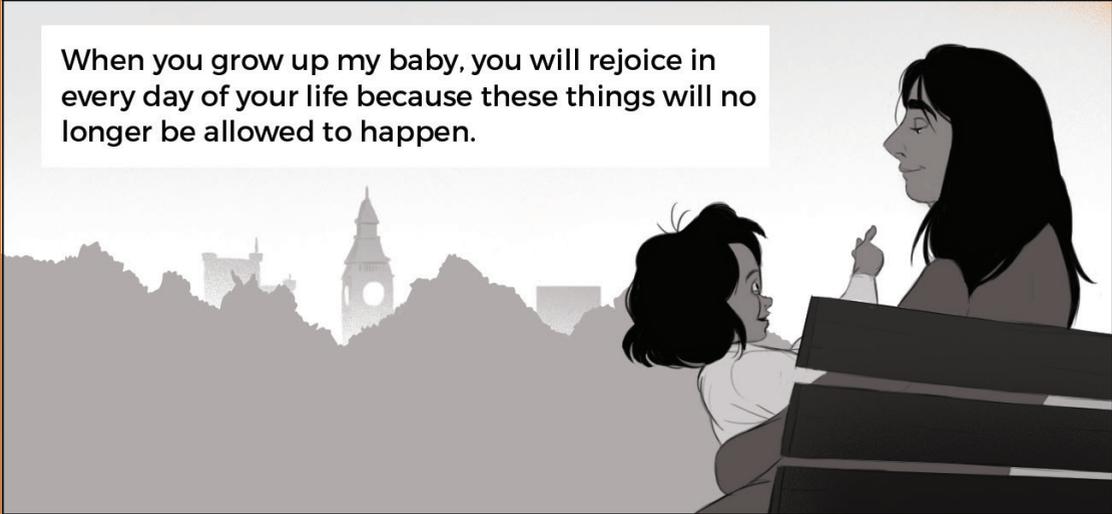
She had been trying to find out where you disappeared to. Eventually we tracked you down.



Tasneem said that no way would you choose to marry a man you had never met before, and so far away from home!



I have a new life now.
I'm free.



When you grow up my baby, you will rejoice in every day of your life because these things will no longer be allowed to happen.

we're safe now.



Just for Being a Girl

The Story of Meera



CAMDEN TOWN, LONDON, 1992

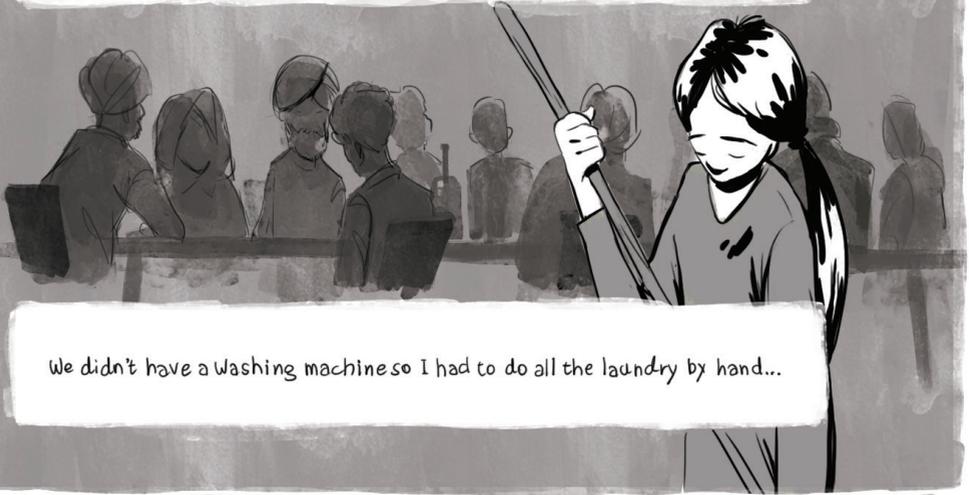
I remember coming out of the tube station - it was the first time I went on the tube. It was a bright sunny day and I was immediately hit by the unfamiliar sounds and smells and colours! My head started to spin with the realisation that I was free. For now...

I remember the smell of incense sticks burning, the smell of unfamiliar foods and all those punks with pink hair!



My heart was pounding and my head was spinning but I knew then that my life has changed forever. I was 17 years old.

I had three older brothers and so even before I was ten years old
I had to cook and clean for the whole family...



We didn't have a washing machine so I had to do all the laundry by hand...

I always knew in my heart, even then, that this is not how life was supposed to be...



I loved school, I felt safe, I could be who I really was, speak freely, hang around with people I wanted to spend my time with but when I got home I had to be someone else: not too smart, obedient, and without questioning cook for my parents, my three brothers and my grandparents who lived with us, and then serve everyone before eating and then make sure the dishes were done...



Mostly I would skip meals just so I had time to do my homework...



I was the first person in my family to actually finish secondary school and get GCSE's so I begged and begged to go to college, secretly praying that I could learn more... be more!



Why do I have to cook and clean and my brothers do nothing?
Why can boys go out and not girls?
Why was my life valued so little and why was it already planned out,
meaning, I will be married off to someone I don't even know?
Why? why? WHY? WHY???



Everyone hated me asking those questions and that's when the spying, accusations and lies started. 'She's talking to boys, she is playing truant, she has a boyfriend, and she's not wearing Indian clothes she is becoming 'too Western!'

One day I came home from college, careful never to be late.
My mum was waiting for me at the door and I could tell something
was wrong...

