

Recognition of and Intervention in Forced Marriage as a Form of Violence and Abuse

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Abstract

This paper highlights the importance of recognising forced marriage as a form of violence and draws attention to the interventions that are developing in Europe as a response to forced marriage. The paper highlights the difficulties of conflating all child marriages as forced marriage and discusses the different contexts of childhood in different parts of the globe. The UK is reputed to have the widest range of policy interventions and practice guidance to tackle forced marriage and is therefore used as a case study in this paper, but reference is also made to other countries thus ensuring a wider relevance. The paper's analysis of UK based research studies on forced marriage identifies three key themes: i) lack of adequate reporting of incidents of forced marriage; ii) lack of professional knowledge of forced marriage and their fear of intervention; iii) the tension between conceptualizing forced marriage as purely cultural or as a form of gender based violence. It also highlights the largely legislative responses to forced marriage in Europe; Civil Protection for victims of forced marriage in the UK is discussed and a critical analysis is offered of the increase in marriage and sponsorship age in the UK and in many European countries. Health and clinical issues related to forced marriage are highlighted and the paper calls for further research globally to i) better understand the extent and nature of forced marriage; ii) to evaluate current interventions; iii) to investigate the clinical and potential mental health implications of forced marriage.

Keywords

forced marriage, child abuse, cultural contexts, gender based violence

Forced marriage is widely recognized at a global level as a violation of women's and children's human rights and as a form of violence against women and children. Within the United Kingdom and the United States, a distinction is made between arranged marriages and forced marriages. Arranged marriages are where parents or relations help select potential suitors, but where consent to proceed to marriage rests with the couple. In contrast, a forced marriage is where there is no full and free consent and where duress is used to enact the marriage or to seek consent. Duress involves physical, financial, or emotional violence, kidnapping, and threats to harm or kill the victim. Where a forced marriage occurs, sexual intercourse within marriage is rape as consent has not been given (Foreign and Commonwealth Office [FCO], 2009).

Recognition of forced marriage appears to be more readily discernible in western European and Nordic countries compared to the United States and Canada. However, the way such recognition has been translated in local contexts, particularly in European countries poses some troubling questions about state interventions to deal with the problem as well as practitioner awareness of forced marriage. The aim of this commentary is to highlight the importance of conceptualizing forced marriage as a form of violence, to explore state interventions, and to argue for further research into forced marriage. Gelles (2010) points out that there are three key phases in responding to abuse: (i) recognition of the topic; (ii) collecting evidence to refine

understandings and causation; and finally (iii) to develop legislation, policy, and interventions to address the problem. This article is based largely on developments in the United Kingdom, but reference is also made to other countries thus ensuring a wider relevance. Using the United Kingdom as a key reference point is valid as it currently has the most wide-ranging policy interventions and practice guidelines for dealing with forced marriage (Milbank & Dauvergne, 2011). While there is a strong recognition of forced marriage at a U.K. government level, at a frontline level in schools, social work settings and health services, evidence is emerging that this recognition is not widespread among practitioners (Ministry of Justice [MoJ], 2009; Natcen, 2009). This illustrates the need for further work on recognizing forced marriage as an abuse issue so that use is made of existing relevant legislation and policy to safeguard victims.

The definition used of forced marriage shapes our understandings and guides research, policy, and practice. The

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distinction between arranged and forced marriage as highlighted above, while useful is also more complex as there can be a “slip-page” between arranged and forced marriage (see Chantler, Gangoli, & Hester, 2009; Gangoli et al., 2006, for a fuller discussion). The term consent has also come under scrutiny from researchers in this field who highlight the contested nature of the term. Central to this, is the argument that consent is context bound and embedded within power relations rather than an act of pure individual agency (Anitha & Gill, 2009; Chantler et al., 2009).

