

Forced Marriage, 'Honour' based violence and 'Missing'

Key Points

- In 2011 the Forced Marriage Unit (FMU) gave advice and support in 1,468 cases (Strickland, 2012).
- Research has identified forced marriage and 'honour' based violence as factors in going missing for some young Asian women (Biehal et al, 2003; Britton et al, 2002).
- Families and perpetrators of violence may report their victim missing or falsely accuse the missing person of a crime, in order to locate them (NPIA, 2008; FMU, 2009).

Background and definitions

An estimated 250,000 people are reported missing to the police and other agencies each year in the UK. Individuals may go missing to escape forced marriage and 'honour' based violence, or they may be abducted, trafficked or removed from home or education for the purposes of forced marriage.

Forced marriage (FM) is defined as "a marriage conducted without the valid consent of both parties, where duress is a factor" (Kazimirski et al, 2009:10). Duress can take a range of forms. Although most cases involve South Asian families (partly reflecting the large South Asian community in the UK), 12 per cent of cases referred to the charity Refuge involved women originating from East Asia, the Middle East, Europe and Africa (Sharp, 2008). In 2012, 87 per cent of cases reported to the FMU concerned women and girls. Thirty five per cent of calls to the FMU involved victims between 18 and 21 years old and 31 per cent involved victims aged between 16 and 17 (Strickland, 2012).

An arranged marriage is where "the families of both spouses take a leading role in arranging the marriage, but the choice whether to solemnise the arrangement remains with the spouses" (Home Office, 2000:10). However, Bokhari argues that the distinction between forced and arranged marriage is not so clear, particularly for 16 and 17 year olds who are dependent on their families and therefore "highly susceptible to manipulation" (2009:16). Jasvinder Sanghera, of the charity Karma Nirvana, also argues that the line between forced and arranged marriage "is sometimes blurred" (Deveney, 2012).

'Honour' based violence (HBV) is an internationally recognised term, which while acknowledging there is no honour in such practices, describes "cultural justifications for violence and abuse...intended to control behaviour to protect perceived cultural and religious beliefs and honour" (NPIA, 2008:12). Examples include "controlling sexual activity, domestic abuse, child abuse, rape, kidnapping, false imprisonment, female genital mutilation, threats to kill and fear of or actual forced marriage, or homicide" (NPIA, 2008: 12).

Links with Missing

Intentionally going missing to escape Forced Marriage and 'Honour' based Violence

Biehal et al (2003) found in their case file study a group of young women, aged 18 – 30, who had gone missing following conflict with their families over choice of partner. Most of these women came from Asian families and had gone missing to avoid forced marriage or to escape threats of violence from families trying to impose forced marriage. Britton et al (2002) also found the issue of forced marriage and 'honour' based violence being factors for young Asian women in going missing. Brandon and Hafez (2008) argue that going missing may be the only way to avoid forced marriage for many young people but it brings risks, including further 'honour' based violence if they are found by their families.

According to figures from 2012, 31 per cent of cases reported to the FMU involved young people aged 16 to 17 years old (Strickland, 2012). For those who go missing at this age, access to help and support is complicated as they are too old for Children's Services and too young to easily access benefits, housing and refuges (Izzidien, 2008). In instances where young people go missing to escape HBV or FM with a partner their family doesn't approve of, there is only one service that exists in which they can access refuge as a couple (Quilgars and Pleace, 2010).

Trafficking

One study suggests that, each year, 1000 women and girls are abducted from the UK by their families and taken to a foreign country with the intention of being forced into marriage (Hossain, 2001). Bokhari suggests that these women, and some men, face violence once they are abroad and often have their passports removed so they cannot leave. Some are expected to return to the UK to sponsor their husbands. The FMU calls this 'reluctant sponsorship.'

Relatively little research has been conducted about people forced into marriage abroad with British citizens, or trafficked to the UK for forced marriage, but some people who are trafficked into the UK for forced marriage are also expected to be domestic workers or carers as well as spouses (Bokhari, 2008).

Missing from education

According to Kazimirski et al (2009), being missing from education is generally considered a useful indicator of a child being at risk of forced marriage. Although there have been reports of hundreds of teenage girls missing from education in Bradford being at risk of forced marriage, a Home Affairs Committee investigation found no clear national figure because of a lack of an "adequate mechanism" to identify missing children in this situation (2008:141).

Refuge found a 'trigger' for forced marriage for many girls is the end of their compulsory education because children were no longer "in a system which might 'ask questions' about their whereabouts and wellbeing" (Sharp, 2010:10), or families worried about a young person's new found independence.

Families reporting victim as missing in order to locate and retrieve them

The FMU (2009), Brandon and Hafez (2008) and Izzidien (2008) report cases where families solicit the help of others to find family members who run away from forced marriage and 'honour' based violence. This can happen in different ways. Some families report the victim missing to the police or even falsely accuse them of a crime in the hope that the police will locate and retrieve them. Others use a third party such as a councillor or GP to request information from practitioners about the missing person's whereabouts. There have been cases of missing people being traced through their national

insurance numbers and mobile phone numbers as well women fleeing FM and HBV being returned to their families by police.

In other cases families have used informal community networks to locate the missing person, including shopkeepers, taxis drivers and even employing 'bounty hunters'. Izzidien argues as a result of this that young women and girls escaping FM and HBV "tend to flee to another geographical area to get as far away from the family as possible" (2008:72).

The NPIA warn that in some missing persons' investigations, perpetrators of abuse may report their victim missing "to portray false concern in an attempt to cover up the abuse or homicide" or, on the other hand, may fail to report someone missing "to avoid subsequent investigation" (2008:15).

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