When I asked her what was the matter, she looked down and said 'wait until your brother comes home'. When my eldest brother returned from work, I could hear whispering. Mum told them that she had heard I had a black boyfriend and brought shame on the family and that is why I needed to be punished.

Then Mum instructed my two older brothers to beat me, they hit me so hard I fell to the floor, they hit me some more, they had a broom handle and a rolling pin (that my mum gave them), the same rolling pin I used to make roti for my family...

I thought I was going to die.



I was sent to my room. When I got there I was in so much pain, my mind kept telling me that I would be better off dead. Then I remembered that I had an old fashioned shaving blade in my wardrobe... I could take my life before they did... I rummaged through my things trying to find the blade but it wasn't there (I was so sure it was!) but when I looked around at the clothes scattered around on the floor I realised, right then, that the only way to save myself was to run away. Not easy!



That's when I went to the tube station and bought my ticket to freedom.

That was 20 years ago...

and I am doing really well now,
I finished my education
and got a job.

...And now I work for a charity
that helps other women and girls like me
whose only crime is to want to choose the
lives they live...



I sometimes think...
if I had not left home,
I would not be here today!
I still miss my family and I know
I had to pay the ultimate price
for my freedom...
JUST FOR BEING A GIRL!



My Graduation

The Story of Yasmin

I was always top of my class in science. I wanted to be an astronomer when I grew up, like Isaac Newton. Dad bought me a telescope for my eleventh birthday. We loved gazing at the stars together.



I am so proud of you!
You got A's in everything!



Dad Says

Yes, Yasmin's very clever
but science won't teach her
how to cook for her in-laws!



Mum Says

She can cook
star shaped samosas!



Granny Says

I was over the moon when I found out that
I got into a fantastic university!
I was the only woman in my family ever to go
to university!



Astrophysics is not the easiest of subjects - I was learning amazing things every day! At the same time, I began to discover so much about myself too... here's the thing: to be honest I was never bothered much about boys, I thought that love will come my way one day, and when I met Jenny I knew that love had arrived...

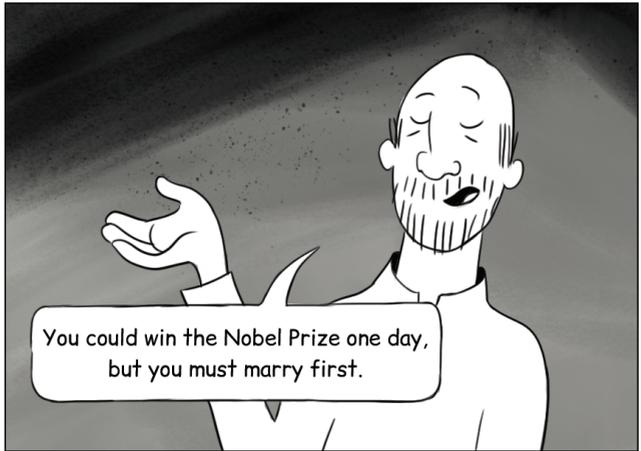
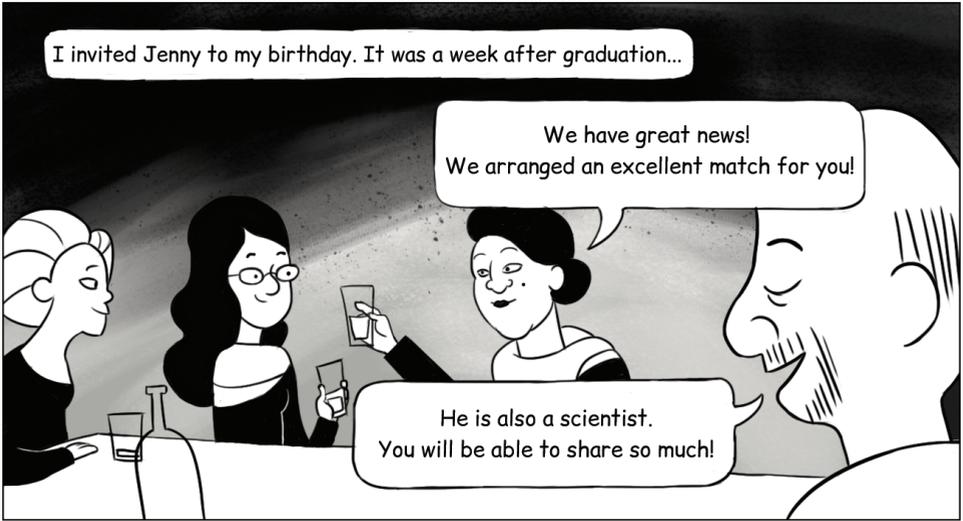


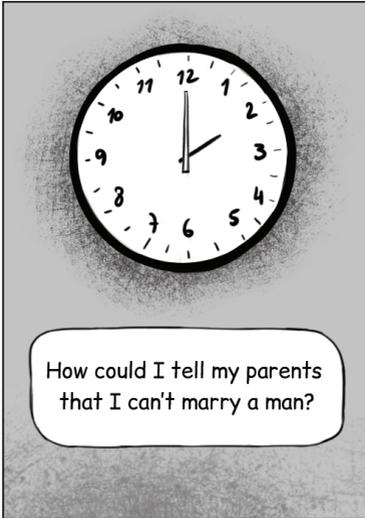
I never thought I could love someone so much



I graduated with First Class Honours!







How could I tell my parents that I can't marry a man?



There's no decent word to describe being 'gay' in Punjabi...or Urdu!



Mum...
I thought about telling you this for a long time and I can't wait any longer...
I'm not ready to marry yet.
There's so much more I'd like to do first.

