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*Critical Social Policy* 2010 30: 189

DOI: 10.1177/0261018309358289

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## **Forced marriage among men: An unrecognized problem**

### *Abstract*

Forced marriage is generally viewed as a clash between culture and gender and the fact that men are also victims, in a small number of cases, escapes attention of policy makers and activists. While the overall approach to forced marriage has helped men as well they, however, have remained below the radar of public concern. A problem particular to men is their unwillingness to articulate in public forums their predicament as questions of masculinity are then raised. Ultimately men will have to break the silence, organize and mobilize collectively if they wish to see specific policies that target men.

**Key words:** arranged marriage, definition, numbers, patterns, policy

### **Introduction**

The literature on forced marriage indicates that international and national interest and concern has grown since the issue was first raised in the UK parliament in 2000 by Anne Cryer MP. Whilst the primary focus has been on the plight and concerns of women, it is recognized that a small number of cases pertain to men. This article explores the following: the factors that lead to forced marriages among men, their responses and the impact on them. In some respects the context and the framework of analysis for men in forced marriage are similar to those of women but, whilst there are points of convergences, there are also important differences. General theoretical discussions provide a useful starting point even when we want to specifically consider the case of men.

## Literature review

The issue has been approached from a number of perspectives and different analytical approaches emphasize particular aspects of the issue. Forced marriage has been considered in the national and international literature from an ethnic perspective and constructed as cultural pathology. Forced marriage is seen as an extension of endogamy practices where there is slippage between arranged and forced marriage and cultural notions of *izzat* (honour) and *sharam* (shame) play a role (Samad and Eade, 2003; Gangoli et al., 2006). Others suggest that forced marriage is a harmful cultural practice that also encompasses child marriage. Thus the thrust of this discussion becomes an assessment of traditional practices and laws and how they affect women and girls (Ouattara et al., 1998). It also highlights those aspects of multiculturalism that condone cultural practices such as forced marriage (Samad and Eade, 2003; Razack, 2004). There is also a literature that draws a clear distinction between religious practices and cultural interpretations and, specifically, highlights how religion is misinterpreted in order to support patriarchal practices (Hassan, 1999; Gangoli et al., 2006).

The cultural perspective encompasses gendered understandings of the roles played by women in the reproduction of community. Ethnic boundaries are often dependent on gender attributes organized around sexuality, marriage and the family. The socially constructed markers of 'honour, purity, the mother of patriots, reproducers of the nation', make women symbolic of the collectivity. This approach also sees forced marriage as symptomatic of wider issues associated with domestic violence and control of women's sexuality. For example, studies commissioned by the Home Office link forced marriage with domestic violence; seeing it as an abuse of women's human rights and a form of gender based violence (*A Choice by Right*, 2000; Parmar, Sampson and Diamond, 2005). However, critics have pointed out the importance of considering women's agency and that, in many cases, women are consciously involved in the process of forced marriage and should be seen as both victims and perpetrators (Abrams, 2000). Child marriage is considered a form of child abuse with consequences for young girls' sexual health, and is associated with domestic violence and high maternal and child mortality rates (Ouattara et al., 1998). Child marriage is always considered as a form of forced marriage as full and free consent is considered to be inevitably absent due to age and gender related power inequalities.

As indicated above men are also victims in a minority of cases, and there are often similarities with women in terms of the reasons why. This poses challenges for the perspective that sees forced marriage exclusively as an issue for women.

The role of social class has also been considered but it is argued that the relationships between class, gender and culture are complex. It is also argued that multiple factors need to be built into the variable social class. Moreover, if forced marriage is located within the category domestic violence then domestic violence takes place across social classes. Social class is a subordinate variable, which needs to be cross-referenced with other variables (Smith et al., 2000).

A number of studies have explored the intergenerational debates that are taking place among Black and minority ethnic (BME) communities on the issue of forced marriage. This approach suggests that the divisions are more clearly related to generational than gender differences. There are, it is suggested, clear generational differences on whether force is acceptable or not. Moreover, force is narrowly interpreted by some generations and does not include emotional and psychological pressure. There is also a suggestion that there is a demographic bulge, which can explain the propensity of forced marriage in particular communities (Samad and Eade, 2003).

