

Child Marriage or Forced Marriage? South Asian Communities in North East England

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This article addresses the links between child marriage and forced marriage in the UK, drawing from a research study on South Asian communities in North East England. It looks at definitional issues through an analysis of UK and South Asian policies. It also analyses how these concepts are understood by service providers, survivors of child marriage and young people from South Asian communities. Finally, concepts such as gender, age, familial and community control reflected in normative marriage practices are addressed. © 2008 The Author(s). Journal compilation © 2008 National Children's Bureau.

The issue of forced marriage is of both national and international interest and focus (Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department of Health, 2003; Phillips and Dustin, 2004). While there is evidence that forced marriage can happen to women and men of any ages (Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office, 2005) and from a range of communities and contexts including (but not restricted to) African, Bangladeshi, British native aristocratic families, Chinese, Eastern European, Indian, Iranian, Moroccan, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, travellers and gypsies, and Turkish communities (Hester and others, 2008), this article will focus on South Asian communities and child marriage. Child marriage has been defined as marriage before the age of 16, and is conceptualised in law and policy as a form of forced marriage (Forum on Marriage and the Rights of Women and Girls, 2000, c.f., Bunting, 2005). Based on a research study funded by the Northern Rock Foundation in North East England that looked at forced marriages and domestic violence within South Asian communities, this article will address: the links between forced marriage and child marriage; perceptions, experiences and effects of child marriage; and the gendered nature of child marriage.

This paper will address how child marriage and forced marriage is defined in the UK and reflected in South Asian policies. We will then analyse these policies to address analysing difficulties of reconciling forced marriage with child marriage. It will then analyse how the concepts of child marriage and forced marriage are understood by service providers, survivors of child marriage, and young people from South Asian communities. Finally, concepts such as age, familial and community control and their implications for normative marriage practices will be addressed with regard to South Asian communities in the UK. It is recognised that social class can be an important factor in understanding differences or similarities on marriage, this paper does not directly address this, partly due to the nature in which the data was collected.

Background

This article is primarily a response to State and official attitudes in the UK and EU that treat child marriage as a problem that exists 'chiefly in migrant communities and primarily affects young women and girls' (Parliamentary Assembly, 2005). Some research suggests that British families from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh tend to reproduce their caste and sectarian communities, underpinned by regional and linguistic identities (Barot, 1998), and there is an implicit understanding that child marriages are a product of South Asian culture. It is suggested that while parents forcing young people into marriage believe that they are upholding the cultural practices of their country of origin, in reality practices and traditions in home countries have 'moved on'. Consequently, it is argued that forced marriage, including child marriage is a product of the diasporic experience and not a 'traditional practice' (Phillips and Dustin, 2004).

The latter view is partly substantiated by national data in South Asian countries, which suggests that there has been a substantial increase in the median age of marriage for women of all ages in urban India and Bangladesh between 1992 and 1999 and to a lesser extent in rural India and Bangladesh. Also, that the median age for Pakistani women was as high as 19 years in 1991–1992. In India, the median age of marriage for urban women aged 25–29 at the time of survey increased from 18.9 years in 1992–1993 to 19.3 years in 1998–1999, and for rural women from 16.7 to 16.9 years; and in Bangladesh, urban women aged 25–29 had a median marriage age of 15.6 years in 1993–1994 and 16.8 years in 1999–2000 (Demographic and Health Surveys, 2007). While child marriages do occur in South Asian countries, there is much variation, both regionally and between urban and rural contexts. Further, within the UK, statistics suggest that the age of marriage often depends on religious rather than national or ethnic categories; with young Muslims between the ages of 16–24 more likely to be married than Hindus and Sikhs of the same age (National Statistics Online, Census, 2001). However, demographic statistics alone cannot address the issue of whether marriages above the age of 16 are forced in any context. Additionally, age related data in South Asian countries can be unreliable because rural and urban working class populations in these contexts are often unaware of their actual age (Hester and others, 2008). Consequently, the thesis that forced and child marriage is on the increase in the West, compared with the East, is not currently testable.