He's a very nice boy. Love will come, you'll see. Like me and your dad.



Mum, I can't marry a man. Ever.
I love Jenny and she loves me.

What are you saying? This is not true...
No, no, no! Your father cannot hear this.
How will he hold his head up in the community now?
SHAME ON YOU!





It's been 5 years since I told my mum I was gay.
We rarely speak. I wish I could show off my new achievements
to my dad. I am about to complete my PhD...
And I am so scared that as my granny, who I adore, is getting older,
I might not see her again. Ever. I miss my family so much.



I heard from my cousin
(the only member of my family I am still
in touch with) about the plans for gran's
80th birthday party. I didn't have the
courage to go to the party but I sent gran
a present - an iPad. Gran is so clever and
she loves technology - she had always
insisted that I take after her
when it comes to brains!

A week later I got an Email from granny

Oh, Yasmin,

you remind me so much of me when I was young!
I always wanted to get my own way, but I couldn't...
I was married when I was 15, and by the time I
was your age I already had 4 children... I love my
children and my grandchildren and all I ever
wanted is for everyone to have a good life.
Every one deserves to have a good life, especially
if they are a good person, and I know that you my
dear Yasmin have a good heart. Nobody in our
family has wanted to, you know... go out with... you
know... but no other girl in our family has become a
big professor like you!

My lovely Yasmin, I want to see a smile on your
face and happiness in your heart -

that's all I'm going to say. I love you.

-Granny

Jenny and I are expecting a baby.

I hope my parents will get to meet their grandchild one day.



My Life, My Choice

The Story of Asra



Every morning Asra leaves home early so she can change her clothes on the way to school.



After school Asra usually goes to her best friend, Caroline. They do their homework together. They both want to go to art school and are dreaming of starting a fashion business together.



When Asra gets home in the evening there are loads of chores for her to do. Like cooking and cleaning. Asra is the only girl in the family and her parents expect a lot from her.



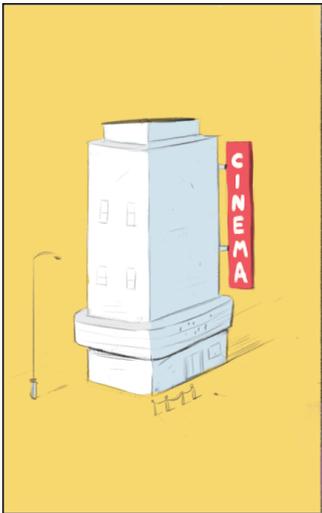
My parents have no idea what I want in life.



One rainy day at the park, Asra met Max, a friend of Caroline's brother.



Max liked Asra straight away. It took him a while but eventually he plucked up the courage to ask her out on a date.



Asra told her parents she was going to Caroline's for a girl's dinner but instead...met Max at the cinema.



Oh no!
It's my uncle!

I am so scared of what my parents will do to me when they find out I am seeing a boy!



The next day, Asra's uncle went to her house and told her parents that he saw her with a boy.



After that, Asra's parents made her younger brother walk her to and from school every day and she was forbidden to see anyone after school



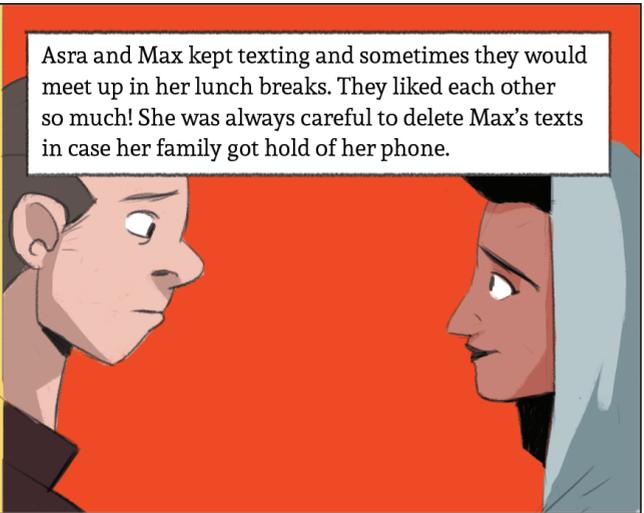
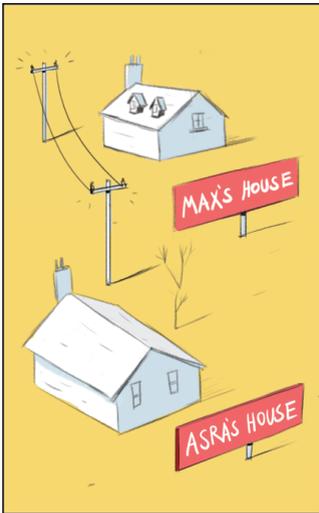
The stress of it all caused Asra's grades to fall and she became withdrawn. The worst part of it was she didn't know how to speak to anyone about it and that she could get help from people who have been through what she's going through.