Some have argued that interventions by a range of state actors in relation to forced marriage, showing a 'new found concern' for BME victims, reflect deep-rooted racism particularly against Muslims. Thus government policies on forced marriages are not driven by the state's desire to empower victims but by the desire to police BME communities. This argument is reinforced by the lack of support given to grassroots BME women's organizations. Moreover, the continuing deportation of women at risk of violence reveals the partial nature of the state's commitment (Wilson, 2007). This perspectives links with literature grappling with the issues in relation to cultural superiority and national identity which suggests that, while engaging with the violation of women's rights among BME communities notions of 'cultural clash' are employed which reinforce racialized stereotypes (Volpp, 2000; Razack, 2004).

A significant body of literature in the UK addresses forced marriage in terms of immigration. This overlaps with the perspective highlighted above which addresses the role of 'race' and racism. Policies and practices conflate 'false marriage' and forced marriage (Philips and Dustin, 2004: 535). Others highlight the gendered and racialized

nature of immigration laws that disadvantage women migrating from abroad and women who sponsor a spouse from abroad (Hall, 2000). However, others suggest that immigration laws encourage forced marriage as the dual nationality provision is used to circumvent them. It has been pointed out that policies on forced marriage have created fear among BME groups and that the government is using the issue of forced marriage to tighten up immigration rules (Samad and Eade, 2003; Skalbergs and Gulicova, 2004).

I would suggest that racism, gender, culture, social class and generation intersect in relation to forced marriage and all these factors have some bearing when considering the issue of forced marriage among men. The difficulty of following a single approach leads to a series of disconnected worlds where oppression in one category does not link up with other categories and forms of oppression. Clearly the real life experiences of individuals are complex and each perspective can only explain a part of the general picture. It is necessary to consider a multi-dimensional approach based upon the intersectionality of gender, race, ethnicity, age, immigration and social class. Intersectionality allows for the examination of power dynamics between communities and within communities and helps to highlight the different aspects involved in a forced marriage (Anthias, 2002; Yuval-Davis, 2006). The failure to work with intersectionality by policy makers and practitioners is reflected in the difficulties encountered by the victims and survivors of forced marriages (Samad and Eade, 2003).

### **Marriage: Continuum from love to forced marriage**

Individuals rarely make marital decisions without the involvement of families, whether nuclear or extended. Both the state and religious authorities regulate these decisions and they confer rights and obligations on partners and their relatives. The family, therefore, plays an important linking role between the private and public spheres. Rates of marriage vary across communities with Black Caribbean people more likely to remain single or co-habit than Whites or South Asians. The rates of marriage among Pakistanis and Bangladeshis are comparatively high (Modood et al., 1997: 24; Office for National Statistics, 2005). The governing principle of marital choice in any community is endogamy – the selection of a partner from a similar social background shaped, for example, by race, class, ethnicity, religion, age and

education – or simply put the girl/boy next door. In the population as a whole inter-ethnic marriages, those between people married to or living as married with a partner from a different ethnic group, form a very small proportion, about 2%, of all partnerships in the UK population. However, among BME groups it is higher among Mixed Race people (78%) and Other Black (48%); considerably lower among Indians (6%), 4% among Pakistanis and 3% among Bangladeshis (Office for National Statistics, 2005).

Arranged marriage, once common in British society, has generally disappeared but the practice persisted among the aristocracy far longer, where it was a means for forging political and economic alliances. Some writers argue that arranged marriage is still viewed favourably by young Asians, but the notion of arranged is changing, and the numbers that are ambivalent have increased (Anwar, 1998: 109–10; Samad and Eade, 2003). There is a commonly held perception that there is a sharp distinction between arranged and free choice marriages. This view fails to distinguish between various forms of arranged marriages or to understand that there is a continuum between traditional forms of arranged marriages at one end of the spectrum, where parents make the crucial decisions, and free choice marriage at the other end, where the individual is the primary decision maker. The use of marriage bureaux, speed dating and websites by White people is indicative of the overlap between different marriage patterns. Stopes-Roe and Cochrane (1990) suggest a typology of arranged marriages stretching along a continuum ranging from the traditional pattern, the traditional modified arrangement to the co-operative traditional variant. In the traditional pattern the parents and elder relatives select a spouse for their children, while in the traditional modified pattern the candidate has the power to decide the outcome from a shortlist prepared by the parents. The marriage process is seen as women's work with the mother and other relatives going through the selection process, moving between different households to vet possible candidates. Siblings, especially sisters, play an important role in making suggestions. Uncles and aunts also have a say in the marriage process but the mother draws up the final shortlist of acceptable candidates. The father is usually brought in to approve the final selection and make formal agreements pertaining to marriage (Samad and Eade, 2003).