Within the United States in particular, but also more widely, the issue of consent is strongly tied to “early marriages” that is, marriages of minors with the underlying assumption that full and free consent can only be given on attaining adulthood. Global statistics similarly tend to focus on child marriages and there is a danger of conflating all child marriages as forced marriage. Global statistics on child marriages are dependent on individual country information and the quality of data is variable as many developing countries do not log the number of child marriages. United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) surveys from 1987 to 2006 based on 100 countries estimate that more than 60 million women aged 20–24 were married or in a union before the age of 18, with over half of these women living in South Asia. In some countries, for example, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Chad, and Mali more than 60% of women were married or in a union before their eighteenth birthday (UNICEF [updated], 2011). However, it should be noted that not all child marriages (particularly of older children, e.g., 16–18) will be forced marriages. Even in the “developed west” for example, in United States and the United Kingdom 16-year-old children/teens can marry with parental consent. Clearly, marriages which are arranged when a child is very young completely compromises the notion of consent; yet, the line between the older “child” and “adult” is not as clear cut as might be imagined. Constructions of childhood together with material realities vary across the globe and there are two key points of analysis. First, poverty appears to be a strong indicator of child marriages and UNICEF found a correlation between poverty and early marriage with girls in the poorest 20% of households more likely to be married early compared to those living in the wealthiest 20% of families. The material realities of poor children in developing countries means that they have to gain employment at an early age or work in family subsistence farms, which is in contrast to most of the developed world where the emphasis is on education in childhood. Within these contexts, early marriage can therefore be understood as alleviating family poverty as there will be one less person to feed. This is further exacerbated by cultural practices such as bride-price¹ as the marriage of the girl brings resources into the bride’s family from the groom’s family. Second, many cultures across the world prize the sexual purity of girls and women, and as Gangoli and Chantler (2009) argue marriage thus becomes the only legitimate arena for sexual relations and likely to be a contributory factor in early and forced marriage. This brief discussion highlights the complexities associated with understanding forced marriage globally and illustrates the importance of the intersections of socioeconomic and cultural factors in forced marriage.

In contrast to the United States, within Europe, attention on forced marriage has been developing since the 1990s and is largely focussed on South Asian and “Muslim” diasporas. Milbank and Dauvergne (2011, p. 3) argue that this emerges from an inherent understanding of “vulnerable brides as ‘ours’ (nationals or dual nationals), while imposed grooms are ‘theirs’ (migrant spouses).” They also point out that such a conceptualization of the problem of forced marriage therefore elicits an immigration response as a solution for it and this conclusion is based on their analysis of policy interventions in Europe. Further, the spotlight on immigrant grooms can also work to obscure “home-grown” forced marriage. According to Milbank and Dauvergne, the United Kingdom has the widest range of policies and guidelines for tackling forced marriage and thus merits some detailed consideration.

The Emergence of Forced Marriage as an Issue of Violence and Abuse in the United Kingdom

Forced marriage first came to prominence in the United Kingdom as a result of activity at an international level but also significantly from the experiences of South Asian women’s organization working in the domestic violence field. Such organizations have been at the forefront of bringing forced marriage to the government’s attention. Hence, this topic has a grassroots dimension which is central to alerting us to forms of violence which have hitherto gone unrecognized. Debates as to what knowledge is and how it should be generated are central to academic discourse. Within disciplines such as social work a significant place is given to experts by experience in the construction of knowledge and is an integral part of uncovering marginalized experiences. Significantly, bringing to public and professional awareness a relatively “new” form of abuse is difficult given the paucity of research on the topic if knowledge construction is perceived to reside solely within the academy or with professionals. Within the United Kingdom, although there is a need for more empirical research, there is nevertheless a growing literature on various aspects of forced marriage, for example, the social construction of victims of forced marriage as portrayed by the media and via crime policy discourses (Anitha & Gill, 2011), the role of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act (1998) as pivotal in protecting victims of forced marriage (Choudry, 2011), and the role of multiculturalism both in the construction of and responses to forced marriage (Patel & Siddiqui, 2010).

Forced Marriage Research in the United Kingdom

There have been six published empirical studies in the United Kingdom (2006–2010), investigating different aspects of forced marriage. These are discussed and evaluated in turn before key themes are drawn in relation to policy and intervention in forced marriage in the United Kingdom. Gangoli et al. (2006) conducted a qualitative study in North East England

exploring the perceptions of marriage in South Asian communities; the experiences of domestic violence in love, arranged, and forced marriages and identified areas for the development for service providers. The methods used were a mapping exercise to determine service provision for domestic violence and/or forced marriage; 69 interviews with married and single men and women (recruited through community, women's, and youth organizations); four interviews with community leaders and two focus groups with young people. A clear description of methods used is provided and each aspect of the study is analyzed separately; however, discussion and conclusions could have been more developed considering the amount of field work undertaken. There are numerous verbatim quotes which are attributed in an anonymized manner thus increasing rigor, transparency, and authenticity of the study. It provides a "thick" description of the area of study and therefore does have some transferability to other areas. Their key findings were that there was very little knowledge or service provision on forced marriage; no increased risk of domestic violence in forced marriage; most participants thought forced marriage was unacceptable and little support was expressed for criminalizing forced marriage. Conceptually, the "slippage" between arranged and forced marriage is well demonstrated.