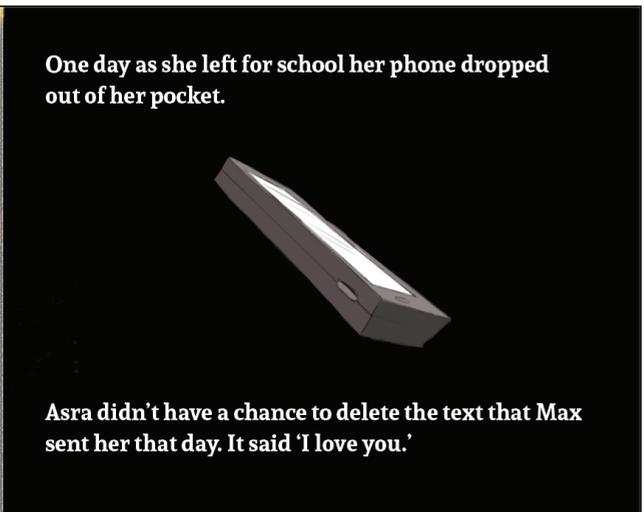
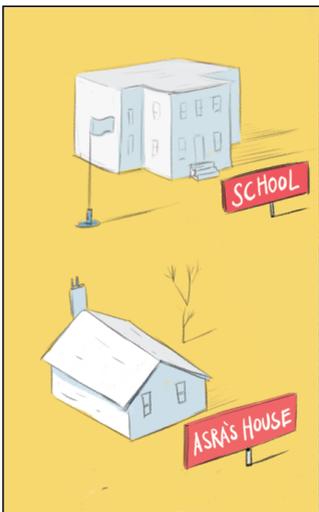


No one in her family was friendly or loving to her. She comes and goes and feels like an invisible ghost.

Look at what you've done! You've ruined this family! How are we meant to look our community in the eye?!

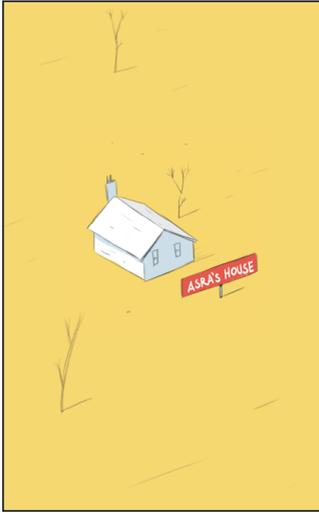


Asra and Max kept texting and sometimes they would meet up in her lunch breaks. They liked each other so much! She was always careful to delete Max's texts in case her family got hold of her phone.

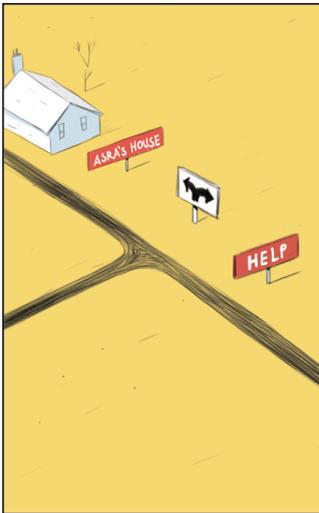


One day as she left for school her phone dropped out of her pocket.

Asra didn't have a chance to delete the text that Max sent her that day. It said 'I love you.'



Halfway through the day she realised that she left her phone at home. She was so scared. Her father already told her that he would kill her if he found out that she was still in contact with Max.



What should Asra do?

Maybe things will be OK. Maybe my parents will forgive me. I might just get away with a simple punishment. Or maybe they will only confiscate my phone... just one more year before I finish school and then maybe they will let me go to uni...



Asra goes home...



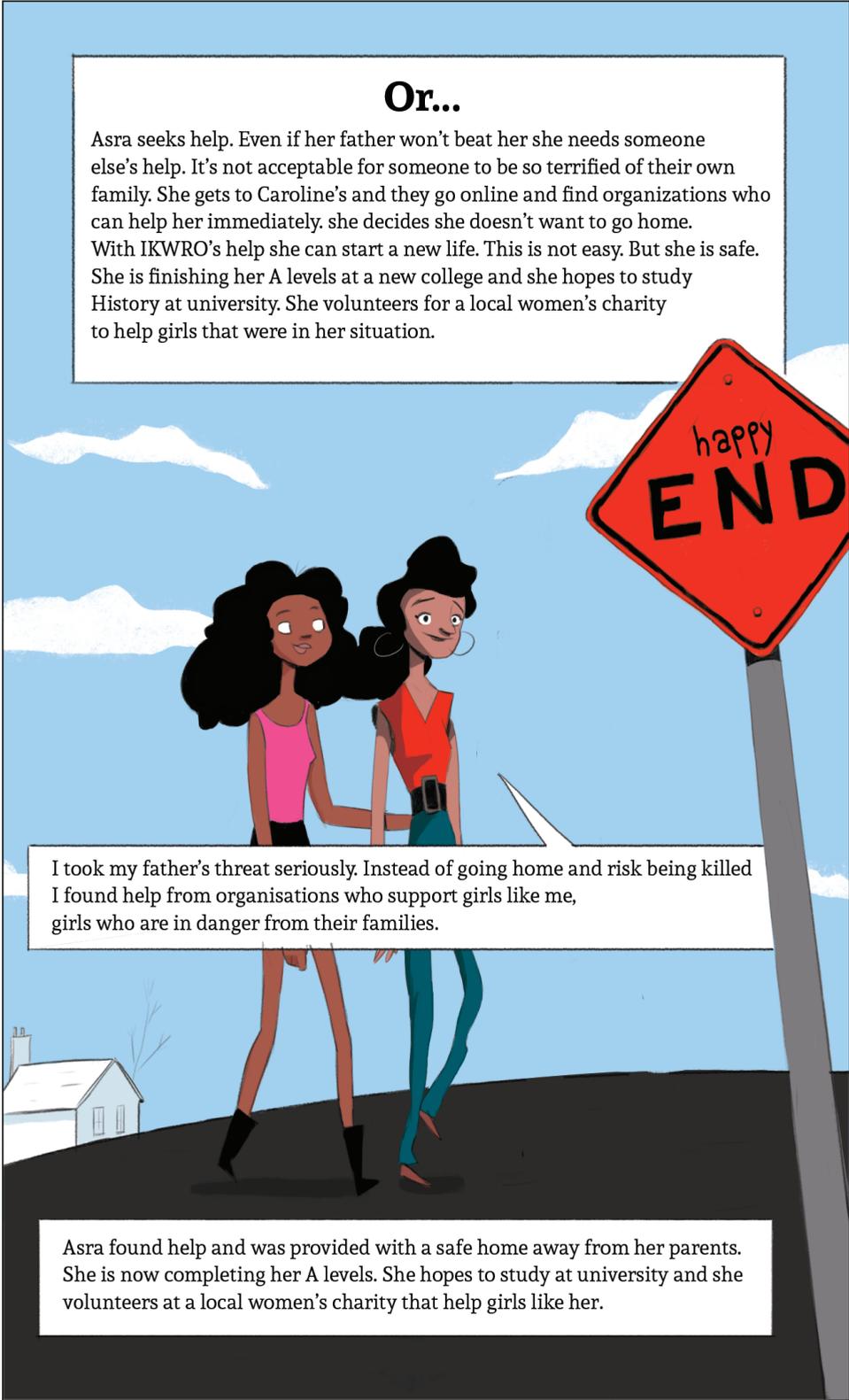
**You disobeyed us!
and you must now pay the price!**