This pattern is now in decline as consultation and negotiation become more prevalent particularly among third generation South Asians. The use of photos of potential partners, arrangement of chaperoned

meetings, marriage bureaux, intermediaries, matrimonial columns in newspapers, magazines, Internet dating, marriage websites and introduction slots on Asian radio are indicative of the increasing popularity of a traditional modified pattern. In the co-operative traditional pattern either the parent or the candidate can make the selection depending on the circumstances and the eventual decision is a co-operative matter, but parental consent is essential. Young people, who have been going out clandestinely for several years, use a matchmaker to officially introduce them in front of their unwitting parents resulting in a successful marriage (Gillespie, 1995). All the paraphernalia used for dating such as lonely hearts columns and websites are popular particularly among third generation South Asians where they select and their parents arrange (Samad and Eade, 2003).

### The definition of forced marriage

While forced marriage in the public's eye has been considered a South Asian, in particular a Muslim, problem the evidence collated by the Home Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office shows that a much wider range of ethnic communities and religions are involved ranging from Europeans, Africans, Chinese and increasing numbers from the Middle East, mainly Kurds, as well as South Asia. Moreover, it is important to remember that 'shotgun marriages' were prevalent in the 1960s among the White British population (Samad and Eade, 2003; Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2004).

The Home Office Working Group on Forced Marriage (*A Choice by Right*, 2000) identified consent as the crucial factor that defined a forced marriage. A marriage must be entered into with the full and free approval of both people. Everyone concerned should feel that they have a choice. This definition would include child marriage, as a form of forced marriage, as full and free consent is absent due to lack of mental maturity. A marriage conducted without consent and where duress is a factor is a forced marriage. The Court of Appeal defined duress as where the mind of the victim was overcome by whatever means. Duress ranged from emotional blackmail by close family members and the extended family and could include 'threatening behaviour, abduction, imprisonment, physical violence, rape and in some cases murder' (*A Choice by Right*, 2000: 6–7, 11). The Report *Community Perceptions of Forced Marriage* conducted for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Samad

and Eade, 2003) showed that while most of the groups interviewed were clear that force was unacceptable on moral and religious grounds, however, emotional pressure was considered in extreme cases to be acceptable. While the media dramatizes those cases of forced marriage where violence or threatening behaviour is used, the majority of cases of forced marriage involve emotional pressure (Samad and Eade, 2003).

## Quantifying the problem

The major problem identified by the Home Office Working Group on Forced Marriage and the research conducted by Samad and Eade (2003) and Hester et al. (2008) concerns the lack of accurate data. The Working Group examined a number of sources available to the Home Office without success. In the absence of a definitive figure it simply took the supposition that one case was one too many. The research team led by Samad et al. in 2001 for the *Community Perceptions of Forced Marriage* (2003) report examined the documentation available at the Community Liaison Unit at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and was unable to arrive at any conclusive figure. At the time Southall Black Sisters (2001) dealt with 200 cases of forced marriages annually, while Bradford Police dealt with 70 cases and the Community Liaison Unit dealt with under 200 cases annually. The research team led by Hester et al. (2008) for the Home Office into the *Risk Factors for Forced Marriage and the Possible Effect of Further Raising the Minimum Age for a Sponsor, and of Leave to Enter the UK as a Spouse or Fiancé(e)* was the most recent attempt and contains the most extensive search of databases. The team examined 29 databases, including those held by police and those held by organizations in the voluntary sector. It emerged that there was inconsistency in the way data were recorded, the categories used and the number of times the same individual was recorded on different databases. Hence it was not clear whether these were the same cases dealt with by different agencies or were separate cases and there was no evidence to prove or disprove speculation in the media that the problem may be as large as a thousand cases a year. However, the Forced Marriage Unit in 2007, handled some 400 cases, which is more than double that handled by the Community Liaison Unit in 2001, as well as responding to thousands of enquiry calls. In the first six months of 2008 this caseload had increased by a factor of 79% (Foreign and Commonwealth Office & Home Office, 2008). The only thing that can be

confidently said about numbers is that the numbers of cases recorded have increased considerably.