Forced marriage has been seen as a form of child abuse (Forum on Marriage and the Rights of Women and Girls, 2000), with young girls disproportionately experiencing the negative consequences of such marriages (Gangoli and others, 2006). Harmful outcomes include sexual assault and health risks associated with early pregnancy, high maternal and child mortality and increased risk of sexually transmitted diseases (Outtarra and others, 1998). Additionally, it has been suggested that rights discourses on marriage can also include in some cases rights of parents, and communities, to preserve their identity, which may rest on assumptions of early marriage as normative. Therefore, there can be a conflict between the rights of children and of families or ethnic communities (Stobarrt, 2002). Further, there have been arguments that legal or human rights understandings that are 'based on a uniform marriageable age of 18 years ... obfuscates the diversity of childhoods' (Bunting, 2005, p. 18).

Definitional issues

Child marriage has been described by a network of UK-based NGOs, the Forum on Marriage and the Rights of Women and Girls (2000) as marriage taking place when one or

both partners are under the age of 18. The legal position in the UK places the legal age of marriage at 18 although children over the age of 16 can get married with parental consent. State responses to child marriages in the UK have primarily been made in the context of discourse on forced marriage, including intense debates on criminalising forced marriage in the UK in 2005. The Foreign and Commonwealth (henceforth FCO) and the Home Office illustrate that there is no specific offence in the UK of 'forcing someone to marry' (FCO and Home Office, 2005, p. 8). There are, however, provisions within criminal and civil law to deal with the range of offences committed during forced marriage which include kidnapping, false imprisonment, assault, sexual offences, harassment, child cruelty and failing to ensure school attendance. In the Indian subcontinent, there is much variation about the definition of child marriage, with India and Bangladesh fixing the marriage age for women at 18 and men at 21, though this is negated in Bangladesh by religious personal laws that allow marriage at puberty. In Pakistan, girls are permitted to marry at 16 and boys at 18.

Discussions in the UK on whether to criminalise forced marriage were premised on the perceived benefits for young people through acting as a deterrent to parents. However, the consultation document suggests that legislation may have some disadvantages, such as having a disproportionate effect on the Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) populations. This could be interpreted as an attack on specific communities, potentially increasing the alienation of victims (Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office, 2005). In addition, there are guidelines by the FCO to social workers (Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department of Health, 2003), the police (Stobart, 2002) and the education department (Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office, 2005) about good practice in cases of forced marriage involving young people. Other responses to forced marriage, such as the increase of the immigration age for spousal visas from 16 to 18 in 2004 are based on the view that young people under 18 are at a higher risk of forced marriage (Hester and others, 2008).

As child marriage in the UK is viewed primarily as a forced marriage issue, it is useful to examine the Home Office definition of forced marriage:

A forced marriage is one where one or both parties are coerced into a marriage against their will and under duress. Duress includes either physical and/or emotional pressure. It is very different from arranged marriage, where both parties give their full and free consent to the marriage. (Home Office, 2002)

The Home Office definition assumes therefore the distinction between arranged marriage and forced marriage is based on 'full and free consent'. The definition does not specifically address the issue of age; with the implication that women and men of any age can be forced in marriage. However, much of the official literature on forced marriage alludes to young girls under the age of 18 as primary victims (Stobart, 2002; FCO and Department of Health, 2003), implicitly linking this issue to child marriage. There is an assumption, shared by international agencies such as United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the monitoring committee of the Women's Convention (CEDAW) that young people under the age of 18 cannot consent, based primarily on ideas of universalised notions of maturity (Bunting, 2005). Furthermore, the Home Office definition does not address the issue of how marriages of young people between the ages of 16–18 who are married with parental consent can be defined, especially as these marriages are legal under UK law.

There are further definitional and legal issues in the case of forced marriage and child marriage, especially within the context of domestic violence. The UK government defines domestic violence 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' (Crime Reduction Website, 2006). There is a further clarification that this definition includes 'issues of concern to black and minority ethnic communities' (Crime Reduction Website, 2006) and forced marriage. However, the definition of domestic violence applies only to adults aged over 18. This removes young people under the ages of 18 experiencing forced marriage outside the ambit of the domestic violence laws, even while the actual experience of forced marriage is conceptualised as a domestic violence issue. Furthermore, the Children Act (2004) does not address the issue of children under 18 being forced into marriage.

These complex definitional issues impact on the understanding of child marriage and forced marriage that we address in this article. For the purposes of the article, child marriage is understood as marriages under the age of 16, following UK definitions of the minimum marriage age.