Asra didn't survive the attack. Her father and uncle were charged with her murder.

Or...

Asra seeks help. Even if her father won't beat her she needs someone else's help. It's not acceptable for someone to be so terrified of their own family. She gets to Caroline's and they go online and find organizations who can help her immediately. she decides she doesn't want to go home. With IKWRO's help she can start a new life. This is not easy. But she is safe. She is finishing her A levels at a new college and she hopes to study History at university. She volunteers for a local women's charity to help girls that were in her situation.



I took my father's threat seriously. Instead of going home and risk being killed I found help from organisations who support girls like me, girls who are in danger from their families.

Asra found help and was provided with a safe home away from her parents. She is now completing her A levels. She hopes to study at university and she volunteers at a local women's charity that help girls like her.

Guest Editorial

Forced Marriage and Health

Asma Ashraf, RN, Dip Trop Nurs, MSc
Research Nurse, University College London, UK

A forced marriage is a marriage into which either one or both spouses have been coerced without their consent. Coercion can include physical, psychological, financial, sexual and emotional pressure from relatives who regard a refusal to marry the person of their choice as a stain on the family's honour (Meetoo and Mirza, 2007). Where an individual lacks the capacity to consent, coercion is not required for a marriage to be forced (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a). Forced marriage should be distinguished from arranged marriage. An arranged marriage is a tradition where families take a leading role in bringing the two parties together and organising the ceremony; however the final decision rests with both spouses to be and they both must agree freely and without any pressure (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a). This editorial concentrates on forced marriage but, as we shall see, it can sometimes be difficult to consider forced and arranged marriage separately.

What is forced marriage?

Forced marriage is a form of domestic violence. It is a way of controlling men and women. It discounts any right of choice for individual/individuals in choosing a partner and, in cases where the individual is below 18 years old, is a form of child abuse.

The practice of forced marriage takes place in many regions across the world: USA, Asia, Africa and European countries including the UK. The perpetrators are family members who often justify their actions on the basis that they are acting in their child's best interests. Marriages are also believed to make family ties stronger. In a forced marriage arrangement, it is considered that the 'honour' of the family is protected and that, culturally and religiously, this is what needs to be done (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a). Let us be clear now that no religion whether it is Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism or Sikhism advocates or supports the forcing of an individual into a marriage.

Perpetrators are misguided because they believe that they are helping the person that they are forcing into a marriage; they do not see that they are doing anything wrong. Young people are told from childhood that their parents/family will choose whom they will marry. Decisions relating to marriage may not even be communicated to the young person who may be unaware both of what is happening and that they can seek help and support. Even if they do know, it is very difficult for them to transcend the traditional framework, especially when parents/family members control their children from a young age in a covert manner by saying that they 'know best', 'you cannot have a boyfriend or girlfriend because tradition forbids it' and 'that this is not what we do in our culture'. In some instances control may be overt. An individual maybe restricted from taking a job or their earnings taken from them, making them dependent on others. They may be isolated by being taken out of the country and left out of the UK for long periods, which further isolates them from help and support (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a).

Leaving home is not an easy option for anyone but is much harder if individuals are from communities that do not consider this to be a normal part of growing up. Living alone with minimal means and support is very isolating and often results in the person returning back to the abusive situation. The person may not want to report the crime or leave their families because this would bring shame or 'dishonour' on

their family. Among those who do leave there may also be a very real and valid fear that the individual will be found by their family (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a).

Moreover, when the elders of the family circle send a message saying that they want the marriage of a person to take place, there is pressure placed on everyone involved to conform and ensure that the wedding goes ahead whether it was for the sake of so called 'honour', increasing/maintaining family wealth, or family commitments (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a). What do you do, who do you turn to? The risk of a forced marriage in the name of so called 'honour' increases if there is a death in the family - if the father dies, if a female discloses any sexual abuse and if a person is known to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. The belief is that the honour of the family will be saved and no one will ask questions if the marriage has taken place (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a).