The Hester et al. study (2007) sought to assess the impact of the age increase of sponsorship and entry of a spouse from 16 to 18 years; the benefits and the risks of increasing the age of sponsorship and entry to 18, 21, or 24 years; to identify the range of communities in which forced marriage occurs and to identify factors which were perceived to increase or decrease the risk of forced marriage. The study was a multimethod study and included 13 interviews with key national organizations; a database exploration of 28 organizations to try to establish how/if numbers of forced marriage cases were recorded; three case study areas with high density of minoritized communities were chosen to conduct in total 45 interviews with professionals; 38 interviews with survivors of forced marriage (recruited via community and women's organizations); a mapping survey covering 79 community-based organizations and 15 focus groups (covering a variety of ethnicities, genders, sexualities, and ages) recruited via colleges, universities, and community-based organizations. Methodological issues are well considered, the multimethod approach means the data are triangulated; the findings from the three geographical areas are easily transferable to other areas with similar demographics. Interviews were mostly taped and transcribed and a wide range of verbatim quotes are used, which are anonymized but attributed which has the same benefits as the Gangoli study above. The limitations are that there is no specific information offered about the individual case study areas. Although the study made good attempts at recruiting non-South Asian participants, future studies should focus further on these communities. The key findings of the study were that there was no discernible impact of the age increase from 16 to 18 years; that there were greater risks than benefits of increasing the age of sponsorship or entry of a spouse to 21 or 24 (e.g., discrimination, human rights implications, early engagements, risk of abduction to a country abroad); that forced marriage occurs in a range of non-South Asian communities

(e.g., Kurdish, African, and Middle-eastern communities); that there are a variety of routes in to forced marriage (e.g., economic, control of sexuality, childhood abuse); and that there is no coherent database of forced marriage. Some of these routes are also evident in the Gangoli study and the Khanum study (discussed below). The researchers have published two articles in peer reviewed journals developing their analysis further, particularly in relation to age and maturity (e.g., Gangoli & Chantler, 2009) and routes into forced marriage (Chantler et al., 2009).

Khanum's 2008 study aimed to investigate key aspects of forced marriage and Honor-based violence (HBV) and was a qualitative study in one town (Luton) in the United Kingdom. It provides a population profile for Luton from existing data sources and conducted 104 interviews with statutory agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and survivors of forced marriage and four focus groups. The strengths of the study are that it is well contextualized in relation to national policy and links made to the Luton context, thus a "thick" description is offered which is potentially transferable to other locations. The limitations of the study include little detail on the qualitative element of the study, for example, sampling, whether interviews were taped or how they were analyzed. There is also a paucity of verbatim quotes so authenticity is compromised. The key findings include that there is little adherence to available guidance on forced marriage; poor recording of forced marriage cases (echoed in the Hester et al. study); victims are more likely to approach community-based organizations rather than mainstream or "White" organizations; forced marriage also occurs in non-South Asian communities (the latter is a similar finding to the Hester et al. study).

Brandon and Hafez (2008) explored forced marriage as part of their study on HBV but has no clear methods section so it is difficult to determine exactly what was done and how but it clearly involved interviews as there are some verbatim quotes in the report. They argue that forced marriage should be conceptualized as HBV; that its roots are primarily cultural and that statutory agencies do not intervene for fear of being labelled racist. Other than the lack of methodological clarity, there is little engagement with current debates in the literature around HBV and its positioning within gender-based violence. Further, restricting understanding of forced marriage to the sole domain of the cultural is not found by the Gangoli; Hester et al. or the Khanum studies (see above) who all discuss the dynamic relationship between culture and structural factors such as poverty and gender.

