



VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINE

ADDRESSING FORCED MARRIAGE WITHIN THE UNITED STATES

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We also want to note the opinions, findings, conclusions and recommendations expressed in this document do not necessarily reflect the positions of any of the organizations that the authors or the individuals that have participated in this study are affiliated with.

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FOREWORD

BY DR. SHAMITA DAS DASGUPTA

“How could I refuse my parents’ wishes? I couldn’t hurt my family! I would never do that...” I cannot count the number of times I have heard these statements from young women with whom I have had the opportunity to discuss the topic of marriage. I remember taking similar vows when I was in my early teens. “I will never go against my parents’ wishes,” I had thought. The sentiment changed the course of my life at a young age. Parents’ and elders’ wishes were paramount to me and regardless of how many years have passed since I made that “self-sacrificing” promise, it still seems to be true for many young women in our communities. So, was my marriage forced? Are the young women I meet vulnerable to a similar fate?

Forced marriage does not have its roots only in the East or global South. Historically, it was practiced in Western societies among the upper classes – royalties and aristocrats, and in intensely bordered religious sects such as fundamentalist Mormons. “Shotgun weddings,” as a way of making unwilling grooms accept responsibilities, were common in the United States until the mid-twentieth century. From the late nineteenth up to mid twentieth century, state prosecutors in the U.S. often charged men with rape to force them to marry their sexual partners. Under India’s legal system, men who walk out of consensual sexual relationships are still charged with the crime of rape; their absolution comes only from marrying their lovers.¹ The scenarios of forced marriage are more varied than these instances. For example, families exchange their daughters for bride-price to enhance their financial resources; swap them to ensure desirable marriage alliances for their sons; offer them to repay debts and negotiate truce between feuding families; and surrender them in lieu of penalties for men’s social misdeeds.

Forced marriage is defined as a marital union where at least one intended spouse refuses to participate but is intimidated to capitulate. Often the coercion is not limited to emotional pressures, but is played out in full violence against the recalcitrant individual. At first glance, there seems to be no room for gender differences in this area. Men and women could be equally bullied to make them agree to marriages that the “wiser” elders in the family deem appropriate and presume will last forever. Elders in the family know the ways of the world better than the youngsters; therefore, the latter must obey the former. This argument forms the basis of both forced and arranged marriages. However, most thinkers and activists attempt to make a clear demarcation between these two types of marital unions: forced and arranged. While the former is judged to be repugnant and unacceptable, the latter is considered a custom common in many ancient cultures and hence, “not so bad.” For me, the distinctions between the two are blurry at best.

It is true that in many societies, arranged marriage has evolved into quasi-choice set-ups where both bride and groom have veto powers. Nonetheless, consider that in most traditional societies including South Asian communities, girls are socialized to be obedient to their parents’ biddings and are taught to bear the responsibilities of their families’ honor, respectability, and happiness. It is the daughter in the family who is carefully monitored and closely policed, whereas her brother’s conduct is treated leniently. Thus, for many young women, there may be no alternative but to submit to their families’ wishes regarding marriage. Withholding cooperation might not be a viable option for them. In most families, girls and young women could not realistically resist the emotional pressures of their parents and elders and hope to thrive or survive. Even in the best of situations, women might have to risk alienation from family and penury to defy their families’ instructions about marriage.

¹ See, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-06-30/chennai/40285472_1_woman-cop-apex-court-ruling-fast-track-court; http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-08-05/nagpur/41092124_1_girlfriend-custody-remand; and <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/women-misuse-rape-law-to-force-lovers-to-marry-them-delhi-high-court/393929-3.html>.

Arranged and forced marriages may possibly be differentiated by the degree of urging involved in obtaining agreement from the prospective bride and groom and also by the outcomes of their resistance. For that matter, arranged and forced marriages may be viewed as points on a continuum of “persuasion” that stretches between two extremes: mild request and severe abuse. However, the fact remains that they can be placed on the *same* continuum, and not on isolated axes.

I believe that arranged-, child-, early-, and forced marriages as well as violence against women are closely linked. These various forms of marriages remain in practice basically to control women’s and girls’ sexualities, curb their desires, and thwart their autonomy. While men can be forced to marry, without a doubt, the overwhelming majority of victims of forced marriage worldwide are girls and women. Young men may be emotionally pressured to marry brides of their families’ choice to stop them from selecting “unsuitable” mates, but it is girls and women who are subjected to unrelenting emotional cruelty and physical violence to make them comply with their elders’ wishes.

Forced marriage is no longer a phenomenon of “Other” countries; but taking place at an increasing rate in the communities in the United States. Many second generation young women in immigrant communities are being deceived to return to their parents’ home countries to be married off under duress and/or put under physical and psychological abuse to extract acquiescence. *Voices from the Frontline*, explores the topic of forced marriage incisively and moves us to confront the problem head on. It presents statistics from surveys, stories of survivors, experiences of activists, and analyses to explode the myth of benign arrangements of marriage in our communities. *Voices from the Frontline* offers an understanding of forced marriage that is essential in anti-violence against women advocacy and activism.

One might attempt to refute the arguments offered in *Voices from the Frontline* by stating that the stories documented in it are of marriages gone awry. For every marriage involving violent force that imploded, there are three that have happy endings, and therefore, are invisible to this report. To this I respond by suggesting that we must separate the coercion involved at the initial stage of marriage and its later outcome – good or bad. *Voices from the Frontline* challenges us to pay critical attention to one of the fundamental structures of our society, marriage, and the violation of human rights that is often entwined with the way we engage in it. It is a lesson that we cannot overlook.

“MY EYES WERE BLURRY. I WAS LYING ON THE FLOOR. THE PILLS WERE COMING UP WITH THE ALCOHOL THROUGH THE VOMIT IN MY THROAT. I COULD HEAR MY FATHER SCREAMING THAT I WOULD NEVER GO BACK HOME TO AMERICA UNTIL I MARRIED THE MAN HE CHOSE.”-SURVIVOR