Honour itself is not a bad thing. In fact being honourable is a valued trait for many people; honour means having integrity and honesty; it can be about being kind, caring and sharing. The problem is when honour is misused, whether consciously or unconsciously, against people, to enforce submission through emotional and guilt-laden processes. This misuse of honour is not only prevalent in South Asian, Middle Eastern or Muslim communities, which is how the issue is often portrayed in the media, but is actually a much wider problem that occurs in African, Jewish and Eastern European communities (Meetoo and Mirza, 2007). In this context honour is used to assert power and control, mainly over women, but men as well. The purpose is to coerce individuals into submitting to pressures from their family and/or community. Such pressures are intense and failure to conform can escalate into what is now termed 'honour' based violence and even murder as in the cases of individuals such as Shafiea Ahmed (BBC News, 2012), Banaz Mahmod (BBC News, 2010) and Laura Wilson (Marsden, 2012). These three young women were unfairly and unjustly considered to bring shame on their family members who murdered them. The Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO, [http://ikwro.org.uk/2015/07/research-reveals-violence/#more-2539\[PM1\]](http://ikwro.org.uk/2015/07/research-reveals-violence/#more-2539[PM1])) (2015), reports that, between 2010 to 2014, UK police recorded more than 11,000 cases of so called 'honour' based violence (IKWRO, 2015). According to Diana Nammi, the Executive Director of IKWRO (<http://ikwro.org.uk/>), this is nowhere near the real figure. Many of these crimes go unreported because the perpetrators are the victim's family members and are heavily influenced by the belief that going to the police, health services or speaking to anyone about it is

shameful (IKWRO, 2015).

An additional factor is the way in which an arranged marriage can sometimes be presented which may make it a form of forced marriage. This can happen when full consent free from coercion is not possible because it is imposed with great subtlety, to the extent that individuals may not realise what is happening (Anitha and Gill, 2009; Chantler, Gangoli, Hester et al., 2009). An issue that also is important when considering consent is that following the marriage, an individual may wish to withdraw consent. Women, however, are placed in a difficult position because they are often unable to leave the arranged marriage, which may have now become a forced marriage. Women and men are put into these positions because the social norms in some communities prevent them from seeking a divorce regardless of whether the marriage was arranged or forced (Samad and Eade, 2002).

Who is at risk?

There is no typical victim of forced marriage. Whilst women are the main victims of this practice, it must also be remembered that men are affected and are victims too. Forced marriage occurs in both under and over 18 year olds, with or without a disability (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014b). In the UK, the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU <https://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage>), a government initiative set up to support victims of forced marriage, reported in 2014 that the highest numbers of callers to their helpline were of Pakistani ethnicity. Whilst it is important to note that Pakistanis are one of the largest migrant communities in the UK, the FMU also reported handling cases from many other ethnicities and revealed that forced marriage cases in the UK involved over 88 different countries (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014b).

According to the FMU, 79% of all cases of forced marriages reported to them during 2014 involved females; 21% of cases involved males. However it is believed that these figures are just the tip of the iceberg and many cases are going unreported (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014b). There are particular difficulties for males who are forced into marriage and not enough is known about these issues, thus the number of men affected may be much higher. However, there is a clear gender disparity in terms of reporting, which highlights that females are more likely to be victims. Females are more at risk because of patriarchal systems that promote violence against women globally (Carter, 2015).

Of the 1267 cases reported to the FMU in 2014 300 involved victims who were under the age of 18 (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014b). Although the UK has signed up to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the forced marriage of children is still possible because UK law allows young people aged 16-18 years to marry with parental consent. The link between child marriage and forced marriage is not easy to distinguish; survivors of child marriage are not able to identify themselves as being forced into a marriage or understand the moral and legal significance that they are children if aged between 16-18 years. In South Asia, there has been a general increase in the age of marriage mainly among urbanised and middle class populations. However, in parts of Bangladesh and India, marriages are still arranged and take place amongst very young children and in some cases between infants (Gangoli, McCarry and Razak, 2009). Child marriages do take place in other countries too. The consequences of child marriage and forced marriage in the younger age groups are often more serious for females who are more likely to experience other forms of domestic and sexual violence. Females can be victims at any age but younger girls are particularly vulnerable and are more likely to experience repeated rape, miscarriages, problems in childbirth, sexually transmitted infections, social issues such as poverty and loss of access to education to name a few (Chantler, 2012).

Implications for health professionals

Unfortunately, in western countries, forced marriage has been regarded as a cultural practice in which outsiders should not interfere. Viewing forced marriage through a cultural lens can be very problematic because health professionals and non- professionals alike may be reluctant to speak up and discuss the matter because they fear being accused of cultural insensitivity, of causing offence or even worse, to be perceived as racist (Gill and Anitha, 2011). Conversely, though, not addressing the issue with someone who is at risk or not talking about it openly encourages and condones the practice (Gill and Anitha, 2011). However, there is growing awareness and understanding of the problem as a human rights abuse (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a). Since the late 1990s, the UK government has recognised this as a problem and has introduced various measures to protect victims of forced marriage (Thiara and Gill, 2010). More recently, in June 2014, forcing someone to marry against their will became an illegal act which carries a prison sentence (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a).

In terms of health care, the response has been slow but changes in UK law mean that ignoring or avoiding the issue of forced marriage is no longer an option. Jasvinder Sanghera a survivor of forced marriage and Karma Nirvana's (<http://www.karmanirvana.org.uk/>) founder, a charity supporting people facing forced marriage, has stated, cultural acceptance does not mean accepting the unacceptable' and acknowledges that often there remains a lack of professional confidence. Many victims facing forced marriage feel that health care practitioners are unable to help them but this should not be the case at all. Doctors and nurses as examples of healthcare workers have a duty to safeguard and protect anyone who is in a vulnerable position and a duty of care to all (The Code for Nurses and Midwives, 2015 and Good Medical Practice, 2013). Healthcare practitioners should also be aware of working jointly in a multi- agency capacity with the police, schools and social services.