In 2001, 70% of cases dealt with by the Community Liaison Unit involved families of Pakistani heritage and 20% involved families of Bangladeshi heritage (Samad and Eade, 2003). Today 65% (approximately) of the cases dealt with by its successor, the Forced Marriage Unit, involve families of Pakistani heritage and 25% involve families of Bangladeshi heritage. The small change in proportions may be due to more accurate recording or changes in the pattern of forced marriages. The research conducted by Samad et al. in 2001 suggested that there was a demographic bulge in the Pakistani community of young people of marriageable age and that numbers might decline as the demographic profile matures. It also noted from the interviews conducted for that research that attitudes to arranged marriages and forced marriages, in particular, were changing. These changes need to be monitored to see if they reflect real changes in trends within communities. In 2001 20% of cases involved men as the 'victims'. Currently the figure is around 15% and, again, it is not clear whether this reflects changing patterns of forced marriage or more accurate recording. Around a third of cases dealt with by the Forced Marriage Unit involve minors (those aged under 18) and some are as young as 13. Again the evidence is unclear whether this represents a shift in patterns or better recording practices (Samad and Eade, 2003; Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008).

### Patterns of forced marriage

The Home Office Working Group (*A Choice by Right*, 2000) enumerated a number of possible motives for a forced marriage. Although oversimplification needs to be avoided, these fall into three broad categories. One category encompassed family and peer group pressure to ensure, for example, that land remained within the family, or that a carer was provided for a disabled family member. A second concerned sexuality and independent behaviour. For example, a forced marriage might be pursued in order to control unwanted behaviour, criminal activity, sexuality (particularly gay relationships) and 'unsuitable' heterosexual relationships. The third category concerned protecting family honour or long-standing family commitments and perceived cultural or religious ideals (Abigail, 2007). While motives have been

divided into three broad categories, these overlap and honour is an issue across categories.

It is not surprising that most of the cases reported come from working class groups whose families mostly originated from remote rural areas where oppressive cultural practices such as forced marriages are justified in the name of religion (Samad and Eade, 2003). A number of ploys are used to trick victims out of the United Kingdom and most of them apply to both men and women. A common ploy used is that a family relative is dying, usually a grandmother, and the individual is persuaded to go back home to visit for the last time. It is common on arrival to find that granny is well. Going on holiday to see relatives or for a wedding is another ruse used. On arrival the individual finds that the wedding being arranged is for them. In the case of men some go voluntarily because they are in trouble and wanted by the police. There have been no reported cases in relation to men where they have been drugged in order to get them on to the plane (as occurs sometimes with women). Once individuals are aboard planes, travel documentation, tickets and passports, and money are removed and the victim is under continuous monitoring and surveillance. Violence becomes an issue when there are attempts to resist the forced marriage or to escape. This may include threatening behaviour with weapons, assault and abduction. However, emotional blackmail is the most common form of duress used and this is carried out primarily by mothers. This accompanies other ploys (Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2000; Samad and Eade, 2003).

The evidence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office cases, media sources and interviews with gatekeepers, shows that the major motive in relation to sons was that related to sexuality. Other motives concerned family and honour and the criminal behaviour of sons. Intersectionality, discussed earlier, is highly relevant in understanding the motives behind forced marriages as it underscores the multiple power relations involved in the process. In relation to sexuality it is clear that the young men were in heterosexual or gay relationships. In the former they had girlfriends, were engaged, eloped or had married and, in all of these cases, the family disapproved. Some of the liaisons were inter-ethnic, others were inter-religious and many were within the same community. On discovery of such liaisons the family's response was to arrange a marriage, to someone they considered appropriate, as a remedy to what they considered wayward behaviour. This inevitably resulted in a pretext being made for a trip to their families' country of origin.

Once there the young man would, in effect, be incarcerated through the removal of passports and airline tickets while a more suitable partner was looked for. Even when the family had apparently accepted the liaison through an engagement ceremony or civil marriage, family members still attempted or actually forced them to marry someone of whom they approved and divorce their former partner. Many of the people who were repatriated were only able to do so through the support they received from their boy/girl friend or, sometimes, from a sympathetic relative who quite often had to provide the money for a new ticket to the respective High Commission. The real problem arose when there was no one to provide financial support for his or her return. The examples below<sup>1</sup> illustrate the point that the desire to end unsuitable relationships was the most common motivation and this applied to both men and women. However, it affects women most (Samad and Eade, 2003).