INTRODUCTION

In February of 2013, the *New York Times* broke the story of Amina Ajmal, an American citizen who was held in captivity for three years in Pakistan due to a forced marriage. With the help of family members, Amina sought refuge in an American embassy, and was flown into her hometown in Brooklyn. As a result of this escape, Amina’s father ordered the murder of two family members who helped facilitate her escape. In the recent proceedings in a federal court in Brooklyn, Amina’s father showed no remorse; on the contrary he reported feeling justified in his actions as he felt his daughter had brought shame to the family by running away from a forced marriage.² Amina’s experience serves as an example of the dark world victims of forced marriage navigate in order to attain freedom. Individuals like Amina who experience forced marriage are hidden in plain sight within American homes. Some are placed under house arrest while others are forced to cope with living in a forced marriage. There are other victims who are exported abroad and kept in isolation. At the most violent end of the forced marriage spectrum are victims who disappear, are killed, or are driven to suicide. Therefore in order to honor individuals like Amina, this study aims to contribute to the paucity of information that exists on forced marriage within the United States by presenting findings from a multi-method research study that includes an analysis of the following: 1) 524 surveys with students, domestic violence professionals and refugee service providers; 2) 52 case reviews of suspected and confirmed cases of forced marriage; and, 3) 22 interviews with frontline responders, activists, and scholars. This study is among a handful of studies within the United States that aim to provide information on the responses, remedies, and protections that are available for victims of forced marriage. This paper is the first to present findings from a group of college students on forced marriage, and the forms of abuse they have witnessed as a result of forced marriage; simultaneously this is one of the first studies that present findings from case reviews for 52 reported and suspected cases of forced marriage. Further this paper documents the experiences and recommendations of frontline responders, scholars, activists, and survivors for improving responses to forced marriage. Overall our findings are sobering and highlight the numerous challenges, victims, their support networks, and direct service providers face in seeking remedies, protection, and adequate responses against forced marriage.

BACKGROUND

DEFINING FORCED MARRIAGE

The issue of forced marriage has recently begun to receive attention within the United States. Consequentially there isn’t a national definition that is widely accepted on what defines a forced marriage and how it differs from an arranged marriage. Arranged marriage is a cultural practice where the consent of all parties involved is respected, while in a forced marriage the basic fundamental right to consent is absent. The U.S State Department defines a forced marriage as one where an individual doesn’t consent or isn’t able to consent, and some form of duress is

² Secret, M (2013, May 22). Court Documents Detail a Deadly Family Feud from Brooklyn to Pakistan. *The New York Times*. Accessed from <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/23/nyregion/court-details-fatal-pakistani-us-family-feud.html?pagewanted=all> on July 20, 2013.

applied (U.S Department of State, 2005).³ The Tahirih Justice Center, which founded and coordinates the National Network to Prevent Forced Marriage, defines a forced marriage as one that can happen at any age and to either gender; the marriage may have already taken place, or is currently in the process of taking place within the United States or abroad. The lack of consent may be the result of being 1) incapacitated or having a disability, 2) cases where individuals are subjected to force, fraud, or coercion, and, 3) if the individual can't legally consent (Tahirih Justice Center, 2011).⁴ Shamita Das DasGupta defines a forced marriage as “a marital union where at least one intended spouse refuses to participate but is intimidated to capitulate.”⁵ Further, a survey conducted by Manavi on South Asian women’s organizations reported forced marriage was commonly defined among service providers as encompassing the following elements:

- a. A marriage against one’s will that is the result of cultural, familial, and societal pressures;
- b. When individuals are put in a situation where they have no choice or control over their own partner in a marriage;
- c. A tool of patriarchy used to control women’s sexuality;
- d. Holding women in captivity physically or emotionally and forcing a marriage upon her; and,
- e. Forcing women or a child to marry someone against their will.⁶

Other commonly used definitions that are utilized by frontline responders on forced marriage include the UK Home Office’s definition of a forced marriage, the UK Oxfordshire National Health Service definition of forced marriage, international human rights framework on marriage, violence against women laws, and laws against child marriage.

LEGISLATION ON FORCED MARRIAGE

In addition to examining how forced marriage is defined by government agencies and victim service providers, we conducted an analysis of current forced marriage statutes in the United States. Legislative reviews on state statutes have been conducted by the Tahirih Justice Center and the Global Justice Initiative’s Forced Marriage Prevention Initiative (FMPI).⁷ Building from their reviews on state laws on forced marriage, we wanted to compare how the current definitions of forced marriage compare with state statutes. We also want to caution everyone that we aren’t lawyers by training and hence our interpretation of the statute is based on what was explicitly stated within the statute.

³ U.S Department of State (2005). *Forced Marriage of Minors*. U.S Department of State Foreign Affairs Manual Volume 7-Consular Affairs. 1-7 Accessed from <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/86822.pdf>

⁴ Tahirih Justice Center (2011). *Forced Marriage in Immigrant Communities in the United States. 2011 National Survey Results*. P 1-11. Accessible from <http://www.tahirih.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/REPORT-Tahirih-Survey-on-Forced-Marriage-in-Immigrant-Communities-in-the-United-States-September-20114.pdf>

⁵ Dasgupta, S. D. (2008). Forced marriage. In Renzetti, C., & Edleson, J. (Eds.). *Encyclopedia of Interpersonal Violence*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

⁶ Roy, D. (2011). *An Introduction to Forced Marriage in the South Asian Community in the United States*. Manavi Occasional Paper No. 9. Accessed from http://www.manavi.org/documents/Manavi_paper9_pass-6.26.12.pdf. Grant Number 2006-WT-AX-K048.

⁷ The Global Justice Initiative Forced Marriage Prevention Initiative(FMPI) has a list of resources that include facts on forced marriage, case examples, resources on forced marriage, and a list of forced marriage laws and publication. The resources are available here: <http://globaljusticeinitiative.wordpress.com/gji-e-library/library-2/>. The Tahirih Justice Center includes a legislative review that can be found here: <http://www.tahirih.org/advocacy/policy-areas/forced-marriage-initiative>

Key Points: Legislative Review

- Nine states across the country have statutes on forced marriage.
- In comparing state laws with definitions of forced marriage, we found that none of the states explicitly included the absence of full consent as a central piece of what constitutes a forced marriage; and, neither did all state codes on forced marriage cover all classes of offenders or victims.

Currently there are 9 states within the United States that have laws against forced marriage (Tahirih Justice Center, 2011).⁸ Most of these statutes are covered under pandering/prostitution codes or rape laws. **Table 1** within the **Appendix** provides a breakdown of the states, the section of code, and the specific elements of a forced marriage that are covered by the law. The specific elements we looked at within state statutes included force, fraud, coercion, menace, consent, and duress. We further document whether all classes of victims are protected under the law, if the offense is punishable, and if there is protection for at-risk victims of forced marriage.

Based on our basic analysis of states' statutes we found the following main points.

- a. Most states include force, menace, and compel within their language on forced marriage.
- b. Only one state explicitly included coercion within their states' definition of forced marriage.
- c. Fraud and abduction were also explicitly covered within the states' definition in only 2 states.
- d. In 7 of the 9 states, anyone under the law could be considered a perpetrator. However, within Minnesota, parents, guardians, and individuals who have legal custody over a child are excluded from the perpetrator category for a forced marriage. Within some states such as Maryland and Virginia the law explicitly states the perpetrator must willingly seek to forcefully marry the victim, or marry the individual to someone else.
- e. **Victims:** Within less than half of all states that have language on forced marriage, anyone can be a victim of a forced marriage. These state statutes don't limit the category of victims to only cover women or children. For example within California, Oklahoma, and the U.S Virgin Islands only women are considered victims of forced marriage under the law. Therefore men who are victims of forced marriage aren't covered under the state law. Within a few states there are age requirements for a victim. For example in Minnesota the victim of a forced marriage has to be younger than 18 while in Mississippi the victim has to be older than 14 years of age. Only 5 states had any language on providing support to at-risk victims of forced marriage.