Healthcare practitioners are in a good place to identify those facing forced marriage and so called 'honour' based violence but need to learn more about the issue. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) Domestic Violence Guidelines (NICE, 2014) highlight that health care workers need to learn more about forced marriage to be able to address training needs; research is needed in this area to gain a better insight and to support victims. For example, little is known about the long term psychological effects in terms of mental health (Meetoo and Mirza, 2007). There is some research to suggest that forced marriage and other types of violence against women may be linked to depression, self-harm and suicide in South Asian women who have faced forced marriage and so called 'honour' based violence however this is not clear cut (Gangoli, McCarry and Razak, 2009; Wilson, 2006). Chantler (2012) in her review of the literature on forced marriage identified a real gap in evidence to prove the health consequences of forced marriage, which, if known, would enable appropriate interventions to be developed. What is clear is that forced marriages can have serious effects on people.

Individuals who are being forced or who have been forced into marriage and/or been the victims of so called 'honour' based violence could present in any area of the National Health Service (NHS).

Potential warning signs may include:

- An individual accompanied to health centre, clinic or hospital
- Self-harm/attempted suicide

- Eating disorders
- Depression/Isolation
- Substance Misuse
- Unwanted pregnancy
- Female Genital Mutilation

(Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a) These signs are not unique to forced marriage or so called 'honour' based violence but a wider problem relating to other forms of domestic violence and the control, mainly, of women.

Healthcare practitioners should be aware that, as with all forms of domestic violence, which they must routinely ask about, forced marriage and so called 'honour' based violence should be accounted for when asking routine questions about a patient's background and home life (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a). In encounters with patients there may only be one opportunity to find out if an individual needs help (Bewley and Welch 2014). It is important to speak to the person of concern on their own, and not in front of family members or any other accompanying adults; this means that they should not be used as interpreters. Examples of appropriate questions include 'how are things at home?' and 'are you worried about anything or anyone?' Ensure that all information including injuries or treatment is fully documented. If you are worried that someone is at risk of being or has been forced into marriage, talk to them about your concerns, and make it clear that, unless there is a safety or child protection issue or action is necessary to prevent a crime, nothing the individual says will be disclosed to anyone else or to any outside agency. It is not appropriate to dismiss any need for immediate protection or to sidestep responsibilities for action. It is also important to avoid approaching family or community members without the victim's consent or to get drawn into any attempt at mediation with family members as this may also endanger the victim (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a). The priority is to do what the person you are supporting wants, as long as they are not deemed as a vulnerable person. All cases should be discussed with a senior member of the medical team and safeguarding leads. The person may not want to have to prosecute their family or relatives but victims of forced marriage do need to understand that what is happening to them is not right—morally or legally— and that they can be helped. Forced

marriage is a crime and should not be tolerated; the person in front of you could be at risk of serious injury and harm.

Further information and guidance about dealing with forced marriage is available through The Multi-agency practice guidelines: Handling cases of Forced Marriage (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a) and should be read by all professionals including healthcare practitioners. These facilitate insight into how victims may present and how they could be supported (Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 2014a). Further advice is available from the Forced Marriage Unit (<https://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage>). Make sure the person you are supporting is fully aware of the plan.

Conclusion

The issue of forced marriage is complex and entwined with an inappropriate 'honour' system, which violates basic human rights on choice and freedom to consent. Both men and women can be victims; young people, especially females, are particularly vulnerable (Home Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (2014b). There is increasing recognition of forced marriage as harmful; it needs to be understood that globally there is an issue of violence mainly against women and girls but also men too. Let's be clear that there is a gender disparity in terms of who suffers most violence (Temmerman, 2015). It is not helpful to label forced marriage as a cultural practice because this may exacerbate the problem giving people an excuse to carry on abusing people. There are clearly inequalities of gender, race, poverty and access to education for those that suffer from forced marriage and honour based violence. However there is no 'typical' victim and the person in front of a healthcare professional could be anyone.

More research is needed on forced marriage and honour based violence for healthcare professionals to intervene appropriately (Temmerman, 2015). However to begin with safeguarding training for healthcare professionals needs to include forced marriage and 'honour' based violence.

ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Asma Ashraf, Research Nurse, University College London,
Research Department of Infection and Population Health,
Research Department of Infection and Population Health, Mortimer
Market Centre, Off Capper Street London WC1E 6JB,
email: a.ashraf@ucl.ac.uk

REFERENCES

- Anitha, S. and Gill, AK (2009) Coercion, Consent and the Forced Marriage Debate in the UK, *Feminist Legal Studies*, 17(2), 165-84
- Bewley, S. and Welch, J (2014) ABC of Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence, BMJ Books
- BBC News August 2012 Shafiea Ahmed murder trial: Parents guilty of killing <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-19068490>
- BBC News November 2010 Banaz Mahmod 'honour' killing cousins jailed for life <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-11716272>
- Carter, J (2015) Patriarchy and violence against women and girls, *The Lancet*. 385 (9978), 40-41
- Chantler, K (2012) Recognition of and Intervention in Forced Marriage, *Journal of Trauma, Violence and Abuse* 13 (3) pp 176-183
- Chantler, K., Gangoli, G. and Hester M. et al. (2009) Forced Marriage in the UK: Religious, cultural, economic or state violence? *Critical Social Policy*, 29(4), 587-612
- Gangoli, G., McCarry, M. and Razak, A (2009) Child Marriage or Forced Marriage? South Asian Communities in North East England. *Children in Society* 23, 418-429
- Gill AK. and Anitha, S (2011) Forced Marriage Introducing a Social Justice and Human Rights Perspective. London, Zed Books Ltd
- Good Medical Practice (2013) General Medical Council
- http://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/good_medical_practice.asp [Accessed 21st August 2015]
- Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office (2014a) Multi-agency practice guidelines: Handling cases of Forced Marriage, London, The Cabinet Office. <https://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage> [Accessed 26th July 2015]
- Home Office and Foreign & Commonwealth Office (2014b) Statistics January to December 2014 <https://www.gov.uk/forced-marriage> [Accessed 26th July 2015]
- Iranian and Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) 9th July 2015 [Accessed 21st August 2015] <http://ikwro.org.uk/2015/07/research-reveals-violence/>
- Marsden, S (2012) Numerous opportunities missed to protect 'first' white honour killing victim. *The Telegraph* 29th May 2012 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/9297748/Numerous-opportunities-missed-to-protect-first-white-honour-killing-victim.html>
- Meetoo, V. and Mirza, HS (2007) "There is nothing 'honourable' about honour killings": Gender, violence and the