The National Center for Social Research (Natcen) conducted a study published in 2009, which aimed to establish the number of forced marriage cases in the United Kingdom and to analyze service responses to forced marriage. The study selected 10 local authority areas of the United Kingdom (from assumptions based on high, medium, and low incidence of forced marriage) and surveyed organizations (via a questionnaire) to investigate the number of forced marriages dealt with in 2008, that is, it is based on reported cases. They then extrapolated these numbers to produce a national estimated figure of forced marriages. They also selected 4 of the 10 areas to conduct 40 qualitative interviews with service providers. Methods are well described and appear robust and transparent. Interviews were digitally recorded and

transcribed and it is the first attempt at establishing prevalence in the United Kingdom and highlights issues for children and young people. The limitations are that the questionnaire used a snowballing approach, which is likely to lead to similar types of organizations being interviewed based on dominant perceptions of who the victims of forced marriage are. The estimate for the number of forced marriage is not based on a large-scale population survey—but this would be difficult for various reasons (e.g., language, sensitivity of topic). The other limitation is that no in-depth analysis is provided of each of the four case study areas. The key findings include an estimate of between 5,000 and 8,000 victims of forced marriage in 2008. The majority of victims were South Asian and female, a substantial number (41%) were under 18 years. They also found an inconsistent uptake of available guidance and legislation and lack of professional understanding of the issue. The study also found that there was a strong contribution from the minoritized community sector and that data on forced marriage were poorly recorded.

Finally, the MoJ study (2009) aimed to establish the number of Forced Marriage Protection Orders (FMPOs) made in 2008 in England and Wales and to gain an understanding of the processes of seeking an FMPO. The researchers scrutinized court records to ascertain the number of applications and FMPOs made in 2008 and also conducted interviews with 63 professionals which were analyzed using the Network Method. The strengths are that the sampling for the quantitative element used the total sample of designated courts for forced marriage cases. The limitations of the qualitative element of the study include that the interviews were not taped, but notes were taken instead. However, what is noted may be subject to interviewer bias as it does not offer the opportunity to double check recall and interpretation as with a recorded interview. Further, no respondent validation appeared to be in place, which is a sound strategy in circumstances where taping is not possible. Nevertheless quotes are used, but these are not attributed. The key findings were that of the 15 designated courts, two thirds of FMPOs were made in just 3 of the courts; fears of offending communities or being thought of as culturally insensitive prevented people from acting; statutory workers often failed to see forced marriage as a child protection issue and that different professionals had different approaches to the issue with the police, for example, being more proactive than social workers.

Despite the studies having different aims and methodological limitations, there are several themes that are apparent (i) lack of adequate recording of incidents of forced marriage; (ii) lack of professional knowledge and fear of intervention; (iii) continued struggles to conceptualize forced marriage: in particular, the tension between conceptualizing forced marriage as purely cultural or as a part of gender-based violence; (iv) the majority of victims are South Asian (partly as these communities form the largest minority ethnic groups in the United Kingdom) but forced marriage also occurs in a variety of other communities. These themes are now discussed in an integrated manner below. It should be noted that the research on forced marriage is not yet at a stage where one can make a firm comment as to the representativeness of the sample of survivors of forced marriage in the Hester (2007) or Khanum

(2008) studies. The debate thus far has been focussed on South Asian communities and both studies include a large proportion of this population in their samples. Hester et al. were also trying to establish which other communities forced marriage occurs in and purposively sampled participants from a range of other communities.

As mentioned above, Natcen (2009) was commissioned by the Department for Children, Schools, and Families to investigate two key issues: (i) to establish the prevalence of forced marriage in the United Kingdom and (ii) the responses of schools, colleges, and local authorities (including social work departments) to forced marriage. The latter is discussed in the interventions sections below. Natcen estimated between 5,000 and 8,000 cases of forced marriage a year. The spread takes account of the potential of double counting, that is, victims who have had contact or support from more than one agency. Khanum (2008) and Hester et al. (2008) both found that there was poor recording of forced marriage cases, which made it difficult to arrive at definitive numbers. In part, this relates to confusion as to what constitutes a “case.” Natcen’s definition of a case included the threat of a forced marriage as well as enacted cases of forced marriages. The authors argue that their figure is likely to be an underestimate as it is based on numbers of victims approaching agencies for help, that is, on reported cases. In relation to gender, all studies illustrate the gendered nature of forced marriage. Only one national agency who works with victims of forced marriage reports a much higher proportion of male victims compared to other agencies. Most other available information demonstrates a significantly higher proportion of women victims. Natcen’s study found the highest number of victims were young (aged 18–23), female and of South Asian origin and sought advice or help about the threat of forced marriage. However, this does not represent the complete picture as the figures rely on reported cases. Other studies have highlighted that forced marriage occurs in a range of other communities including Middle-eastern and African communities and a range of orthodox religious communities (Hester et al. 2007; Khanum, 2008). This wider spread of communities is also consistent with global statistics on child marriages discussed above.