In conclusion our legislative review found the majority of states don't have any explicit protections for forced marriage victims. We found states that have language on forced marriage within their statutes weren't as comprehensive or as encompassing as victim services provider definitions. In comparing state laws with definitions of forced marriage, we found that none of the states explicitly included the absence of full consent as a central piece of what constitutes a forced marriage; and, neither did they expand it enough to cover all classes of offenders or victims. While language is included in state statutes that covers compel, coercion, and a victim's will, further research is needed on how these terms such as compel, coercion, and will are interpreted and applied in forced marriage cases as stated under the law. Additionally given only a handful number of states provide protection for at-risk victims of forced marriage, more information is needed on legal protections for victims in cases where individuals are at-risk of forced marriage.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women are coming forward to report a variety of challenges they are facing with forced marriage in the United States (Alanen, 2012).⁹ Some are facing the imminent threat of a forced marriage, and require protection and assistance; others might be in a forced marriage where they are facing physical abuse and have decided to

⁸ Alanen, J. (2011). *Table: Forced Marriage Laws of the U.S States and Territories*. Accessed from <http://globaljusticeinitiative.wordpress.com/gji-e-library/library-2/>

⁹ See note 8

leave—requiring support and assistance. Still others report that they had a forced marriage wherein they did not give their free consent but are not experiencing abuse within the marriage so they are leading a life acceptable to them—but are looking for support groups or networks of other individuals who are in a forced marriage. It is important to note that forced marriage happens for a variety of reasons and can impact, both, women and men.

Despite the existence of anecdotal information from frontline responders on the increase in forced marriage cases, the lack of data makes it difficult to present an accurate picture of the prevalence, need, challenges, and the responses that are available for victims of forced marriage. Currently there isn't a national prevalence estimate available for the United States on the percentage of individuals who are victims of forced marriage. The only national-level statistics that are currently available are from a survey conducted by the Tahirih Justice Center of over 500 agencies across the United States; the focus of the survey was on whether service providers are receiving cases of forced marriage from immigrant communities. Major findings from their study included a list of the following points.

- Within a 2 year period, agencies across the country reported receiving approximately 3000 known and suspected cases of forced marriage.
- 67 percent of respondents reported cases of forced marriage weren't being identified; hence, there was a significant "hidden population" of victims of forced marriage.
- Direct service providers reported receiving cases from 56 different countries of origin that cut across all different faiths.
- Perhaps, most importantly the survey found the majority of agencies weren't equipped in properly handling cases of forced marriage (Tahirih Justice Center, 2011).¹⁰

Findings from the Tahirih Justice Center's survey on the lack of responses available for victims of forced marriage have been further supported by studies that have looked into the causes of forced marriage, and the context under which individuals are at-risk for becoming victims of forced marriage. For example the Sauti Yetu Center for African Women and Families conducted a study on early and forced marriage within the African immigrant community in New York City. The study included interviews and focus groups with 30 girls. Major findings from the study found from the 30 girls, only two girls weren't pressured to marry or weren't already married within the study sample. Girls reported they faced immense pressure from their parents, guardians, friends, and extended families in New York and around the United States—even abroad for marriage. Despite the pressure they faced from their support networks, girls clearly reported they wanted to postpone their marriages; more importantly girls reported they didn't want to lose their relationship with their families, culture, and their community. Further, the lack of legal protections and availability of social services for girls weighed heavily on their decision to marry—only in cases where they had some option to give consent. Among the most pernicious findings from the study was girls reported a lack of protection against violence and forced marriage as influencing their decision to go forward with a forced marriage—because they didn't feel there were other options. For example the study documented cases of girls who tried to utilize the Child Protective System in order to escape forced marriage, and despite seeking the help of CPS, they were screened as ineligible to receive services (Sauti Yetu Center for African Women and Families, 2012).¹¹

¹⁰ Tahirih Justice Center (2011). *Forced Marriage in Immigrant Communities in the United States. 2011 National Survey Results*. P 1-11. Accessible from <http://www.tahirih.org/site/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/REPORT-Tahirih-Survey-on-Forced-Marriage-in-Immigrant-Communities-in-the-United-States-September-20114.pdf>

¹¹ Sauti Yetu Center for African Women and Families, 2012. *A Closer Look at Forced and Early Marriage in African Immigrant Communities in New York City. P 1-28. Sauti Yetu Occasional Report, Vol. 3, 2012. Accessed from http://gallery.mailchimp.com/6aa9ae6326c5675db83015b02/files/EFM_Report_FINAL_2.pdf*

Manavi further contributed to the research on forced marriage by conducting a survey of 12 organizations within the South Asian community that address violence against women. Their results found 83 percent of all organizations reported they had worked with women within the past 5 years who reported facing retaliation due to a forced marriage. A key finding from Manavi's study was victims struggled with the language they used to describe a forced marriage; many victims that sought help from victim services agencies used the term "arranged marriage" to describe their experience. Hence victims of forced marriage weren't identifying themselves as such. In other instances many victims would come forward and seek a remedy for the domestic violence or sexual assault they faced at the hands of their partners, in-laws, or the extended family. Within such cases unless a case manager or an agency screened for a forced marriage, it wasn't apparent that abuse was an extension of a forced marriage. Consequentially cases of forced marriage are either never identified as such or are slipping through the cracks because even victims who experience a forced marriage don't have the language to name their experience as such (Roy, 2011).¹²

In addition to these three foundational studies on forced marriage in the U.S., Julia Alanan (2012)¹³ released a paper on forced marriage that included information on how forced marriage isn't a form of abuse specific to the immigrant community; on the contrary harmful marriage practices have existed within the United States for years. She provided examples of forced marriage cases that received the attention of the mainstream media; these cases included the case of Warren Jeffs' Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS) and the Tony Alamo Spiritual Ministry. Within these cases numerous underage girls were forced into marriages with the youngest girl being an eight year old. Other examples of forced marriage within the United States include the "shotgun wedding" where parents force their pregnant daughter to marry the father of the child. Alanan (2012)¹⁴ also provides critical information on the forms of protection that are available for victims under U.S laws.