limits of multiculturalism. *Women's Studies International Forum* 30, 187-200

NICE (2014) Domestic violence and abuse: how health services, social care and the organisations they work with can respond effectively NICE Guidelines PH50 <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph50> [Accessed 26th July 2015]

The Code for Nurses and Midwives (2015) Nursing and Midwifery Council <http://www.nmc.org.uk/standards/code/read-the-code-online/> [Accessed 21st August 2015]

Samad, Y. and Eade, J (2002) *Community Perceptions of Forced Marriage*. London: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Temmerman, M (2015) Research priorities to address violence against women and girls *The Lancet*. 385 (9978), 38-40

Thiara, RK. and Gill, AK (2010) *Violence Against Women in South Asian Communities Issue for Policy and Practice*. London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) [Accessed 21st August 2015] <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/44/a44r025.htm>

Wilson, A (2006) *Dreams, Questions, Struggles: South Asian Women in Britain*. London: Pluto

Thanks & Acknowledgments

Lead Consultants

Polly Harrar
Asma Ashraf

Funded by the FMU

Book Edited by

Talia Randall & Ruth Beni

Production partners

Animage Films
AVA (Against Violence and Abuse)

Info & Addresses

Sharan

The Sharan Project is a leading UK charity which supports women who have been disowned by their families and/or communities. This may include (but not limited to) issues such as forced marriage, domestic violence, honour abuse, dowry violence, sexual orientation, FGM and cultural conflict. This is a largely an online resource service as not all women have the opportunity to safely access mainstream support. Disownment affects women in many ways and can result in isolation, displacement and becoming increasingly disengaged, often for the rest of their lives.

The Sharan Project works to enable, empower and educate women who face cultural difficulties in accessing mainstream services. They campaign to create awareness and act as a voice for those who are unable to speak out. As a growing volunteer led charity, they work to ensure women are able to lead successful independent lives without fear.

Established in 2008 the SHARAN Project is the vision of its founder, Polly Harrar, a South Asian professional based in the United Kingdom who saw a clear need to provide culturally sensitive support, practical advice and information to meet the needs of an increasing number of South Asian women in the U.K. who have been or are at risk of being disowned.

To contact The Sharan Project, you can call the Information Line **0844 504 3231**

or email Sharan at info@sharan.org.uk.

If you are affected by domestic violence, you can also call the 24hr National Domestic Violence Helpline free on **0808 2000 247.**

If you or someone you know is at risk of or experiencing Forced Marriage, you can contact The Forced Marriage Unit on **0207 008 0151**

Info & Addresses

Ikwro

The Iranian & Kurdish Women's Rights Organisation (IKWRO) is a registered charity supporting women and girls from Middle Eastern and North African communities at risk of "honour" based violence, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and domestic abuse through advice, advocacy, counselling, training and our refuge. We also advise and train front-line professionals, campaign for improvements in law, policy and implementation and to end all forms of "honour" based violence.

For advice, advocacy, referrals & counselling:

Monday- Friday 9.30-5.30 call **0207 920 6460**

or email advice@ikwro.org.uk

For out-of-hours emergencies call:

Kurdish / Arabic: **07846 275246**

Farsi / Dari / Turkish: **07846 310157**

Info & Addresses

FMU

The Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) is a joint Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office unit which was set up in January 2005 to lead on the Government's forced marriage policy, outreach and casework. It operates both inside the UK, where support is provided to any individual, and overseas, where consular assistance is provided to British nationals, including dual nationals.

The FMU operates a public helpline to provide advice and support to victims of forced marriage as well as to professionals dealing with cases. The assistance provided ranges from simple safety advice, through to aiding a victim to prevent their unwanted spouse moving to the UK ('reluctant sponsor' cases), and, in extreme circumstances, to rescues of victims held against their will overseas.

The FMU undertake an extensive outreach and training programme of around 100 events a year, targeting both professionals and potential victims. The FMU also carry out media campaigns, such as 2015's 'right to choose' campaign, where the FMU commissioned a short film to raise awareness amongst young people at risk of being forced into marriage, as well as potential perpetrators.

Contact the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) if you're trying to stop a forced marriage or you need help leaving a marriage you've been forced into.

Telephone: +44 (0) 20 7008 0151

Email: fmu@fco.gov.uk

Email for outreach work: fmuoutreach@fco.gov.uk

Out of hours: 020 7008 1500 (ask for the Global Response Centre)



Published by Animage Press
© Animage Films 2016
Book Edited by | Talia Randall & Ruth Beni
Book Designer | Tami Ozsinay