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Abstract

Our paper is based on a qualitative empirical study of forced marriage in the UK and offers a multidimensional view which challenges four key points that are currently central in the forced marriage debate. First, the study explores the problematic of current UK and European Union policies on preventing forced marriage which focus on raising the age of sponsorship and marriage age for non-EU nationals migrating to the UK. Second, current conceptualizations of forced marriage focus on consent at the *entry* point into marriage. In contrast, survivors of forced marriage, and women's organizations experienced in providing services to this group, both attach equal importance to *exiting* (forced) marriages. Third, within the forced marriage debate, South Asian and Muslim communities are perceived as being largely responsible for forced marriages, whilst our research demonstrates that the range of communities in which forced marriage occurs is much wider. Fourth, forced marriage is often seen as a product of a 'backward' culture or religion in a pathologizing manner. The narratives in our study illustrate the interplay between culture, religion, poverty and state practices including immigration practices which points to the need for a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of forced marriage. We end our paper by outlining measures that could be put into place to support women experiencing forced marriage.

Key words: gender, immigration, marriage age, sexuality, sponsorship

Introduction

Forced marriage is of current national and international importance (Samad and Eade, 2002; Razack, 2004). Much of the international impetus stems from a number of significant international human rights instruments and standards including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 (UDHR), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC). The UDHR confirms the acceptance of 30 rights and was adopted by UN member states in 1948. Further, the UK is party to the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 1950 (ECHR). The UK is also party to CEDAW and CRC. Hence from a human rights perspective as Hossain and Turner (2002) have also argued, forced marriage breaches a number of international human rights standards. Central to these, is the issue of consent and we return to this later when discussing definitions of forced marriage. Feminist activists and scholars working on the issue are at the forefront of addressing forced marriage as an abuse of women's human rights, and therefore as gender based violence (Hossain and Turner, 2002; Siddiqui, 2002; Gangoli et al., 2006). Child marriage is conceptualized as a form of child abuse (Forum on Marriage, 2000; Otoo-Oyertey and Pobi, 2003) that has serious consequences for young girls including sexual assault and health risks associated with early pregnancy, high maternal and child mortality and increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases (Outtara et al., 1998). In this sense child marriage is treated as forced marriage, due to the absence of free and full consent. Forced marriage has also been conceptualized as a development issue, linked to poverty and practices such as bride price in Ethiopia (Otoo-Oyertey and Pobi, 2003). It has also been suggested that a rights discourse on marriage can include in some cases the rights of parents and of communities to preserve their identity, therefore there is sometimes a conflict between the rights of young people and rights of families (Stobarrt, 2002).

'Multiculturalism' is a contested term and has shifted in meaning from the 1970s when multiculturalism was positioned in opposition to anti-racism. The key difference was that anti-racism was posited as engaging with power relations, whilst multiculturalism was often reduced to issues of differences in language, religion and customs without engaging with power relations and came to be known as the 'saris, samosas and steelbands' approach. Since the 1990s, there has

been an attempt to reconcile power relations (external and internal to communities) with issues of culture (e.g. Brah, 1996). More recently (particularly since 9/11) it can be argued that multiculturalism has shifted form again as can be seen in the UK government's policies in relation to the faith agenda and community cohesion. Hence religion has become a central organizing principle of recent developments in the multicultural arena. This development does little to attend to intra-community inequalities that have always presented a 'problem' to either multiculturalism, faith communities or indeed anti-racism (Patel, 2008). Is it possible for example to talk of gender inequalities, homophobia and other social divisions within a multicultural frame? From a multicultural perspective it is often argued that cultures should be allowed a measure of autonomy to conduct their own affairs. Where this occurs, the relationship between culture and gender is often overlooked, so that gender based inequality and violence is often invisible in multicultural discourses (Chantler et al., 2001; Batsleer et al., 2002). Hence the conflict mentioned above in relation to competing rights between families/communities and young people is compounded by a culturalist discourse which typically obfuscates gender. Unsurprisingly then, in the UK, forced marriage has at times been constructed as a pathology within some cultures, specifically South Asian and/or Muslim communities (Oprea, 2005). Interventions and approaches tend to be steeped in cultural assumptions about different communities, including situating it as harmful cultural practices (cf. Volpp, 2000; Phillips and Dustin, 2004). However, some literature does grapple with the issue of how to avoid feeding into a celebration of European superiority or national identity while confronting and naming violent practices within minoritized communities, and notes the ways in which 'culture clash' works into strengthening racial stereotypes (Chantler et al., 2001; Batsleer et al., 2002; Razack, 2004: 154), while multicultural acceptance of cultural practices is identified as encouraging forced marriage. There is also literature addressing how forced marriage is against the tenets of different religions including Islam (Caroll, 1998) and a misinterpretation of culture (Gangoli et al., 2006).