Forthcoming research findings on forced marriage is also underway at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice where the AHA Foundation has commissioned a study on forced marriage in NYC; while the data from this report isn't available publicly at this point, according to the AHA Foundation's Annual Report, the John Jay College of Criminal Justice's study on forced marriage has interviewed over 70 plus students from targeted communities and the interviews have provided information on the complexities of this problem; the study will provide an insight into the specific neighborhoods and communities within New York City that are affected by forced marriage. Information was also included on research being conducted on the possibility of a forced marriage hotline within the United States (AHA Foundation, 2012).¹⁵

The current research on forced marriage all agree more data and information is needed on understanding the complex nature of forced marriage and it's manifestation within the various communities within the United States. The studies also report the remedies available for victims of forced marriage must be strengthened. Most importantly the few research studies on forced marriage agree the United States lags behind European countries—specifically the UK—in creating a coordinated response to forced marriage.

¹² Roy, D. (2011). *An Introduction to Forced Marriage in the South Asian Community in the United States*. Manavi Occasional Paper No. 9. Accessed from http://www.manavi.org/documents/Manavi_paper9_pass-6.26.12.pdf. Grant Number 2006-WT-AX-K048.

¹³ See note 8

¹⁴ See note 8

¹⁵ AHA Foundation (2012). *The AHA Foundation 2012 Annual Report*. Accessed from <http://theahafoundation.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/Year-End-Report-2012.pdf>

STUDY FINDINGS

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a multi-method approach for collecting data on forced marriage. We conducted 524 questionnaires of individuals that attended workshops, talks, and mandatory training on the topic of forced marriage. Our section on **Survey Findings** provides a detailed breakdown of questionnaire respondents by the sub-sample (i.e. students, domestic violence professionals, refugee service providers). We then followed up on the questionnaires by creating a semi-structured interview protocol for individuals and agencies that have experience addressing forced marriage in the United States. With the exception of Nazir Afzal, the Chief Crown Prosecutor for the U.K Home Office, the rest of the interviews were conducted with frontline responders, scholars, and activists within the United States. Our section on **Interview Findings** will present the responses from 22 interviewees on characteristics of forced marriage, the numerous challenges frontline responders face, and their recommendations for improving responses to forced marriage.

In order to build on the information provided by questionnaires and interview respondents, and given that accessing victims of forced marriage is difficult and their voices are critical in shaping effective responses, we conducted a case review of 52 confirmed and suspected cases of forced marriage. Our section on **Case Reviews** includes 1) the mode of reporting; 2) the types of services that victims needed; 3) what types of agencies cases were forwarded to; and, 4) how were cases resolved. We then follow-up our section on case reviews with 10 major recommendations from frontline responders on improving responses to victims of forced marriage.

QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS

A total of 524 questionnaires were administered to students, domestic violence professionals, and refugee service providers. Within a series of talks, workshops, and training for professionals, questionnaires were collected from September 2011 to October 2012. Questionnaires were administered during workshops led by Vidya Sri on forced marriage. These workshops were given in 3 states and 8 cities located on the East Coast of the United States. A questionnaire was administered to 161 domestic violence professionals, 62 professionals from the refugee resettlement field, and 301 students of predominantly South Asian background. All of the workshops with students were conducted on college campuses. Student groups within various universities assembled talks on forced marriage, and had an average of 40 to 50 students that were present for each talk. It is important to note that based on observations during these workshops from all of the groups that attended the talks, the students were the only group that identified, engaged, and understood the issue of forced marriage. The brief anonymous questionnaire was administered at the end of the workshop and included the following questions:

- 1) Did workshop attendees come across known cases of forced marriage;
- 2) Did workshop attendees know of suspected cases of forced marriage;
- 3) How many known and suspected cases of forced marriage were respondents aware of;
- 4) And, what forms of abuse did attendees come across as a result of forced marriage cases.

Data is presented below in **Table 2-Table 8** on the findings from the questionnaire. We have provided results from the questionnaire for the entire sample as a whole and then have provided basic percentages for the individual groups. The tables below provide information on 1) the number of suspected and confirmed cases our entire sample

reported; 2) the number of individual respondents that reported coming across confirmed and suspected cases of forced marriage; and, 3) what forms of violence have respondents seen as a result of forced marriage.

Table 2 provides a breakdown of the survey sample by the following groups: 1) Domestic violence professionals; 2) Refugee service providers; and, 3) Students of South Asian background within college campuses.

Table 2: Breakdown of Survey Sample

	(n)	Percentage
Refugee Service Providers	62	12%
Domestic Violence (DV) professionals	161	31%
Students	301	57%
Total	524	100%

According to our findings, 57 percent of our entire sample was comprised of predominantly South Asian students on college campuses. Thirty-one percent of our entire sample was composed of domestic violence professionals, and 12 percent of our sample comprised of refugee service providers.

REPORTS OF CONFIRMED AND SUSPECTED FORCED MARRIAGE CASES

Our sample **reported coming across 531 cases of suspected and confirmed forced marriage cases**. **Table 3** documents how many respondents reported coming across 1, 2 or 3+ cases of suspected and confirmed cases of forced marriage. It is important to note within our questionnaire we only asked whether respondents came across 1, 2, or 3 or more cases. We didn't ask individuals that reported coming across 3 or more cases to fill in the total number of suspected and confirmed cases they came across. We later discovered in entering our data from questionnaires that some individuals checked the 3 plus answer and then filled in the number of cases they had seen; given we didn't allow that option for all respondents we excluded any fill-in responses and only counted when they checked 3 or more cases.

Table 3: Number of Known and Suspected Forced Marriage Cases

	1 (n=109)	2 (n=130)	3+ (n=54)
Reports on the number of cases individuals reported (n=293/524; 56%)	37%	44%	18%

Overall 56 percent of our entire group of respondents (n=524) reported coming across at least one case of suspected or confirmed case of forced marriage. For this question we were only asking if respondents recall coming across cases they thought were forced marriage cases, or knew for sure were confirmed cases. We then ran frequencies on how many of the 293 respondents reported coming across 1, 2, or 3 plus cases. Based on our findings 62 percent of respondents reported knowing 2 or more cases that they either suspected were forced marriage cases, or knew were forced marriage cases. It is important to note 18 percent of the respondents reported coming across 3 or more cases of suspected and confirmed forced marriage cases.

Major Points: Questionnaire Findings

- Approximately 1 in 3 respondents from our entire sample (N=524) reported witnessing known cases of forced marriage (37 percent).
- Almost 3 in 5 confirmed cases of forced marriage were reported by students (61 percent).
- Almost 2 in 5 confirmed cases of forced marriage were reported by professionals (39 percent).
- Almost 2 in 5 students in our entire sample of 301 students reported witnessing confirmed cases of forced marriage (39 percent). This rate was similar to the total percentage of all refugee service providers in our study (44 percent), and higher than domestic violence professionals (30 percent).