The Research Project

The study took place over a period of 18 months (September 2005–February 2006) and focused on Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Indian communities in Newcastle, Sunderland and South Tyneside. The project aimed to address whether experientially and in terms of perception, there was a continuum between arranged, love and forced marriage and to ascertain the experiences, hopes and perceptions of marriage among South Asian women and men. By looking at domestic violence experiences in arranged, forced and love marriages, it analysed whether forced marriage was conceptualised as a form of domestic violence by survivors and service providers and whether post-marriage domestic violence was more common in forced marriage than other forms of marriage. Finally, an earlier study in the area by one of the authors (Gangoli and others, 2005) revealed a paucity of services for South Asian domestic violence survivors, building on which we assessed service provision for forced marriage in order to identify areas for positive development.

The research design incorporated multi-methods including surveys, telephone and face-to-face interviews, and focus groups. The research began by conducting a mapping exercise of services for forced marriages in these areas. Telephone and face-to-face interviews were conducted with members of 49 statutory and voluntary agencies, including those working primarily or solely with ethnic minority communities. Of the 49 agencies interviewed, only eight (16.6%) worked exclusively with children and young people, but a further 22 (45.8%) worked with adults and children.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 37 women and 34 men to elicit data on their experiences of marriage or their understanding of marriage. Given the sensitivity of the topic we sought access to men, women and young people through community, women's and youth organisations. Two focus groups with 19 young people (aged between 10 and 22 years) were also conducted, to understand their views and expectations about marriage. In addition, we interviewed four community and religious leaders/representatives from Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Indian communities to ascertain their views on forced marriages.

Context

Immigration patterns within the UK have varied regionally and for different communities, and sub-communities. Historically, African Asians immigrated as families; while the pattern of migration for immigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh was that the men arrived first often for the purposes of employment, and were later joined by their wives and families. However, the migration of Indian women has preceded that of either Pakistani or Bangladeshi women and the latest census figures reveal that the rate of family reunification of Bengali migrants was much slower and later than any other South Asian community (Ballard, 2004). There are perceptions that Indian communities are better 'integrated' into British patterns of marriage than Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities (Gangoli and others, 2006).

The North East, where the research was conducted, is an area that is less ethnically diverse with a relatively larger white population than the rest of England. The 2001 census reveals that only one in 50 people of the North East were born outside the EU, compared to one in 14 in England as a whole. There is high unemployment with the highest proportion of people in England who are economically inactive and permanently sick or disabled. The census also reveals that the marital status of people in the North East is broadly similar to that of England as a whole, with only slightly higher proportions of married, divorced and widowed people, and fewer people who were single or remarried. There are slightly more lone-parent households (10.8 per cent compared with 9.5 per cent in England; Census 2001). The North East has also been characterised as an area with high 'ethnic tension', with conflicts driven by struggles for resources such as employment and housing (Hudson and others, 2007). South Asian communities in North East England are strongly connected with their families in their country of origin especially in terms of marriage arrangements.

Service provision

None of the agencies interviewed offered services in areas such as housing and refuge services for children and young people escaping forced marriage. This could be attributed to the fact that refuge provision in the UK is primarily limited to providing services to adult victims of domestic violence, and in some cases their children; and as discussed above, domestic violence is defined as happening only to adults above the age of 18. This can therefore leave young girls and boys escaping forced marriage in situations of increased vulnerability.

None of the agencies that worked only with children and only three agencies that worked with young people and adults had a definition of forced marriage, or indeed made a connection between child marriage and forced marriage. Of these three agencies, one recognised difficulties in defining 'force' in the absence of physical force, but alluded to other forms of pressure and manipulation that young people could experience. Agencies also discussed the gendered nature of forced marriage, and there was a general implicit agreement that forced marriage happened mostly to 'young people', and was more likely to happen to girls than boys, as a form of control over sexuality.

While most agencies working with South Asian communities acknowledged the issue of forced marriage within their communities, the problems with definitions and conceptualisation meant that they were often hesitant to address the issue of child marriage in their day

to day work, focusing instead on the generic term 'forced marriage of young people'. There is a possibility that the term 'child marriage' is seen as more emotive than 'forced marriage'. Three workers from South Asian specialist agencies commented on the 'hidden' nature of forced marriage of young people, and the lack of discussion within communities, families and community organisations on the issue. There were concerns that discussions on forced marriage could engender community backlash against specialist support groups.