It has also been suggested that forced marriage is a product of immigration rather than a 'tradition' exported from the country of origin (Phillips and Dustin, 2004: 543). Within the UK, scholars have pointed out that public debates on forced marriage are mostly addressed in terms of immigration (Hossain and Turner, 2002), and the 'overseas dimensions' of forced marriage, suggesting that there is

sometimes a conflation within policy and practice on 'false marriage' and 'forced marriage' (Phillips and Dustin, 2004: 535). Debates also examine the specific gendered and racialized nature of immigration law, based on stereotyped images of passive and dependent Asian women, and notions of South Asian families following patrilocality. This is seen to disadvantage both women migrating from abroad and British women of South Asian origin who sponsor a spouse from abroad (Hall, 2002). Some scholars address the ways in which some related immigration laws can encourage forced marriage such as the dual nationality provision in some cases (Hall, 2002; An-Na'im, n.d.). It is also suggested that some UK initiatives on forced marriage have a 'civilizing tone' in the way that immigrants are expected to be culturally 'British' (Razack, 2004: 154), and that policies on forced marriage have created fears in some members of the 'ethnic community' that the government is using its campaign against forced marriage to tighten immigration rules (Skalbergs and Gulicova, 2004).

This paper therefore engages with the three key issues discussed above namely human rights, issues of culture/gender and UK immigration policy in relation to forced marriage. Through an exploration of responses to a proposed increase in immigration age for spousal visas, it will explore the intersections between religion, cultural, economic and state structures to interrogate the complex myriad of factors which contribute to forced marriages.

Background: Setting the study in recent European and UK policy context

In April 2003, the UK government increased the age at which a British national could sponsor a foreign (outside the European Union) national from 16 to 18 years on a spousal or fiancé(e) visa. Immigration law states that sponsors need to prove that they can financially provide for the applicant as the incomer is not entitled to welfare provisions for the first two years until they obtain indefinite leave to remain. In December 2004, the government increased the age of marriage for incoming spouses (again from outside the EU) from 16 to 18.

The move to increase the age at which one can sponsor or be permitted entry as a non-EU spouse can be contextualized within the quest for European harmonization where various European countries have increased the age of entry. Countries such as the Netherlands

and Germany have also raised the age to 21 for a sponsor or spouse entering the country, and Denmark has the highest minimum age in the European Union for a sponsor, at 24.

In Denmark the raising of the age to 24 was implemented in 2002 within a general tightening of immigration and asylum laws, and increasing emphasis on integration and assimilation. The Danish family reunification law has an 'attachment requirement', where the couple has to prove that they have a higher attachment to Denmark than to any other country. To further integration policy aims, there has been a major investment in the levels of support for young people in Denmark who may face forced marriage, including dedicated refuges, hotlines and targeted funding from the Danish government for a variety of support including housing (Hvilshøj, 2006). While the increase in age appears to have had no direct impact on forced marriages in Denmark, there has been an increase in the numbers of young immigrants pursuing further education, from 10 per cent of 20–24 year olds in 2000/1 to 17 per cent in 2003/4, and the age of marriage to someone residing outside the EU has increased from 20 to 25 years. One impact of the increase in age has been that some couples have been forced to migrate to other European countries such as Sweden (Stollavistskaia and McElroy, 2006) in order to get married. Concerns have been raised by groups such as the Danish Institute for Human Rights that Danish family reunification laws are discriminatory, as they violate the right to family life guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights, that they discriminate against consensual marriages, and only apply to non-EU citizens and to Danish citizens with other ethnic backgrounds (Stollavistskaia and McElroy, 2006). Germany has introduced a law that makes forced marriage a particularly severe case of the criminal offence of 'coercion' (Berghahn and Rostock, 2006) and in Pakistan, there were, at the time of writing, discussions on pushing forward legislation aiming to outlaw forced marriage (News24, 2006). For the first time in legal history, forced marriage is being prosecuted as a 'crime against humanity' in Sierra Leone's post-conflict Special Court (Park, 2006).

Other European responses include specific measures to combat 'marriages of convenience' for visa purposes, which are often conflated with forced marriages. There have also been debates in the UK and elsewhere on whether or not to criminalize forced marriage (Foreign and Commonwealth Office et al., 2006). The absence of clear support on criminalization led to the proposal being dropped, and it was suggested instead that there be increased training offered to professionals and

more engagement with affected communities on this issue. A further suggestion was that statutory agencies should follow guidelines, share best practice, and ensure that existing legislation is fully implemented including making better use of civil remedies and the family courts. In 2006, proposals to include civil remedies for forced marriage in the Family Law Act 1996 were introduced by Lord Lester. These have received royal assent (Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007) and were implemented in autumn 2008. Some of the remedies include: use of injunctions to restrain parents or any other party from forcing or attempting to force young people into a marriage; provision for third party intervention, and emergency and immediate interventions; compensation for damages; and placing the governmental guidance on forced marriage to public bodies on a statutory footing.

It is within this context that the research team[2] was commissioned by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (now called the Border Agency) to explore the following:

- the impact and outcome of the recent increase in the age of sponsorship and entry of a spouse from 16 to 18 years;
- the benefits and risks of increasing the age of sponsorship or entry to 18, 21 and 24;
- the range of communities in which forced marriage happens; and
- the factors which were perceived to increase or decrease the risk of forced marriages.