CONFIRMED CASES OF FORCED MARRIAGE

Table 4 below provides a summary of our findings by the percentage of respondents that reported known cases of forced marriage from the entire sample of questionnaire respondents (N=524). We found from our entire sample of 524 respondents, 37 percent (n=193) reported known cases of forced marriage. In simpler terms approximately 1 in 3 questionnaire respondents from our entire sample (N=524) reported known cases of forced marriage. We then examined the two following categories of percentages for the number of individuals that reported known cases of forced marriage: 1) what is the individual group (i.e. service providers/student) breakdown by individuals who reported known cases of forced marriage. For example what percentage of the total 193 individuals that reported known cases of forced marriage were composed of service providers versus professionals; 2) what is the percentage breakdown by each individual group that reported known cases of forced marriage. In other terms what percentage of all individual group respondents (i.e. students, professionals) reported known cases of forced marriage. We provided these two different measures to account for the overrepresentation of students in our sample.

Table 4: Known Cases of FM	Percentage by Number of Known Cases (n=193)	Percentage of Known Cases within individual group
Refugee Service Providers (n=62)	14%	44%
Domestic Violence (DV) professionals (n=161)	25%	30%
Workshops on college campuses with mostly students of S. Asian Descent (n=301)	61%	39%

Our initial hypothesis was despite the overrepresentation of students in our sample, professionals would report most of the known cases. On the contrary we found students reported 61 percent of all known cases in our sample. Approximately 2 in 3 known cases were reported by students while professionals reported 1 in 3 cases of known forced marriage cases. In sum, students reported a higher rate of coming across known cases of forced marriage than domestic violence professionals.

When we analyzed individual groups to determine what percentage of each individual group reported known cases of forced marriage, we found similar percentages of coming across forced marriage cases. For example 44 percent of all refugee service providers in our entire sample reported coming across confirmed cases of forced marriage. For our entire sample of students, almost 2 in 5 students reported known cases of forced marriage—a higher percentage rate than domestic violence professionals.

SUSPECTED CASES OF FORCED MARRIAGE

Since the issue of forced marriage has recently begun to receive attention, and there are different variations in how forced marriage is being defined, we asked questionnaire respondents if they came across suspected cases of forced marriage. **Table 5** below provides information on the number of suspected cases of forced marriage that were reported in our study.

Table 5: Suspected Cases of FM

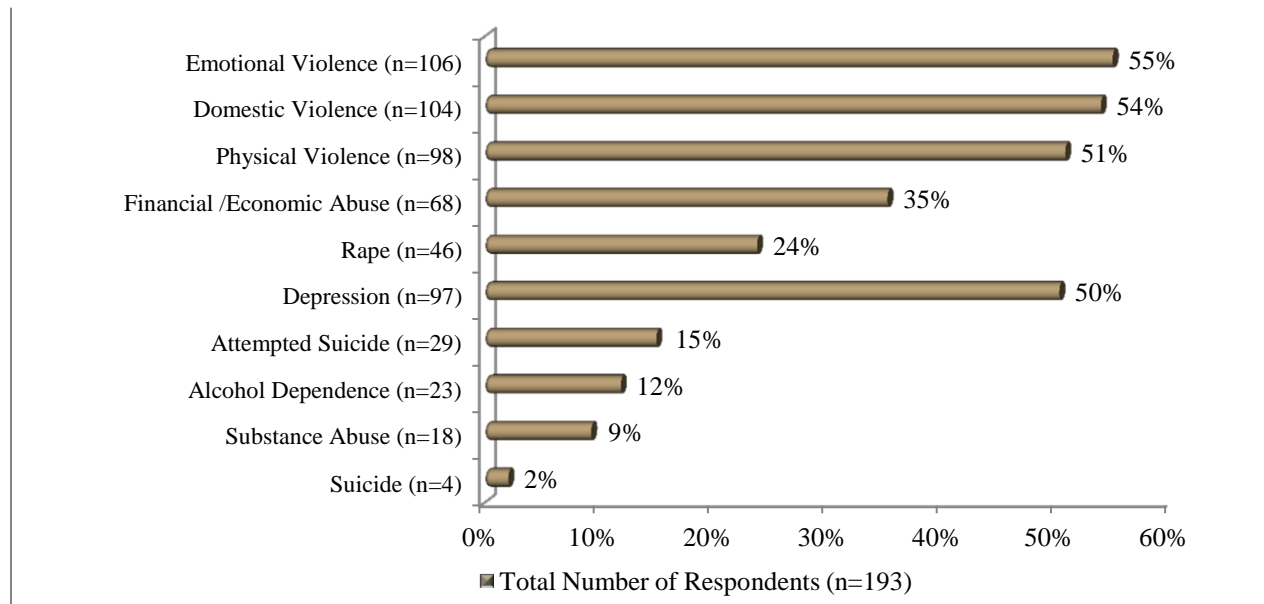
	Percentage of Total Suspected Cases (n=277)	Percentage of Suspected Cases by Group
Refugee Service Providers (n=62)	13%	56%
Domestic Violence (DV) professionals (n=161)	29%	50%
Workshops on college campuses with mostly students of S. Asian Descent (n=301)	58%	53%

Almost 1 in 2 respondents from our entire sample of 524 respondents reported coming across suspected cases of forced marriage (53 percent). A total of 277 individuals out of 524 respondents reported coming across suspected cases of forced marriage. In line with our findings for confirmed cases of forced marriage, students again reported coming across most of the suspected cases of forced marriage. Approximately 2 in 3 respondents in our entire study reported suspected cases of forced marriage were students (58 percent). When we broke down our questionnaire sample by individual groups in order to determine how many individuals reported coming across suspected cases of forced marriage, we found almost half of all individual groups—students, domestic violence professionals, and refugee service providers—reported suspected cases of forced marriage. Overall we found the highest percentages of suspected cases by group were reported by refugee service providers (56 percent), which was followed by students (53 percent) and domestic violence professionals (50 percent).

CHARACTERISTICS OF VIOLENCE AND ABUSE IN FORCED MARRIAGE

Our questionnaire asked respondents to report forms of violence and abuse they came across as a result of a forced marriage. In order to maintain the validity of our data, we excluded any cases where individuals reported they suspected cases of forced marriage. Our findings for this section only cover respondents that reported they came across known cases of forced marriage. **Table 6** documents the forms of violence that our study sample reported.