Jaz's White girlfriend, who is 17, contacts the British High Commission to report that he was being held against his will by his uncle in Pakistan. He had earlier succeeded escaping from his capturers and made his way to the British High Commission. He had no funds and tried to report the loss of his ticket so that he could get another one issued free of charge but was not successful.

On hearing that his family was making threats against his girlfriend's life he contacts his parents in the UK who convinced him that they would let him return to the UK and send him a ticket if he returned to his uncle's house. In his naivety he believed them but was hoodwinked and incarcerated again.

The girl's family initially agreed to help but let her down. She has been thrown out of the mother and step-father's house over this and her birth father is not prepared to provide assistance. She is not working and staying with her sister who is trying to get a small loan for the return ticket and emergency documentation.

Jaz's situation is difficult but the British High Commission cannot help until he manages to get to escape and reach them.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of gay men knowledge of their sexuality was enough to trigger a forced marriage as marriage was seen as an antidote for their gayness. In Sukhvinder's case he was tricked into going to India and once there his travel documents, money and mobile phone were taken

away from him. His family had become aware of his sexuality and they had decided that he would marry a girl already chosen for him from the village. His refusal to comply led to him being assaulted. He managed to contact the British Consulate in India, who helped him return to the UK. The Forced Marriage Unit put him in contact with a voluntary organization on his return to help with issues around sexuality, depression and stress.

Although I am gay, I wasn't really 'out' for a long time. I felt ashamed that as a man I was being forced into a marriage, and that my family was being violent with me. It was horrible for me and the girl I was forced to marry. (Forced Marriage Unit, n.d.)

In Farhan's case he acquiesced to his family's wishes and travelled with them to the Middle East, where he was forced into a marriage. Farhan's family, on his return, refused to let him talk to his friends or leave the house unchaperoned. He was threatened by his father with dire consequences if he met his gay friends. Farhan eventually ran away and became suicidal. Through support, Farhan has moved away from his home town and is now going to university.

My family were shocked and very angry when they found out I was gay. They were violent towards me and called me names. My mother tried to calm things but couldn't. I felt guilty that I had caused them pain and let them down. They made me feel as if I owed them. They really believed that if I married who they wanted, I would stop being gay. (Forced Marriage Unit, n.d.)

Family issues included preventing the break-up of land and honouring family obligations but there has been a decline in these as motives for forced marriage. On some occasions parents are subject to pressure from family members to marry off their children, even when they had no intention of doing so. However, the combination of pressure and deference to senior relatives has led to children being married without their consent. The next example shows how families had agreed a marriage and presented it as a *fait accompli* to the victim who acquiesced under pressure.

I'm . . . at the time, at the time when I, well when I was arranged marriage, I was a bit upset at first, but then I was okay with it you know, I

thought yeah it's okay, it's part of our thing, how it happens in our community like this anyway and it's part of my life to go through, and I just accepted it . . . from then onwards. (Samad and Eade, 2003: 68)

In other cases vulnerable men, suffering from a disability, were coerced into a forced marriage with families believing that it was the best way to support and protect them. Shaz was divorced and suffering from schizophrenia. His family married him off against his wishes and he contacted the British High Commission for advice on how to return to the UK. There were other cases where men in trouble with the police would be sent away or go on their own accord to escape the law. In the case of Anwar he jumped bail for drug offences in Britain and went to Pakistan. His father, who was there, tried to pressurize him into a marriage, hoping that, once married, he would mend his ways. Anwar was desperate to return to the UK but had no money and his family in the UK, under the father's influence, were not willing to provide any funds. Anwar was aware that he would be arrested on his return but wanted to come back and turn himself in.

The issue of honour usually connects issues around sexuality and family. Honour comes into play when a formal agreement has been reached and this is then carried through. From the example below it is clear that the marriage was voluntary but there was pressure around family honour as a commitment to marry had been made, although there was also an opportunity to reject.