Part of the Hester et al. study (2007) included 38 in-depth interviews with survivors of forced marriage, which identified a number of routes in to forced marriage including being gay or lesbian, previous family abuse, and parental sanctions against what they consider to be inappropriate relationships with the opposite sex. These routes are also found by Khanum’s 2008 qualitative study. Elements of these are also discussed in Brandon and Hafiz’s study (2008) and Gangoli’s study (2006). In addition, Hester et al. and Khanum indicate emerging issues (requiring further research) about people with mental health difficulties being forced into marriage; brides unknowingly partnered with a spouse with mental health issues and of mental health problems following a forced marriage. Hester et al. (2007) also raise the issue of bride-price in a context of poverty which severely compromises full and free consent. Bride-price and its relationship to domestic violence are also discussed by Hague and Thiara’s study, a participatory action research study in Uganda (2009). These studies illustrate the dynamic interrelationship between culture, gender, and poverty.

The lived experience of victims of forced marriage makes it difficult to conceptualize forced marriage as a purely cultural issue.

Interventions in Forced Marriage in the United Kingdom and Europe

Interventions in Europe including the United Kingdom have focused on legislative measures and in some countries guidelines or action plans have been produced to combat forced marriage. Norway was the first European country to criminalize forced marriage in 2003, followed by Germany in 2005 and later by Belgium in 2007. The United Kingdom considered creating a specific criminal offence of forced marriage, but decided instead to opt for civil measures. At the time of writing, there is no equivalent of the U.K.'s Forced Marriage Civil Protection Act (2007), which aims to provide civil protection to prevent a forced marriage from taking place as well as to help victims (children or adults) to leave a forced marriage. This legislation came into force in 2008 and enables victims or relevant third parties (currently restricted to local authorities, but others can apply if leave from the court is granted) to apply for an FMPO. From its inception to the end of October 2009, 83 FMPO applications were made to the courts and 63 were granted indicating that there is clearly a need for such protection (MoJ, 2009). Noteworthy is that two thirds of the orders were made in only three of the designated 15 courts. This indicates a variability that requires further investigation. From the qualitative interviews undertaken in the MoJ study, it appears that one of the reasons that local authorities do not pursue orders is due to the fear of offending minoritized communities within their localities and being perceived as culturally insensitive. Natcen's 2009 study exploring service responses to forced marriage concluded that there is insufficient awareness and understanding of forced marriage and that improvement needs to be made in responding to forced marriage, also echoed by Gangoli (2006) and Khanum (2008). Natcen's study also concurred with the MoJ study in highlighting fears around cultural sensitivity and the conceptualization of forced marriage as a "cultural issue" as a barrier to appropriate intervention. The research therefore suggests that the location of forced marriage as a "cultural issue" serves to position it as "other" and therefore as outside the business of mainstream agencies charged with the protection of vulnerable children or adults. This is also discernible at an international level with the introduction of the term *harmful cultural practices* into the lexicon of violence and abuse. However, there is a robust critique of positioning gender-based violence as a cultural issue (e.g., Chantler, Burman, & Batsleer, 2003; Gill & Mitra-Khan, 2010; Patel & Siddiqui, 2010; Razack, 2004), but as yet does not appear to have the desired effects on practice. This literature highlights the contentious issue of whether forced marriage is solely a cultural issue or solely a gender-based issue or indeed whether it could be argued to be both. Such debates are, however, beyond the scope of this article, but see for example Razack (2004) and Welchman and Hossain (2005).