Table 6: Characteristics of Violence



Major Points: Characteristics of Violence and Abuse in Forced Marriage

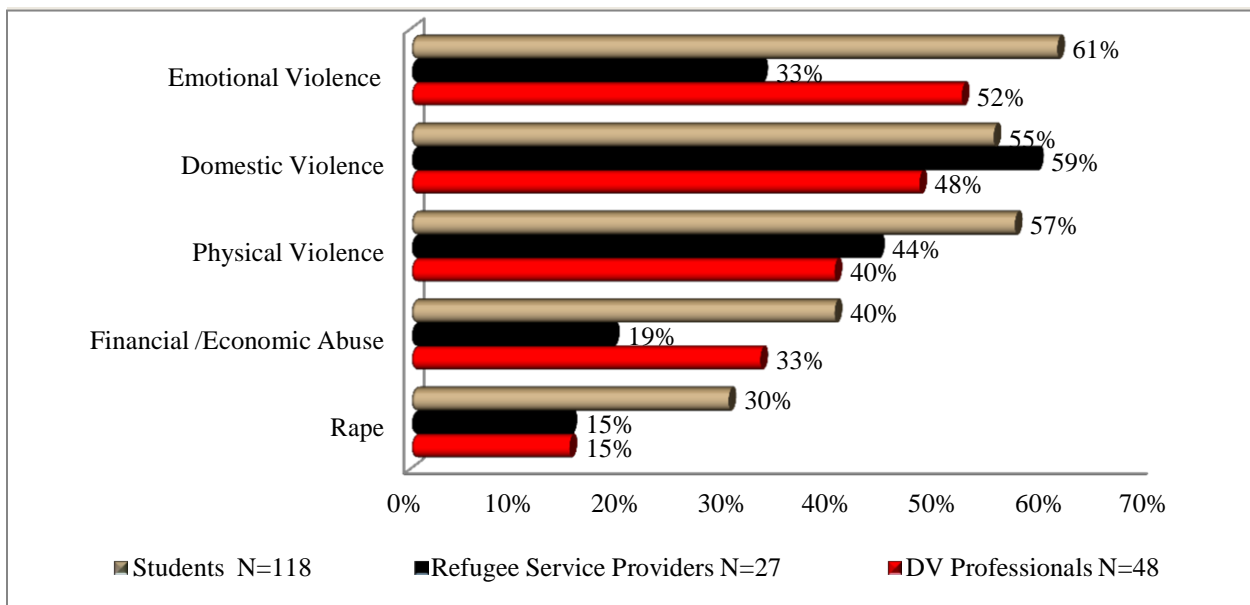
- Approximately half of all individuals that reported witnessing known cases of forced marriage stated they saw emotional violence (55 percent), domestic violence (54 percent), physical violence (51 percent), and depression (50 percent) as consequences of forced marriage.

From 193 respondents that reported known cases of forced marriage, we found the following results:

- Approximately half of the sample reported coming across emotional violence (55 percent), domestic violence (54 percent), physical violence (51 percent), and depression (50 percent);
- Almost one-third of respondents reported coming across financial and economic abuse (35 percent);
- Approximately 1 in 4 respondents reported coming across rape (24%) as a consequence of forced marriage;
- 15 percent of our sample reported individuals had attempted suicide as a result of a forced marriage; and,
- 2 percent of our sample reported they knew of victims who committed suicide as a result of a forced marriage.

In addition to examining these numbers, we wanted to know what percentage of each individual group that reported a known case of forced marriage also reported coming across these forms of violence. In simpler terms if x percent of students reported coming across known cases of forced marriage, then what percentage of that group also reported coming across forms of violence. **Table 7** documents the results for the number of respondents by each individual group that reported known cases of forced marriage, and also came across forms of abuse and violence.

Table 7: Characteristics of Abuse and Violence by Individual Group



Overall students reported the highest rates of witnessing forms of violence as a consequence of forced marriage. For each individual form of abuse—with the exception of domestic violence—students reported a higher percentage of witnessing emotional violence, physical violence, financial/economic abuse, and rape as a consequence of forced marriage. For example for the entire sample of students that reported known cases of forced marriage, approximately 2 in 3 reported witnessing emotional violence, physical violence, and domestic violence as a consequence of the forced marriage. We want to emphasize that we didn't measure whether forced marriage existed with these other forms of abuse, but clearly asked whether these forms of violence were the consequence of a forced

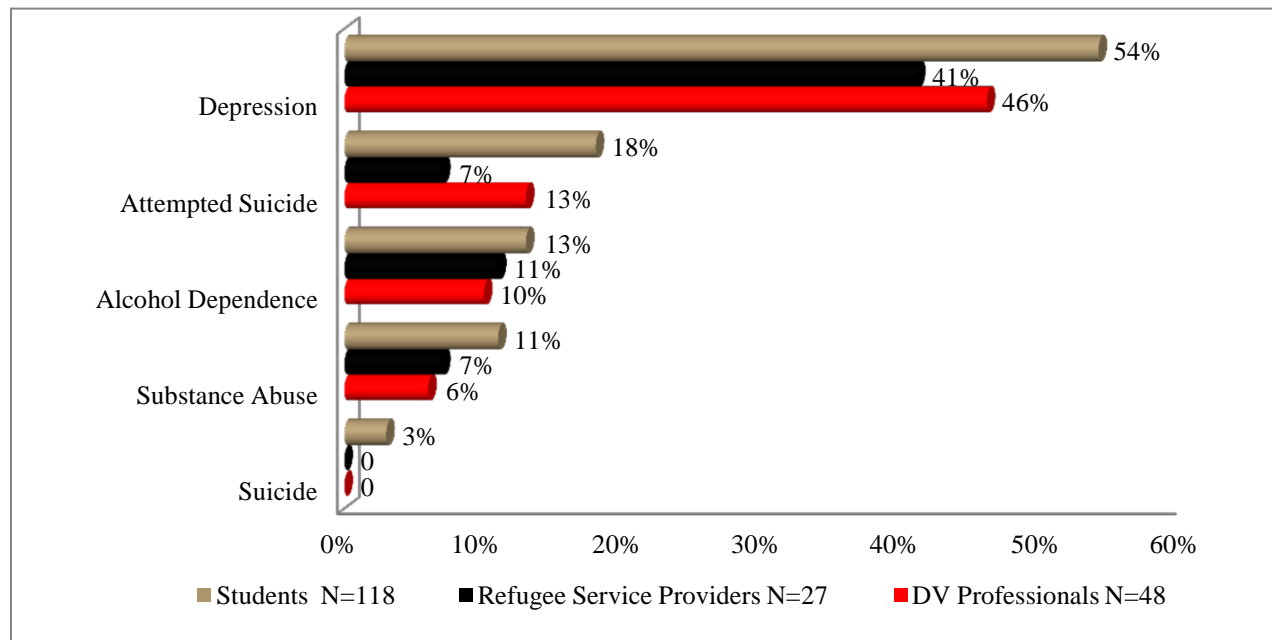
Characteristics of Violence and Abuse in Forced Marriage (Continued)

- Overall students reported the highest rates of witnessing forms of violence as a consequence of forced marriage. For each individual form of abuse—with the exception of domestic violence—students reported a higher percentage of witnessing emotional violence, physical violence, financial/economic abuse, and rape as a consequence of forced marriage.
- Almost 1 in 3 students reported coming across rape as a result of forced marriage.
- It is also important to note only students reported coming across suicide cases as a direct consequence of forced marriage cases.

marriage. Hence our study respondents clearly reported these forms of violence were the consequences of forced marriage.