Methodology

The very nature of forced marriage means that individuals experiencing such marriages are a 'hard to reach' group. They are a 'hard to reach' group as a) victims may not label what is happening to them as forced marriage at the time of the marriage; b) they may not report the forced marriage to agencies such as the police, social services or to voluntary sector agencies; c) as with other forms of abuse, they may find it difficult to speak out. This makes it extremely difficult to develop accurate measures of the prevalence of forced marriages or to obtain reliable quantitative information. It was decided, therefore, that the study should use a largely qualitative approach employing a variety of methods that would enable exploration of the research questions. The study was conducted in Tower Hamlets (London), Manchester

and Birmingham. These three locations were selected as the three case study areas because of the high density of communities identified where forced marriage is an issue. Whilst forced marriage is not restricted to particular religions or nationalities, the majority of reported cases have been from Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Overall, the research involved:

- Familiarization interviews with 13 individuals from a range of key government departments, statutory sector organizations and the voluntary sector. This included organizations such as the Metropolitan Police, the Forced Marriage Unit and the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. Voluntary organizations included: Southall Black Sisters, Imkaan and national level Jewish and African community groups.
- Stakeholder interviews with 45 individuals across Birmingham, Manchester, and Tower Hamlets. This included Women's Aid organizations, community organizations, refugee organizations, mosques, counsellors, college staff, and the police. These were largely face-to-face, in-depth interviews using a semi-structured topic guide relating to our four research questions outlined above. A few interviews were conducted over the phone where participants preferred this. Verbatim notes were kept of the interview. These were offered to the participants to check for accuracy and for any additional material to be added (or removed) if the participant so wished.
- In-depth interviews with 38 survivors of forced marriage (33 women and 5 men). Survivors were identified via stakeholders and snowballing techniques and were thus a purposive sample. Interviews took place at a venue to suit the participant and costs for transport and childcare were covered where required. Interviews were conducted in the language that the participant preferred. The research team speak a number of languages but we also used interpreters. However, most of the interviews were conducted in English. Care was taken to ensure that we were able to refer participants back to agencies if that was required. The fact that some members of the research team were practitioners in domestic violence services ensured that this was possible. Questions were open ended, and asked about circumstances leading to marriage, expectations of marriage and how much choice was involved, views about the proposed legislation and potential benefits and risks as well as their views on what would increase/decrease the likelihood of forced marriages taking place. Where permission was given, interviews were transcribed and participants were offered the transcripts for amendments. Where the interview had taken

place in a language other than English, we were able to offer a recording of the interview. Whilst this arrangement was not ideal, it should be noted that this was the best we could do within our budgetary and time constraints. In the event, very few offers of transcripts were taken up by survivors. All interviews (survivors, stakeholders and familiarization visits) were analysed thematically.

- A mapping survey of 79 community based organizations providing a service (not necessarily on forced marriage) to a range of communities across Birmingham (*n* = 25), Manchester (*n* = 24), and Tower Hamlets (*n* = 30). This was analysed using SPSS.

- Twenty-eight departments/projects interviewed in depth about the content and structure of their databases.

- Fifteen focus groups with a wide range of communities involving 97 individuals (82 women and 15 men) with ages ranging from 15 to 60. Focus groups were thought to be the most appropriate method to obtain more in-depth information regarding the practice and perceptions of forced marriage from a wider range of communities. The sampling for focus groups was influenced by previous elements of the research in four ways. First, there was a gap in terms of age and we wanted to rectify this in the focus groups. In particular we wanted to elicit the views of younger people (16–18 years) as well as those of older generations (parents of young people and grandparents). Our second criterion was based on the need for diversity. As South Asian communities had featured quite substantially in the rest of the study, we needed to maintain this strand, but also engage with other communities who had said that forced marriages occurred in their communities, or where the literature appeared to identify communities (other than South Asian) where forced marriage occurred. Third, homosexuality had emerged as a significant trigger into forced marriage and it was therefore important to include at least one focus group around this issue. Fourth, issues of asylum and immigration had also been dominant in survivor accounts and so merited a focus group. Particular difficulties associated with conducting a focus group with this last group include the transient nature of this group and the trust issues involved, particularly in relation to a Home Office funded study. However, in the event it was not possible to convene such a group owing to the additional time required to build appropriate networks for such a focus group. Focus groups were convened with Kurdish communities, African communities, Chinese (mainland) communities, a range of South Asian communities (including young people aged 16–18) and a lesbian group. Groups were convened by the researchers in locations negotiated with each group. We

used vignettes as a method to discuss issues more broadly and followed this with questions regarding the increase in age, perceived risks and benefits. Discussions were taped, transcribed and analysed thematically.