One agency in particular expressed the view that work on forced marriage would be more effectively done by generic organisations, as they would be less subject to scrutiny and control by the minoritised community. However, a representative of a generic women-only agency discussed their reluctance to work on the issue due to the tension between supporting women and the potentially racist and imperialist overtones of white women supporting BME women. There were therefore tensions between recognising forced marriage in general as a serious issue requiring intervention and deciding which organisation was most appropriately placed to work on it.

Survivor definitions

While the majority of respondents in our sample were married above the legal age for marriage in the UK, there were five cases where respondents had been married prior to age 16. In the sample, 15 men and 23 women had experiences of marriage and five in total were married before the age of 16 – one man and four women. One of these five was married in the UK and the rest in their country of origin; two in Bangladesh, one in India and one in Pakistan. The marriages contracted in India, Pakistan and the UK were therefore violating the permitted age of marriage in the country where the marriage had taken place. Whilst five from a sample of 38 is a relatively small number, considering that the sample did not seek to specifically include people who had experienced child marriage, it is a significant and unexpected finding to emerge from the study.

Four of the five described their marriage experiences as 'arranged marriage', one woman described hers as a forced marriage and all five referred to the financial and social pressured which influenced their 'agreement' to the marriage. One woman married before she was 16 believed that she was in a love marriage, even though there were indications that she had been pressurised to marry her boyfriend by her family. None of the five conceptualised their marriages as 'child marriages'. In the wider sample, one woman who was married after she was 16 but before the age of 18, explained the prevailing view in her community of 'early marriage' was both acceptable and normative. This was more so where the young person was not performing well educationally or professionally, indicating that there can often be gaps between official, personal and community perceptions of childhood and adulthood.

Interviewer: Did you think you were old enough and prepared enough to get married?

Respondent: Well I sort of think yes because I wasn't in any education or any sort of fixed work or whatever, you know. And I felt okay, because all my sisters they got married at a young age and I felt ... you know because everybody got married at a young age...

Even though several respondents pointed to the lack of agency in their lives prior to marriage – the forced marriage being an obvious consequence – marriage in itself was

recognised as a big step, with consequences for their mobility and freedom. The woman interviewed above noted her concerns in this regard:

I felt like if I had maybe a year or two years then I would have liked sort of like adventure.... But what can you do? It's like all our sisters got married at a young age and I was the next one.

The conceptualisation of early marriage in particular and marriage in general as unavoidable relates to the ways in which parental and community discourses present this as normative, therefore rendering invisible the process by which it was normalised. As we have seen only one respondent married before the age of 16 named her experience as forced. The next section highlights other normative constructions that can legitimise child marriage and forced marriages.

Sharam and Izzat

Research on domestic violence within South Asian communities has pointed to the importance of culturally specific concepts of *izzat* (honour) and *sharam* (shame) in preventing women from articulating their experiences of violence in domestic situations (Bhopal, 1997). *Izzat* and *sharam* are based primarily on the notion that the bodies and actions of women and girls represent community or individual honour. South Asian young women and girls in the UK are especially vulnerable to such control, as there can be a high premium attached to ideas of sexual purity and chastity for young unmarried girls, especially in the context of taboos around premarital sexuality, loss of virginity and fears of young women being 'corrupted' by western values (Gangoli and others, 2006). This can sometimes be manifested in forced marriage of girl children, as ways to prevent or end transgressive sexual behaviour.

Norms of *izzat* and *sharam* play an important role in persuading young women that they should marry according to their parents' wishes, and in some cases, to continue to live within an unwanted marriage. Most of the women interviewed reflected on the control over their mobility and the belief that their actions and behaviour were interpreted as reflecting family and in some cases, community honour. This understanding pushed them to actions that they later conceptualised as self destructive. As one respondent who was married at the age of 15 comments:

I agreed to the marriage as I respected my parents' wishes and their honour, I didn't want to upset them but sometimes in order to keep your parents happy you can end up ruining your own life.

These norms also influence women into forcing their children into perceived socially acceptable behaviour. A Pakistani woman, whose 17-year-old son had got his 15-year-old girlfriend pregnant, admits that she used these concepts to pressurise her son into marriage:

And I did talk about all the shame stuff and the izzat stuff, and I did talk about it to him.... I did say to him that this is going to be really bad, and it's going to be shameful on the family.