A more contested form of a legislative measure to protect victims of forced marriage is the introduction in November 2008 of an increase in age from 18 to 21 years for British

citizens to act as sponsor and for non-European Union (EU) spouses to be at least 21 years. This follows moves in many European countries to enact similar legislation. Denmark is at the forefront and has raised the age of a sponsor and fiancé to 24; the Netherlands and Germany have raised theirs to 21. Common to all these countries is the view that a later marriage age enables young people to mature, to become financially independent, and therefore to resist family pressures to marry. Over the last 10–15 years, there has been a burgeoning of research exploring the links between brain development and adolescent cognition and behavior (e.g., Blakemore et al., 2007). Despite these advances, there is a recognition that this is a young science and that reductionist causal assumptions between biology and behavior are often unwarranted and should instead be read as "reasonable speculation" (Steinberg, 2008, p. 3). Further, those working in this field highlight how more research is required to understand how contextual features such as the cultural and social environment impact on brain development (Choudry, 2010; Steinberg, 2008). Additionally, in relation to forced marriage, it is unlikely that "brain science" can currently offer anything concrete in support of increasing the age of marriage or sponsorship as the contexts in which forced marriage occurs is often very different from the populations traditionally used in studies of brain development.

The use of immigration measures to protect victims of forced marriage has been strongly criticized by a number of authors, for example, Bredal, 2010 in relation to Nordic Countries, Razack (2004) and Myrdahl (2010) in relation to Norway; Fair (2010) in relation to Denmark; Gill and Anitha (2011); Gangoli and Chantler (2009); Wilson, 2007 in relation to the United Kingdom. Common themes within these European critiques are that it does not protect "home grown" forced marriages occurring within the EU; that this intervention is more about controlling immigration rather than preventing forced marriage; that it is discriminatory as nationals of these countries or EU nationals marrying similar are allowed to do so at a younger age; that age alone does not prevent forced marriage; that it interferes with arranged and love marriages where one spouse is from outside the EU and that this may therefore be a breach of human rights, specifically Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights, which guarantees the right to respect private and family life (see Hester et al., 2007 for a full discussion on this intervention). The age increase measure in the United Kingdom has been ruled unlawful by the Supreme Court in the Quila case: *Quila & Anor v Secretary of State for the Home Department* (2010) EWCA Civ 1482 (December 21, 2011). The EU Commissioners for Human Rights for the Council of Europe have strongly criticized the Danish age increase to 24, arguing that it interferes disproportionately with Article 8 (Fair, 2010).

Other than legislative measures, Denmark also produced an Action Plan for the years 2003–2005, which focuses on supporting young people to resist forced marriage via counselling, specialized residential facilities for those who need to escape from their family environment, education for professionals such as teachers and social workers (Milbank & Dauvergne, 2011). Clear guidance for frontline professionals has also been

produced by the U.K.'s Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), together with an awareness raising programme for professionals and communities. Unlike Denmark, the United Kingdom has not provided extra resources to deal with forced marriage and Wilson (2007) argues that those services that do exist are under threat due to the lack of funding. The FMU offers advice to professionals and victims, including U.K. nationals who have been taken abroad and forced into marriage. The United States is beginning to introduce such measures for U.S. nationals in Bangladesh via its embassy in Dacca, although interventions within the United States itself have not as yet been developed (Milbank & Dauvergne, 2011).

Clinical Issues

Most of the current European literature focuses on frameworks, particularly legislative measures to protect victims of forced marriage. Appropriate legislative interventions are clearly important, but there is also a need to intervene at a clinical level. In relation to child marriages, UNICEF's (2011) research points to premature pregnancies with attendant health risks, vulnerability to sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, and domestic violence. There is a well-developed literature which illustrates the links between abuse and mental health problems and early indications are that this is also likely to be the case for victims of forced marriage. However, there appears to be a gap in the research literature exploring health risks, particularly mental health risks of forced marriage. In the absence of this, turning to U.K. literature (limited as it is) offers a glimpse into potential mental health impacts of forced marriage. Significantly, Natcen's study indicates that forced marriage is often hidden behind other presenting issues, such as eating disorders and self-harm (Natcen, 2009). Chantler et al.'s study into South Asian women and attempted suicide and self-harm (albeit with a small sample of victims of self-harm) also indicated forced marriage as a precursor to manifestations of such distress (Chantler et al., 2003). Hester et al. (2007) also documented cases of suicidal ideation and attempted suicide in their sample of survivors of forced marriage. There is also an elevated rate of completed suicides of South Asian women in the United Kingdom (Soni-Raleigh, 1996) and of self-harm (Bhui, McKenzie, & Rasul, 2007). Bhui et al.'s U.K. literature review on rates, risk factors, and methods of self-harm among minority ethnic groups also suggests a link between what they term arranged marriages and self-harm.