We further asked respondents that reported known cases of forced marriage if they had come across depression, suicide, attempted suicide, substance abuse, and alcohol dependence. We wanted to know whether respondents had come across emotional or psychological consequences as a result of forced marriage. **Table 8** below documents the findings.

Table 8: Impact of Forced Marriage



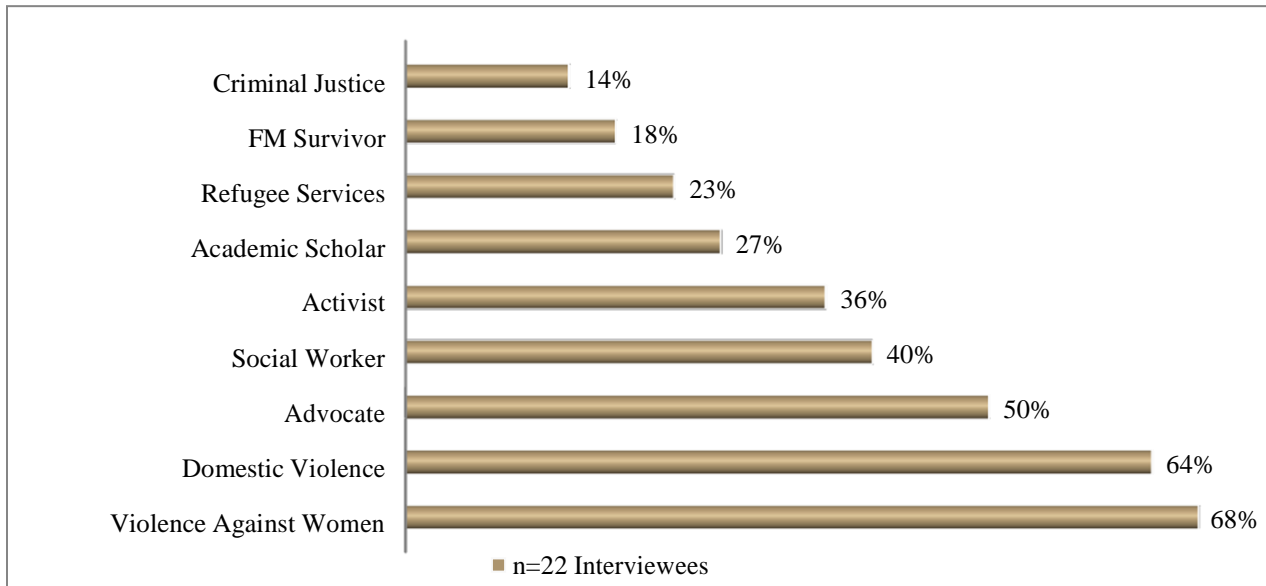
Based on our survey findings we found 54 percent of all students that reported known cases of forced marriage reported coming across depression; and, 46 percent of domestic violence professionals reported coming across depression.

More students reported they came across victims who attempted suicide or suicide as a result of forced marriage than domestic violence professionals and service providers. It is important to note the only group in our study that reported they knew of cases where victims committed suicide as a consequence of forced marriage were students.

INTERVIEW FINDINGS: EXPERIENCES OF FRONTLINE RESPONDERS

In order to compliment the data we received from the questionnaire, we conducted 22 interviews with stakeholders within the field of forced marriage and other areas of work that intersect with the issue of forced marriage. Our aim was to provide richer data by documenting interviewee experiences with forced marriage cases, and their recommendations on improving responses to forced marriage. **Table 9** below provides information on interviewee backgrounds. According to our breakdown most interviewees came from a multidisciplinary background where most of our interviewees reported they work within the field of violence against women. It is important to note 18 percent of our interviewee sample was composed of survivors of forced marriage.

Table 9: Backgrounds of Interviewees



In interviewing a diverse group of individuals, we were able to pull major themes that all respondents touched upon. These included the reported increase in the number of forced marriage cases, the lack of clarity between what constitutes a forced marriage and an arranged marriage, and the level of complexity forced marriage cases presented for first responders. For example Julia Alanen, the Co-Founder and Director of the National Forced Marriage Prevention Initiative at Global Justice Initiative stated the following about how she started coming across cases of forced marriage:

"I became aware of forced marriage around 2009, when I worked as a national legal technical assistance and training provider serving organizations combatting domestic violence and trafficking in persons. I started getting more and more calls

“I WAS 16 WHEN THEY FORCED ME TO GO OVERSEAS THE FIRST TIME TO MARRY. I WAS 18 WHEN THEY TRICKED ME AND FORCED ME TO GO DO IT AGAIN. I NEVER BELIEVED THAT THE MARRIAGE WAS REAL.” -SURVIVOR

from providers who didn't know how to respond to these unfamiliar cases. Was it a cultural or human rights issue? Did forced marriage fit into their organizational mandate and their funding parameters? These were some of the questions being raised by my callers. Victims were surfacing everywhere; forced marriage was clearly not limited to any one state or one faith or ethnic community... It was an emerging issue because as a nation, we were just becoming aware of it, and we confronted a profound dearth of directed laws, resources or funding to address the problem.”

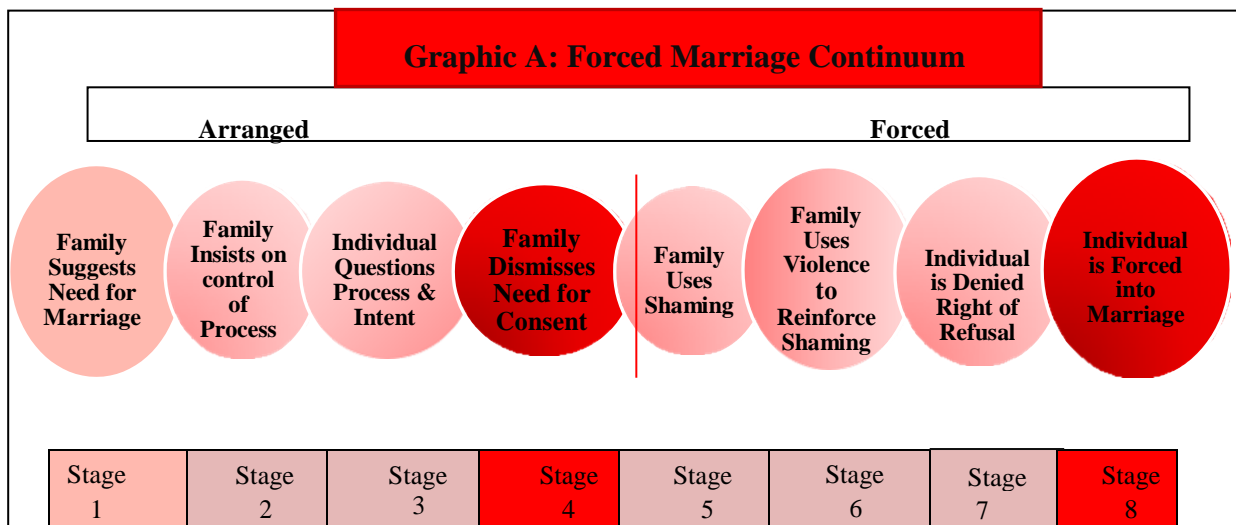
These sentiments were reported by others in our study; they reported forced marriage cases presented new challenges because their agencies didn't have the resources or the mandate to respond to forced marriage cases. A major barrier to responding to cases of forced marriage which we explore below was the need for understanding the difference between arranged marriages and forced marriages.