My father died at age of 79. I was in college . . . doing my 'A' levels. I went back to Pakistan for the funeral. My father actually spoke to them in the family for my marriage. Now my mother said: 'This marriage has been arranged for you by your father but he's died. What are you going to do?' My first reaction was: 'No, I wanted to complete my education, and this is true as well. Then I'll decide'. My mother said: 'That's fine, but remember if you are not going to do it, tell us now, rather than embarrass us later on because the decision they have come to' . . . 'And normally', she said, 'since your father and grandfather's word of mouth is a word of honour and if you are going to go back on that this is what is going to happen to us and what we will do'. So I said: 'Fine'. I slept over it and, by God, in the morning I said: 'I'll get married'. (Samad and Eade, 2003: 40)

The number of cases where families in the UK arranged marriages to import relatives was negligible in general. This was particularly so in

relation to men. Immigration was a clear factor behind the motivation of those who wanted to marry British citizens but their influence in any decision-making process resulting in a forced marriage was insignificant. South Asian families settled in Britain are disturbed by the instrumental way that their relatives treat marriage. Thus not only would any new immigration controls not solve the problem but young South Asians would be simply coerced into marriages and sent back with no expectation of returning (Samad and Eade, 2003). This was supported by the research conducted by Hester et al. (2008) who found that if forced marriage victims were unable to import a spouse they would simply drop off the radar. They would only become visible when the spouse tried to migrate and the victim tried to use the immigration services to prevent their arrival. In spite of the evidence provided by research conducted by Samad et al. (Samad and Eade, 2003) and Hester et al. (2008) the UK authorities have raised the age from 18 to 21 for when a spouse can import a partner.

Intersectionality is important in understanding the various factors in the process of forced marriages. Class is a subordinate variable with most of the cases occurring in working class groups that originated from rural backgrounds and religion, despite little supporting evidence in the religious texts, is used to justify oppressive cultural practices. Women have been the focus of the public discourse as victims but our examples show that they are quite often perpetrators using emotional and psychological tools as pressure on the victim. Violence or the threat of violence comes into play when issues of honour are at stake. Concerns about immigration by the authorities appear to be misplaced and have acted to increase communities' resistance to recognizing that there is a problem.

### Male coping strategies and consequences

Most cases of forced marriage are due to emotional blackmail and violence is not that common. Mothers, aunts, sisters usually conduct this psychological pressure until 'even the toughest guys give up'. Men do not enter the picture unless some aspect of family honour, such as agreeing to an arrangement, draws them in and then the threat of violence or actual violence becomes involved. As the quote below shows there is a lot of pressure on young men in their mid-20s to get married. Consequently some men only realize that they were coerced in hindsight, settle down and try to make the marriage work, while others walk out of the marriage within a few years.

Yeah . . . they've been into a marriage that's been forced. But once they're back here they have the opportunity to either negate that agreement that they've made because they've got access here, they've got freedom. [They can say]: 'Right, that's it, I've had enough of you, you're not compatible with me. I'm not happy'. Irrespective of the pressures imposed by families that there might be, or the local ties *et cetera*. . . . If someone's not happy within their marriage now, they will clearly state so and say: 'That's it'. Whether they've got kids or they haven't . . . (Samad and Eade, 2003: 68)

Men have great difficulty in admitting they were forced into a marriage as it raises questions about their masculinity. In a number of the cases the victims were in relationships, both heterosexual and homosexual, that their families disapproved of. In many cases the men's response was to continue the relationship despite being married. So they maintained a public/private dichotomy where they had a wife at home and girlfriend outside. It is a marriage of convenience, maintained to satisfy their families. But they will continue to play the field. 'It is an easy option to say yes'.<sup>3</sup> Male victims see their marriage in terms of duty tied to procreation. They find intimacy outside the marriage. This may cost them as, according to some research, there has been a rise in the cases of psycho-sexual dysfunction being noted by doctors (Ledwith, Husband and Karmani, 1997). Alongside the rise in cases of impotence, emotional and mental health issues also emerge. According to a community worker interviewed in our research, one victim, now in his 40s, had a classic mid-life crisis, could not relate to his wife, became a heavy drinker, experienced a range of personal problems and ended up in jail. For others it can result in serious mental health problems (Samad and Eade, 2003).

There is growing recognition by communities that forced marriage is a problem and undesirable. Men who have experienced a forced marriage themselves do not want their children to have to go through the same experience. Attitudes are changing as the consequences of forced marriages become evident and accumulate in the consciousness of communities. Rising numbers of failed marriages and psychological and emotional difficulties are all having an impact. However, the problem is barely recognized in the public sphere and there are no specific policy initiatives that relate to men. Partly this is due to the smaller numbers by comparison with women, but also due to the unwillingness by men to admit there is a problem. Men have not formed self-help groups or third sector organizations to engage with the issue.