A second key issue in relation to clinical practice that has been highlighted by various studies in the United Kingdom (e.g., Batsleer et al., 2002; Natcen, 2009; MoJ, 2009) is the issue of culture, cultural sensitivity, and gender-based violence. On the basis of the Natcen, MoJ, and Gangoli (2006) studies, it is clear that many practitioners struggle to know how to intervene in the arena of forced marriage. It appears that the issues of culture and the desire to maintain good community relations are in danger of being given priority over intervention in abuse. The Natcen (2009) and the MoJ (2009) findings in the United Kingdom demonstrate the variability of service responses as well as a lack of understanding of forced marriage and the

erroneous construction of forced marriage as a "cultural issue" and fears of being perceived as culturally insensitive. This positioning and impact has also been found in Batsleer et al.'s earlier 2002 study into domestic violence in minoritized communities in the United Kingdom. These studies indicate that there is still much work to be done to raise awareness and develop understanding based on research on forced marriage as an abuse issue and to encourage practitioners to use the measures already available to them to protect victims of forced marriage.

Implications for Research

It can be concluded that a wide range of research needs to take place globally: both in developed countries as well as in developing countries, but this is predicated on recognition of forced marriage as a form of abuse. Such research needs to be conducted with due regard to socioeconomic and cultural contexts to ensure that Euro-American norms regarding love and marriage do not overly determine research agendas. Hence, research which focuses on understanding why forced marriage occurs in developing countries; the interrelationships between poverty, gender, and culture and the health impacts of forced marriage appear to be called for. It would also be pertinent to collect data on the prevalence of forced marriage globally and it is recognized that this is a complex task (see limitations discussed re: UNICEF (global) and Natcen (United Kingdom) studies), it would nevertheless offer more robust data than is currently available.

In many contexts both in the west and the developing world, there is evidence of multiple and shifting constructions of childhood and the age at which one is deemed mature enough to give full and free consent to marriage. Hence, research needs to track and understand these shifting patterns and elucidate further the different reasons for these constructions and the impact of these on forced marriage. In European countries, where the age of marriage and sponsorship has been increased if marrying nationals outside the EU, research should focus on the impact of this not only on whether this has reduced the numbers of forced marriage but also other unintended consequences, for example, Danish young people having to live in exile for example in Sweden (until they are over 24 years) in order that the couple can live together before the age of 24 (Fair, 2010). Given the numerous critiques of such measures, the human rights implications of such measures should also be monitored for "love" and arranged marriages. The U.K.'s unique civil protection for victims needs to be evaluated on a regular basis not only for the number of protection orders made, the outcome of these, follow-up where necessary but also for professionals knowledge, attitudes, and anxieties in intervening in forced marriage.

Interventions need to be developed that are effective in supporting victims in the immediate situation, that uphold human rights and that attend to potential adverse longer term social and mental health problems arising from forced marriage. However, at the time of writing there have been no specific published studies in the United Kingdom or elsewhere which investigate the intersection of mental health problems and

forced marriage. There is also a need for research which examines which clinical or practice interventions are most effective in supporting victims. In Denmark, research into the specialized services set up to support victims of forced marriages would help western countries to understand what might be effective in supporting victims. In the United Kingdom, there is a well-developed South Asian women's NGO sector who have been supporting victims of forced marriage long before it came to wider public attention, so analyzing what works in these sectors would seem crucial to developing effective interventions in similar contexts in the western world.

This article illustrates the fledgling nature of research and intervention in forced marriage and argues that forced marriage needs to be seen as an urgent abuse issue requiring a more robust research base ranging from conceptualizing and understanding forced marriage better to developing appropriate interventions to support victims of forced marriage. However, central to this is the recognition of forced marriage as a form of abuse and the commentary also highlights the difficulties that many professionals experience in understanding it as such.

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Notes

1. Bride-price refers to the cultural custom of the groom's family making a gift to the bride's family. In contexts of poverty and subsistence, this gift may be crucial for the bride's family's survival.
2. Within the U.K. context, South Asian refers to people of (East) Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Sri Lankan origins.

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Bio

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