Additionally, women respondents alluded to the perceived need to control the sexuality of their daughters, and, to a lesser degree, their sons, and noted that control over the sexuality of young people was attributed as a justification for forced marriage. Parents in such cases

do not construct these marriages as forced or child marriages, but see them as essential to maintain familial or community acceptance.

The extract below from an interview with a Bangladeshi woman examines the impact of sexual control on young men within these families, and highlights issues of family control, and attitudes to young people.

I notice that here, what is happening, if a son or a daughter is growing up, what does a parent do? They take their sons or daughters to India or Pakistan or Bangladesh ... to marry. And sometimes the son ... the sons have an affair with white girls, and the mother thinks that, or the family think that they arrange a marriage for him and he will forget that girl.... And he refuse to marry so this is also a forced marriage...

While some young men were also subjected to familial and community scrutiny, the following extract from the focus groups with South Asian girls also brought out the ways in which family control and honour is conceptualised, the impact over the mobility of young girls, and the double standards attached to sexualised behaviour by girls and boys.

Young female 1: A girl will get a reputation more than a boy will.

Young female 2: Especially Asian girls. People just think 'oh she's a slapper', easy or something but a boy can be with as many girls as he wants, do what he wants and they won't be judging him.

Effects of child marriage

While all the respondents who had been forced into marriage found the experience difficult irrespective of age, the consequences for the women who had been forced into marriage at an early age were perhaps more serious. In some cases, these included denial of education and loss of confidence, with long-term effects on their choices and lifestyle. One British Asian woman, following a childhood betrothal had been forced into marriage at the age of 15 in her country of origin, and was unable to continue with her education when she returned to the UK because she was embarrassed by the general 'prurient' interest in her marriage among her peers. She stated that as 'everyone was talking about' her marriage when she returned, she dropped out of school. Further, as she was aware that she had been subjected to child marriage which was technically illegal in the UK, she was unwilling to seek help from teachers or counsellors at school, out of concern that her parents would be 'victims' by the authorities. For this young woman, there was a clash in expectations between the white mainstream culture, which saw early marriages such as hers as unacceptable and her parents, who perceived her reluctance to accept her marriage as equally unacceptable. Her experience highlights the ways in which the 'intersectionality' (van der Hootge and Kingma, 2004) of intergenerational differences and conflict, familial loyalties, gender and ethnicity worked together to disadvantage her.

While there is much literature examining the problems faced by first generation immigrant brides in the UK, especially in the context of domestic violence (Bhopal, 1997; Burman and Chantler, 2005), there is little focus on the specific issues faced by young immigrant women married before the legal age of marriage, and the forms of discrimination and marginalisation they may experience in cases of post-marriage domestic violence. One of our respondents, a Bangladeshi woman came to the UK after her marriage at the age of 15 to a British

Asian man aged 17. Even though she was under the immigration age, her age in her passport was falsified, and increased to 18, enabling her entry to the UK. At the time she did not perceive her marriage as a child or forced marriage, as she came from a context where adolescent arranged marriages were acceptable. When she came to UK, she experienced domestic violence at the hands of her husband.

I tried very hard to make the relationship work, he used to beat me and the children but I still wanted him to be a part of their lives. As a Bengali and a Muslim ... we are supposed to abide by husband's wishes...

In addition to religious concerns, her husband used her insecure immigration status to control her, and prevent her from leaving the marriage. While the interviewee did not refer to her age as a contributory factor adding to her vulnerability in this context, there are possibly some links that need further elucidation, as she did not get her immigration status regularised until she was older, and had the confidence to approach a lawyer on her own.

Gendered nature of control

The research supported the view that the effects of child marriage are gendered, with women and men experiencing the consequences of forced and early marriage differently. One male respondent, who was married at the age of 16 to a girl aged 14, did not regret the marriage. However, he expressed misgivings as both he and his wife were so young at the time of the marriage, and he recognised that she could have been forced into the marriage, demonstrating an understanding of the gendered nature of control over young Asian women:

I'm going to get married one day and ... certain Asian cultures, especially when a female reaches a certain age they should get married and I didn't want that pressure to get put on my wife or my partner at that time. So sort of getting married and get it done with.