This approach generated rich data on issues related to forced marriage, and also examined the research questions from different angles and in relation to different communities. The variety of methods used provided a degree of triangulation, and also enough breadth to allow general patterns to emerge. Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the methodological challenges, but we would draw brief attention to three key issues. First, the restrictive nature of recent immigration policy has been well documented (Cohen, 2001, 2003; Humphries, 2004) and this posed particular methodological issues. As a research team who are committed professionally, politically and personally to work towards the elimination of violence against women, the close association of this study within the arena of immigration was troublesome. In particular, we were concerned not to become co-opted into the state machinery in a way which was antithetical to combating violence against minoritized women. Feminist work has often been at the forefront of engaging with 'difference', yet a common pitfall is for feminist sympathies to be engaged in a racist manner in the name of gender equality (see Razack, 2004). Our alertness to this potential dynamic helped us to keep in view issues of gender and 'race'/culture simultaneously and therefore to avoid this pitfall.

Second, as already highlighted, there is often an association of forced marriage with certain communities – South Asian and/or Muslim – and we were anxious that our research should not feed into further pathologizing of these communities. There was also the possibility that minoritized participants (stakeholders, community organizations for the mapping survey, survivors) might perceive the study as instrumental in further restricting immigration and in potentially interfering with cultural practices around arranged marriages. This had the potential of creating distrustful and suspicious research relationships right from the outset, and of creating a sampling bias in favour of organizations and individuals who did not have a critical or radical perspective on the issues being explored. Whilst this may have been the case, our inclusion of a wide range of organizations from overtly feminist and anti-racist organizations right through to an imam at a mosque illustrates that we were successful in engaging with participants from a variety of perspectives.

The third challenge revolved around the definition of forced marriage. As discussed in more detail below, there is a widely accepted government level definition of forced marriage. Whilst the study adopted this definition, it soon became clear that the issues participants raised were much wider than the accepted definition. This poses some interesting questions which we return to later on in the paper.

Definitional issues

Forced marriage is defined as taking place: 'where one or both parties are coerced into a marriage against their will and under duress' (Foreign and Commonwealth Office et al., 2006: 4). Duress includes physical and emotional pressure, and it is further stated that:

> It is very different from arranged marriage, where both parties give their full and free consent to the marriage. The tradition of arranged marriages has operated successfully within many communities and many countries for a very long time. (Foreign and Commonwealth Office et al., 2006: 4)

This is a useful definition as it is broad ranging in scope and includes a range of coercive behaviours. However, as with domestic violence, issues of physical and sexual violence are frequently privileged over emotional pressure and coercion. In particular, the term 'force' was not thought to adequately cover issues of subtle pressure where a young person may not realize what is taking place until it is too late, or may not themselves identify the marriage as 'forced' as no physical violence occurred. Concerns were expressed by participants that the term 'forced marriage' as conceptualized now was limited and often did not express the range of experiences that women and men went through. As this problematic emerged fairly early on with the first group of interviews with key agencies, we responded to this by adopting an approach that would tease out the various components of what might constitute a forced marriage or the circumstances in which a forced marriage might occur (e.g. pregnancy outside of marriage, being gay, feeling unable to say no to potential suitors for fear of upsetting family etc.). We sought to ensure that a wide range of experiences could be considered, that physical coercion and violence were not necessarily privileged over more subtle emotional pressure so that responses from a range of communities, stakeholders and individuals would thus be maximized.

Further, forced marriage is also included within the domestic violence definition used by the government. Domestic violence is defined as 'any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality' and includes 'issues of concern to black and minority ethnic communities' (Home Office website, n.d.). While significant as it recognizes cases of violence within wider family networks, the domestic violence definition is somewhat limited for forced marriage cases, as it is incident based, and is limited to adults. Additionally, forced marriage cases often include community members who would not be seen as family members in the mainstream British sense (Gangoli et al., 2006; Sanghera, 2007).

Definitional issues also impacted on practical issues. For example, when should coercive or pressurizing behaviour be logged within a police database as a forced marriage? Should this happen at a point when a young person contacted them to say they were very worried that they were on the brink of being forced into marriage? Or alternatively should it be logged once the person had already been forced to marry? Should this be logged as a forced marriage or for example, abduction or rape where these were elements of the forced marriage? This type of issue was one of the difficulties associated with compiling or comparing datasets on forced marriage (where these existed).

As indicated by the definition of forced marriage outlined earlier, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office considers there to be a clear distinction between forced and arranged marriages, based on whether consent has been given or not. Normally a forced marriage is taken to mean a lack of consent at the point of entry into a marriage, but if the marriage arrangements are very rushed and the young person does not really understand what is happening, or does not have time to respond, or has been given inadequate information, then the notion of consent is questionable. In particular, there can be a 'slippage' or blurring between arranged and forced marriage, as the following focus group member pointed out: 'they will arrange the marriage and if you reject the person they will force you to marry the person'.

This also poses questions of *exit* options (particularly where consent has not been given or is questionable) and the pressure (emotional, physical, financial, cultural, immigration status and so on) that is put upon women and men to stay in a forced marriage. The pressures to remain in forced marriages echo the pressures encountered at the entry

point and raise the issue of whether a sole focus on entry points is sufficient for the definition of forced marriage. We discuss this issue further later on in the paper.