## Policy responses to forced marriage

The Home Office Working Group was the first attempt to formulate policy in this area. Up to this point the lead agency was the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which was involved in the repatriation of victims, including men. The Community Liaison Unit was responsible for co-ordinating the repatriation of victims and operating a helpline for potential victims in the UK. A psychologist, human rights lawyer as well as a Foreign and Commonwealth Office official were part of the team. There were problems for the British High Commissions operating in some of the countries concerned owing to dual citizenship (this was particularly the case in Pakistan) and the remoteness of some of the areas where victims were located. To operate more efficiently on the ground the British High Commissions supported the involvement of local NGOs to identify and help in the transfer of victims from these remote localities to the High Commission for repatriation. A policy criticism that was raised was that this was dealing with the problem at too late a stage and that the focus of policy should be on prevention. A joint unit of the Home Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was formed: the Forced Marriage Unit. It was situated in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with a Home Office official seconded to it. The Forced Marriage Unit continued the activities of its predecessor but placed greater emphasis on engaging with statutory bodies such as the police, education and health authorities and on providing them with guidance to assess and support victims. The *Community Perceptions of Forced Marriage* report (Samad and Eade, 2003) showed that there was some confusion among statutory agencies on this issue. For example, victims were refused support on the grounds that forced marriage was a part of BME culture. Therefore, distinguishing between forced marriages and arranged marriages, developing a definition of force and outlining the responsibilities that agencies had were central activities. A number of third sector organizations were funded in order to work with victims and provide support. The vast majority of this support focused on women with some provision for LGBT organizations. There was no support to develop an organization working exclusively with men.

Unfortunately, the issue of forced marriage has been inextricably linked with the moral panic over immigration and Islamophobia. A consultation exercise on whether forced marriage should be made a specific criminal offence was conducted (epolitix.com, 2006). The response to this consultation was that any legislation would be unworkable in

practice. Forced marriage involved activities such as abduction and assault which were already illegal. Moreover, legislation would be likely to be considered racist legislation targeting BME communities in general and Muslims in particular (Samad and Eade, 2003; Gangoli et al., 2006; Southall Black Sisters, n.d.). These responses led the government to drop the idea of a specific offence. However, arguments emerged that immigration was part of the equation in forced marriage and that a preventative tool would involve raising the age for sponsoring a spouse. This approach has been adopted in Denmark where the age of sponsorship was raised to 24 (the age has also been raised in Germany). However, there has been little evidence of effectiveness in both countries. In relation to the UK Hester et al.'s (2008) study argued that raising the age of sponsorship could have a detrimental effect on victims as victims would be unable to return to the UK until they had reached the required age when they could sponsor a spouse. The government ignored the research findings, perhaps motivated by politics, and raised the age of sponsorship to 21. The danger here is now that victims will continue to be coerced into forced marriages and then have to wait for several years before they appear on the radar. Finally the government introduced the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007, which gives the courts the power to intervene in cases of forced marriage as requested by the victim or an interested party. An innovative aspect of the legislation was that third party intervention was allowable if the victim was too fearful of applying for an injunction. An important development has been that the government's guidance on forced marriage to a range of public bodies has been placed on a statutory footing. This makes it easier to challenge failure to adhere to the guidelines. The focus of policy has primarily been on women and men are covered in a general sense but not specifically.

## Conclusion

Forced marriage is a problem for a small number of men according to current knowledge. In some senses the general policy developments have helped men but, as the issues are primarily viewed within a 'culture and gender clash' approach, the fact that men could be victims as well as perpetrators escapes attention. In contrast to women, men are reluctant to talk about forced marriage as it raises questions about their masculinity. 'What kind of man are you to get forced into a marriage?'

So men have, in general, adopted more low-key responses or simply go into denial with long-term health repercussions. Until men themselves are prepared to argue publicly that this is a concern then there will be little progress in their situation. The government and other agencies have failed to support any initiatives that exclusively focus on men and without male self-help groups it is unlikely that the silence on male victims will be broken.

## Notes

1. The author led the team for the Community Liaison Unit's report on forced marriage (Y. Samad and J. Eade (2003) *Community Perceptions of Forced Marriage*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London) and the data used in the examples were collected during the research and not necessarily published in the report.
2. All names of victims are fictive and used for illustrative purpose only.
3. Quote from youth worker's interviews not used in the original report (Y. Samad and J. Eade (2003) *Community Perceptions of Forced Marriage*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London).

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