While both young South Asian girls and boys are subjected to surveillance by older members of the family, the study revealed that girls were subjected to more control in terms of mobility and sexual freedom. The focus group data brings out the gendered differences in the conceptualisation of the control by girls and boys. The young men in the male focus group believed that forced marriage happened primarily or only to young women who were perceived as needing to be controlled, constructing forced marriage as a necessary and legitimate way to control women:

Young Male 1: Men don't get forced marriages.

Young Male 2: Neither do girls.

Young Male 1: Girls do.

Young Male 3: The fucked up girls do.

The girls in contrast, had a more nuanced understanding of the reasons for young women being forced into marriage. The extract below from the group alludes to the incongruity between their parents' and the community's views, with the latter sometimes pressurising parents to control their children:

I don't think it's actually, like Asian parents and stuff, are as bothered about how you do things, but how the Asian community think, oh like they haven't looked after their daughter she has been doing this and that and stuff.

The extract above therefore makes a distinction between individual families, which may be progressive in terms of gendered control, and the community seen as being more concerned about issues of stigma and honour, vested primarily in the bodies and actions of young women. In addition, one young woman recognised the social and economic power enjoyed by boys in South Asian families, leading to a higher status within the family, and therefore less parental control:

Boys are seen as higher than the girls cos they carry on the family name, they inherit everything, so the girl is seen as minor.

Conclusions

As discussed, the conceptual link between child marriage and forced marriage is extremely complex. While international and UK based law and policy agree that most child marriage is forced, and question its legality, in practice some forms of child marriage are legally permitted, and therefore not considered forced. This is evident in the case of marriage of children between the ages of 16–18 with parental consent in the UK. There is no indication that the rate of child marriage is actually increasing in the UK, however our data suggests that in the case of South Asian communities and families in the UK, it is sometimes socially acceptable. Early marriage can be considered a legitimate way of controlling female and, in some cases, male sexuality, especially where there are fears of sexual or social transgression. Within South Asian countries while the marriage age shows a general increase especially among the urbanised and middle class populations. However, there is much variation according to country, region, the urban-rural divide and social class (DHS, 2007). Bangladeshis have the lowest median marriage age in South Asia, however there are indications that in some parts of rural India, marriages take place between infants aged under a year, while in urban centres like Mumbai the average marriage age is as high as early twenties (Gangoli, 2007).

This study highlights that while survivors of child marriage may not always articulate their experiences as forced marriage or recognise themselves as being children at the time, they note the negative consequences of early marriage. Early marriages have gendered consequences, with girls experiencing a greater vulnerability to domestic and sexual violence within the marriage and loss of opportunities to study or pursue a career. Respondents also noted the gendered differences in expectations, and the fewer options available to young women.

Regarding service provision, in the area of study, there are very few provisions for forced marriage involving children, even there was an understanding that many cases of forced marriage involved young people under 18. This may be a consequence of lack of awareness of existing official definitions, policies and guidelines on forced marriage. While some BME agencies were aware of the issue, and the need to prioritise it, there was little input in this area. Forced marriage was seen as a gendered issue, with more 'young' women experiencing forced marriage and suffering more serious consequences from it.

The study highlights that while child marriage does take place within sections of South Asian immigrant communities, it needs to be understood as a product of immigration and the diaspora experience, rather than the unthinking adoption of social practices from the country of origin. It is linked to social and economic expectations from countries of origin, conflicts and pressures to maintain social and gendered behavioural norms, especially in a context where the minoritised community believes itself to be under threat from western values and norms of late marriage and greater sexual freedom. The serious and gendered differences in experiences of child marriage are an important aspect that needs to be factored into policy and practice on this issue.

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Melanie McCarry has recently completed two major studies on domestic abuse in same sex relationship, and domestic abuse and forced marriage. Melanie is currently working, in conjunction with the NSPCC, on the first national UK survey on Teen 'Dating' Violence. Melanie is the Co-ordinating Officer for the Violence Against Women Research Group (University of Bristol) and the Co-convenor for the British Sociological Association Violence Against Women Study Group.

Amina Razak is currently completing her PhD on 'Young "South Asian" men, the "new masculinities" and experiences of racialism and racism' at the School for Social and Political Studies, University of Edinburgh. She has research experience working on projects on forced marriage and South Asian communities and attrition and domestic violence in the Criminal Justice System. Her research interests include masculinity/gender, racism, violence and abuse, identity and culture, race/ethnicity.