Given the complexities of the definitional issues of the term 'forced marriage' our approach was twofold. Firstly, in dealings with agencies who were familiar with the government definition (e.g. the police, law centres, schools etc.) we kept to the government's definition. When contacting smaller, community based agencies (e.g. the survey), focus groups and survivors, in addition to the official definition of forced marriage, we also used the term 'pressurized to marry' thus explicitly allowing for more subtle forms of pressure such as emotional and psychological pressure. As discussed above, this was further broken down to its constituent parts (e.g. being gay). Clearly no definition can be all encompassing and our approach highlights the socially constructed nature of forced marriage, and our attempts at 'translating' this for audiences who are not familiar with government speak. This 'translation' took the form of breaking down the terms 'forced marriage' and 'pressurized to marry' into their constituent parts and identified potential situations (discussed above e.g. pregnancy outside of marriage) where people might be forced to marry. Judging by the variety of responses that were elicited, we are confident that we encompassed a wide range of experiences.

Closely related to the definitional problems discussed above is the popular construction of forced marriages as occurring only in South Asian communities. The strength of this construction was apparent throughout the study and repeated to us on many occasions. This is unsurprising given that existing knowledge around forced marriage is largely centred around South Asian and Muslim communities. This can lead to an assumption that these communities are especially vulnerable to this issue, and here we outline important considerations to contextualize the higher number of cases within these communities. These include: demographics, as South Asian communities are the largest ethnic minority group in the UK. In addition, there have historically been very articulate and powerful South Asian feminist groups that have challenged gender related issues within these communities, including forced marriage, honour related violence and dowry related violence. For these reasons, there has also been much research on forms of marriage within South Asian communities, including arranged marriages that are sometimes confused with forced marriage (Caroll, 1998; Gangoli et al., 2006).

The next section explores the range of communities in which forced marriage takes place which helps to destabilize the construction of forced marriage as a purely South Asian or Muslim issue.

Communities where forced marriage takes place

The mapping survey asked respondents whether forced marriage happened in the communities covered by their work. The findings suggest that forced marriage is an issue across a wide range of communities. At least two-thirds of respondents thought that forced marriage took place in the communities with which they worked. The affirmative responses (related to community) are shown in Table 1.

Given that the majority of the organizations surveyed worked with South Asian communities, it follows that most participants saw forced marriage as occurring in these communities (n = 55, 69.6%). As noted before, there has been much focus on Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities with regard to forced marriage, and therefore a wider recognition of the issue. It is important to recognize, however, that a wide range of other minority ethnic, religious as well as majority communities were also named, including African (n = 22, 27.8%), Middle Eastern (n = 21, 26.6%), Latin American (n = 7, 8.9%), 'white' (n = 12, 15.2%), and Muslim (n = 34, 43%). Also mentioned to a lesser extent were Eastern Europeans, Albanian, Chinese, Jewish, and some Christian groups, including Mormon, Jehovah's Witness and Greek Orthodox.

Between one-fifth and one-third of the agencies surveyed thought that forced marriage was 'very common' in the communities with which they worked. Two-thirds of voluntary sector organizations and almost as many of the statutory sector agencies thought that forced marriage was either very common or sometimes occurred in the communities with which they worked. Almost one in ten statutory and a similar

Table 1 The communities in which forced marriage occurs as reported by respondents to the mapping survey

Main community targeted	N	%
South Asian	43	37.4
Somali	20	17.4
Other African	19	16.5
Chinese	9	7.8
Middle Eastern	17	14.8
Latin American	7	6.1
	115[a]	100

[a] The number adds to more than 79 because some organizations worked with more than one type of community.

proportion of voluntary sector organizations, came across between ten and fifty cases per year in their work. The largest group of mapping survey respondents ($n = 34$, 43%) thought that forced marriage cases involved marriage to someone abroad who would settle in the UK after marriage. Being forced to marry within the UK, or being forced to marry someone abroad with the intention of settlement there, were considered the less likely options (both $n = 7$, 8.9%).

Interviews with stakeholders also indicated that forced marriage was considered an issue for a wide range of communities outside the South Asian diaspora. This was echoed by focus group participants. Communities where forced marriage was seen as taking place both within and outside the EU included Irish traveller women, orthodox/ fundamental religious communities (including Christian, Jewish and Muslim), Armenian, Turkish, some mainland Chinese communities, Eastern European communities (linked to trafficking and prostitution) and some African countries, in particular Eritrea, Somalia and Sudan. While some South Asian focus group participants from Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities accepted that forced marriage did take place in their ethnic or in their religious community, others believed that the problem was not as extreme as was depicted within popular culture and the media. Several respondents from Bangladeshi and Pakistani communities believed that forced marriage was projected as a problem specific to their religion, that is Islam, pointing out in contrast that Islamic marriage was 'based on consent'. Some focus group participants from Middle Eastern communities thought that forced marriage was a common occurrence in their communities, and Kurdish women stated that this was a major issue among Kurdish communities, where '90% of girls aged between 15–35 were forced to marry'.

The majority of survivors interviewed were South Asian ($n = 33$, 87%) and so this confirms forced marriage as an issue within these communities. Importantly, the few African and African Caribbean female survivors interviewed implied that the focus on South Asian communities regarding forced marriages obscures what was happening in their own communities:

> . . . everyone says forced marriage is the Asian way . . . they know just one side of the forced marriage, for example you could not believe that I didn't want to get married, that people are forced in different countries, different tribes, different traditions, where you don't want to marry . . . you can feel what's the consequences of telling people what's happening . . . there's not

much information about that . . . we hear more about the Asian side but there are so many people are forced to get married for different reasons

I think a lot of other people out there think, forced, oh, that happens to Asian women, it doesn't happen to us not in our community.

a simple reason your father is poor and he wants money [bride price] . . . you have to please your family can't just do it for yourself.

This alerts us to the dangers of continuing with a construction of forced marriage which erases the experiences of women from communities other than South Asian and the particular issues raised by these participants are elaborated by exploring women and men's routes into forced marriage. Focusing on participant experiences allows for a more complex understanding of the factors contributing to forced marriage and therefore possibilities of developing policies and interventions both to prevent forced marriage and to exit them. However, before we do this, we critically analyse the UK government's emphasis on age of marriage/sponsorship as an intervention to prevent forced marriage.

The age debate

As discussed above, the age of marriage to a person outside the EU and related sponsorship has increased across Europe. Following its consultation on increasing the age of marriage/sponsorship, the UK government has recently increased the age of marriage and sponsorship to spouses from non-EU countries to 21 years. In relation to our study, research participants could offer no evidence that raising the age of sponsorship or entry from 16 to 18 years old had any major impact on the incidence of forced marriage cases. Further, the data currently held in large scale national databases are such that it was not possible to measure the impact that the change in age legislation has had on the incidence of forced marriage.

In considering the benefits and risks of increasing the age of sponsorship or entry to 21 or 24, the study found that there was limited support for raising the age to 21 or 24. Only 16% of stakeholders and 17% of survivors held the view that increasing the age would be beneficial. Some participants viewed age as immaterial in preventing forced marriage as such marriages can occur across a wider range of ages, and that other factors (discussed later) are much more pertinent.

The potential benefits of raising the entry age included the possibility of greater maturity, access to education and financial independence for young people, all of which were perceived to better position young people to resist forced marriage. However, these benefits were also perceived by participants as being largely outweighed by the risks, with 88% of key individuals, 71% of stakeholders and 54% of survivors indicating this view. Across all aspects of the study, four main themes emerged from the material in relation to the risks associated with increasing the age further to 21 or 24.

First, participants reported the likelihood of increased risk of physical and psychological harm to victims and potential victims of forced marriage. This included the possibility of young British women being taken abroad to marry and kept there forcibly until they were old enough to sponsor their spouses; entering the UK with false documentation; and implications for mental health, particularly attempted suicide and self-harm. The concern was that an increase in age could also prevent victims from accessing some potential sources of support, such as those provided via child protection legislation and education-based counselling support. Second, participants viewed the increase in age as being discriminatory as this will impose a dual system of marriage ages within the UK, with a disproportionate effect on certain minority communities. Hence, the age of marriage for those marrying within the EU will remain at 16 (with parental consent), but will increase to 21 for those marrying non-EU spouses. Third, participants drew attention to the human rights implications of the increase in age, in that the right to family life would be denied until the person was 21 as they would not be permitted to marry a non-EU spouse until then even where the marriage was a 'love' marriage or 'arranged' by mutual consent. Fourth, there was a grave suspicion that the changes in age requirements were only a measure to restrict immigration rather than prevent forced marriage, particularly as there is nothing in this policy change to prevent 'home-grown' (UK and EU based) forced marriages.

By exploring people's journeys into forced marriage it becomes evident that a far wider range of factors come into play. The emphasis on age in the UK and the EU detracts from a more nuanced understanding of the issues which impact on forced marriage. We discuss six key issues which emerged from interview material from survivors of forced marriage and from our focus group discussions.

First, the issue of poverty and hardship was a key factor in some accounts and was explicitly mentioned by two of the African women

interviewed as a route into forced marriage. Both instances were linked to bride price (see also Otoo-Oyertey and Pobi, 2003). 'Poverty is the major thing . . . if she [prospective in-laws] gives money, the family won't ask [for the young woman's consent] . . . the money will buy rice for them. . . . Because of money, they will send their kids [for marriage]'. Choice and consent were therefore not available in these situations and crucially women are structurally located as the conduit to family survival and women's own aspirations are subordinated within patriarchal and class structures: 'Your father possesses you then your husband possesses you there is nowhere to go . . . Women are money . . . they say the more girls you have the more you will get richer . . .'. This was also reiterated in both focus groups conducted with members from African communities, one with Ugandan professionals, and the other with women from a range of African countries:

> Because if a father thinks, believes, that he can get so many manner of cattle or dowry, out of this one girl, and he can use that for three of his sons, to marry, to get them wives, then he's going to get that girl out of school at thirteen.

Two focus groups conducted with Chinese women of different ages mentioned financial pressures on young women to marry. Where Chinese women from poorer backgrounds were made an offer to marry a richer person, particularly a husband with British citizenship, then economic security was privileged over consent or 'love' and this was interpreted by the focus groups as force.

Second, compulsory heterosexuality and marriage were raised by some participants from a number of cultural backgrounds. Importantly, it is only recently that the UK officially recognized gay relationships in the form of civil partnerships, pension arrangements etc. Hence the compulsory nature of heterosexuality is widespread in a very wide range of cultures. A white woman from a lesbian focus group (various cultural backgrounds) pointed out that marriage was seen as a 'cure' for 'deviant' sexual behaviour:

> I guess for me I wouldn't necessarily see that as just peculiar to this community [South Asian] . . . I think that that's happened in white communities and majoritised communities as well . . . if you get married then that will iron out all the, the bumps of your sexuality so to speak and frankly that's saying isn't it, all she needs is a good fuck.

Five of the survivor interviews had content relating to gay sexuality. Three survivors were pressurized to marry because they were gay or lesbian, and two women from abroad married men whom they later discovered were gay. A woman from India was forced to marry a man living in the UK, when her parents discovered that she was lesbian. A lesbian woman from Sierra Leone was forced to marry her aunt's son. A gay British Indian man was pressurized to marry despite his parents knowing that he was gay, and this pressure continued throughout his 20s and 30s despite his being in a relationship with his current (male) partner. With regard to pressure on gay people to marry, the Syrian, Iranian and Moroccan focus group respondents thought that this could be perceived as a forced marriage, but also pointed out that homosexuality was not allowed within Islam. Iranian participants were more critical of such attitudes, and suggested that they would accept their children's sexuality even if they were not personally comfortable with it.

Third, closely related to compulsory heterosexuality is the requirement in many cultures to insist on sexual propriety for women. This was evident in some of the survivor interviews and in some of the focus groups. For example, the young Bangladeshi women's focus group believed that forced marriage was more likely to occur if the young woman was acting outside the community 'norms': '. . . when a daughter of the family is misbehaving, or gets caught . . . doing something wrong, like with a boyfriend or smoking or doing . . . drugs or alcohol, anything wrong'. The gendered surveillance of young South Asian women as contributing to forced marriage has been noted in other studies (Gangoli et al., 2006).

Kurdish women also reported a range of marriage practices including an increase in polygamous marriages in Iraq in the last few years. They indicated that women in their community often experienced gender discrimination, manifested through sexual control, forced marriage and domestic violence, and that this may create very contradictory situations and emotions for the women concerned:

> They [girls] are under so much pressure from their family. And some of them they accept it easily because they say obeying a father, brother means everything. Because it is a culture. But most of them, the others, they are kind of liberated and they, their wives, they do not accept it and they kill themselves or they live with this depression for ever. And that is why the issue of domestic violence was very very high in UK, especially in the Kurdish community because of that, forced marriage.

The mixed Middle Eastern and North African group accepted that there could be emotional pressure in relation to some arranged marriages, and that such marriages might thus be forced.

Fourth, the issue of child marriages was also raised by participants. As mentioned in the introduction, child marriage is often conceptualized as a form of forced marriage, due to the inability of children to consent (Forum on Marriage, 2000). African focus group respondents reported on international marriages involving very young brides from Uganda married to much older men living in the UK, defining this as a form of child abuse.

> A man who is forty-five, marrying a sixteen year or seventeen year old, is not marrying a wife. He's marrying a . . . slave. Someone he can control. Someone he can tell to do what he wants to do when. Somebody who doesn't know where to find help. Someone who is locked in the house as he goes to work. You know it's just a way of, child abuse.

Kurdish women reported on early marriages of girls before the age of 16, which they believed were non-consensual. Chinese focus groups were also aware of cases of kidnapping and trafficking of young girls from rural areas of China for marriage to men within China and possibly abroad. This could be linked to the declining sex ratio in China from a ratio of 108.5 boys to 100 girls in the early 1980s to 120 boys for each 100 girls in 2007. It has been suggested by Amartya Sen (1999) that the Chinese one child policy in the context of son preference has resulted in high female infant mortality, female infanticide, sex selection abortion of female foetuses and abandonment of girls. Other economists in the 1980s predicted that the shortage of girls of marriageable age owing to son preference could lead to kidnapping and forced marriages of young girls in different social contexts (Dube, 1983).

Fifth, immigration and asylum issues featured in 14 of the 38 survivor accounts, including 12 women and 2 men. The 14 individuals concerned originated from a wide range of countries: Pakistan ($n = 7$), Bangladesh ($n = 2$), India ($n = 2$), Iran ($n = 1$), Sierra Leone ($n = 1$) and Mozambique ($n = 1$). Two types of forced marriage experiences linked to asylum and immigration could be discerned. The first set of survivors were either foreign nationals who were forced to marry to improve their own career and life chances, or were UK nationals who were under obligation to improve the life chances of relatives from outside the EU. Participants from the Bangladeshi focus group believed that Bangladeshi

men who married British Bangladeshi women did so because they believed that it would improve their financial status, and that there was little knowledge of the reality of life in the UK: 'They think it's [UK passport] a passport to heaven. When they don't know how much we have to struggle. Come on now. We're all working class here in this room. Yeah? We're not [living] in a bloody big mansion do we?'

The second category concerned women who were forced into marriage in their countries of origin (outside the EU) and who had claimed or were claiming asylum in the UK on the basis of gender persecution. For the women claiming asylum, or others subject to the two year rule, their problems were compounded by the policy of no recourse to public funds. Without access to refuge space, housing or other welfare and support services, it is clearly very difficult to leave a forced marriage (Burman and Chantler, 2005). This issue is closely bound up with exiting forced marriages.

Lastly, the sixth issue relates to exiting forced marriage. A wide range of organizations including South Asian, Chinese and more general women's organizations, counselling services, immigration units, and law centres challenged traditional constructions of forced marriage as only focusing on consent to enter a marriage. Exit out of such relationships was considered crucial, including the systems that keep women in forced marriages and thus may be deemed to increase risk. These included structural issues like no recourse to public funds for women and men who may have entered the country on a spouse visa for the first two years, until they become eligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain. As this participant said, 'if the government had a policy on forced marriage, then they would also be looking at women with no recourse [to public funds]'.

In addition, the emotional and social pressures to enter into a forced marriage continue through the marriage, thus making it difficult for women to escape forced marriage. Women expressed the view that inability to escape also needed to be conceptualized as a forced marriage, and this had long term negative impacts on women's ability to move on. Where women or men have been forced into marriage as a way to control or correct their wayward behaviour, the surveillance continues after the marriage, and survivors have to find ways of managing this if they are to leave the marriage. This is highlighted in the example of a lesbian woman from India who was forced into marriage with a British Indian man, and she had to convince her husband and his family that she was a good wife and daughter-in-law.

> I did all the things a good Indian wife should do, I changed the way
> I dressed, looked after my mother in law, pressed her feet every night,
> didn't insist on getting a job though it would have given me more free-
> dom . . . That sort of thing you know. I was playing a part. All the time.
> I was trying to get back to [name of partner], I knew she was waiting
> for me.

She finally managed to escape after four years when pregnant, but had
to pay a heavy price for it as she had to go into hiding from her family.

> I feel guilt sometimes. My daughter doesn't know her father or grandpar-
> ents. But for me it is a matter of survival. I can't go there again. I miss
> my family, sometimes even my husband but they will destroy me if they
> find out. He was a good man really, in another life he could have been
> my friend.

Whilst it is right that the focus should be on 'consent', what is clear
from the interview material is that consent is sometimes hard to
establish. In addition, there may well be cases where despite refusal,
a marriage will take place. Thus participants highlighted that these
factors make it important to focus on not only 'entry into', but also
'exit out of' such relationships. In relation to the domestic violence
concession,[3] it is important for agencies (including government
departments) to recognize that if a person has been forced into a
marriage, this should automatically count as evidence of domestic
violence. These accounts alert us to the importance of focusing on
exit points and to challenge the current policy focus which is geared
largely towards entry points.

Conclusions

This paper illuminates the complex and multidimensional nature of
forced marriage and illustrates why a sole focus on increasing the age
of sponsorship or marriage to 21 or 24 years for non-EU marriages may
not prevent forced marriage. Issues of poverty, sexuality, gender inequal-
ities, violence, child marriages, and immigration and asylum featured
strongly in survivor accounts as conduits into forced marriage. Such
factors were considered by many to be more salient aspects of forced

marriage than age. Moreover, the increase in age was considered by the majority of participants to be a breach of human rights standards, discriminatory in nature and more about further restrictions in immigration rather than a strategy to prevent forced marriage. Participants also pointed out that this intervention would not tackle UK or EU forced marriages and that it would have unintended consequences e.g. a longer period of surveillance and coercion with negative outcomes for victims. The study also highlights a range of communities where forced marriage is an issue, including some 'white' communities. A sole focus on South Asian communities detracts from the factors contributing to forced marriage in other communities, thus making those experiences invisible. The danger of gearing policy and practice towards specific communities and on age is a far from satisfactory response to tackling forced marriage. Participants in the study strongly favoured responses which included better support services to victims, community education, ensuring adequate strategic planning at a local level, and training and development for front line staff rather than the current policy focus on age.

The study also reveals the limitations of the current conceptualization of forced marriage. In particular, we draw attention to the deficiency of concentrating only on entry/consent into marriage and instead suggest that equal attention be paid to exiting forced marriage. Survivor and practitioner accounts highlight that post-marriage experiences and therefore exit strategies need to be conceptualized as part of forced marriage. Lastly, forced marriage needs to be understood much more broadly, in relation both to the communities it occurs in and to the structural inequalities (nationally and internationally) which generate the conditions in which forced marriages flourish.

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Notes

1. The authors' names are in alphabetical order and each author has made an equal contribution to the writing of the article.
2. The research team comprised Professor Marianne Hester (Principal Investigator), Dr Khatidja Chantler (co-ordinator, Manchester), Dr Geetanjali Gangoli (co-ordinator, Bristol), Jasvinder Devgon, Sandhya Sharma and Ann Singleton.
3. Where a victim can provide evidence of domestic violence (e.g. an injunction, a caution or report from a general practitioner or social worker), s/he is no longer subject to the two year rule.

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