ARRANGED MARRIAGE V. FORCED MARRIAGE

The need for clarity between forced and arranged marriage was reported by frontline responders as one of the major concerns they face in their work. For example Rupa M. Khetarpal, an expert on violence in the immigrant community stated:

“In training social service providers and mental health providers, quite often the discussion involves differentiating between arranged and forced marriages. The boundaries get blurred and it is imperative to differentiate between the two.”

This sentiment was further echoed by others who felt forced marriage is being lumped under the category of arranged marriage because the language and understanding of how they are distinctly different isn't widely available or known. Further in going over the 22 interviews, workshops with professionals, and talks with students, individuals reported they felt arranged marriage and forced marriage were on a continuum. Many asked for a clearer and deeper understanding of when arranged marriages can become forced marriages, or if forced marriage always was carried out with the intent to marry someone without their consent. As a result of these interviews, we combed through the interview notes and our case reviews of suspected and forced marriage cases to make an attempt at creating a continuum of forced marriage. We want to caution anyone that this continuum doesn't offer the exact blueprint of how arranged marriages turn into forced marriages since we are just beginning to explore the topic of forced marriage. However we wanted to create this continuum to document what we heard.



The graphic above illustrates one potential sequence as a continuum. The process begins in the first stage where the family declares a need for marriage. This stage is not left to the discretion of the individual being married. In the second stage, the family insists on controlling the process by choosing the mate, his/her race, religion, socio-economic level, family background, geographic location, education level, language spoken, professional occupation, age, and their income level. In the third stage, the individual questions the process and the intent behind the process. For example the individual may have been planning to marry at a later time or to a different type of mate, or personally doesn't feel they wanted to marry at the point the parents want them to marry.

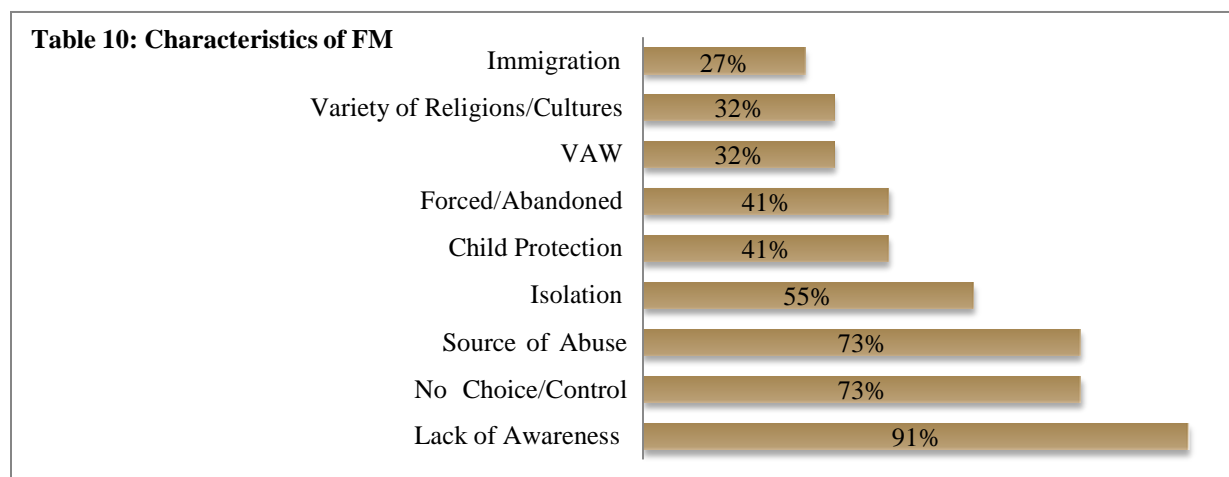
In the fourth stage the family dismisses the need for consent. This stage is a pivotal one because this dismissal could signal the transformation of the potential arranged marriage to a forced marriage. The vertical red line is used to demarcate the potential end of the arranged marriage and start of the forced marriage. In the fifth stage, the individual pushes back on the choices being made for her/him resulting in the potential for the family to become hostile and coercive using shaming to enforce a predetermined code of conduct. In stage 6, the type and intensity of the violence escalates and may include various manifestations of emotional, economic, and physical abuse. In Stage 7 is where the family explicitly denies the right of refusal, and through emotional or physical intimidation forces the individual to accept the marriage. In the final stage, the event of the forced marriage may take place in a foreign country under duress, physical threat, or under the influence of drugs.

While we couldn't document the feedback of some of our interviewees within this continuum, some reported we need to take a deeper look at how arranged marriages are defined. They stated we need to examine them within the context of how girls and women are raised in a family, community, or culture where they may have been raised without the understanding that the right to choose the individual they want to marry isn't a right afforded to them. For example Dr. Shamita Das DasGupta, the Co-founder of Manavi made the following point:

“We need to think a lot more about the differences between arranged and forced marriages. Arranged marriage is frequently where women have little say and choice and control over their lives.... It's a denial of desires for girls and women.”

CHARACTERISTICS OF FORCED MARRIAGE

In conducting interviews with front line responders, scholars and activists, the following characteristics of forced marriage emerged in the interview process; below in **Table 10** we document the characteristics we came across. We have expanded on these characteristics within the following pages.



“I FIGHT AND SCREAM BUT THEY BEAT ME A LOT. ALL OF THEM BEAT ME, MY FATHER, MY UNCLE, AND MY FATHER-IN-LAW. THEY GAVE ME SOME DRUG TO DRINK AND I FALL ASLEEP. WHEN I WAKE UP MY COUSIN TOLD ME I WAS MARRIED.” -SURVIVOR

CULTURAL SUPREMACY

Cultural Supremacy can be a sensitive and complex component of forced marriage. This is when there may be a tendency to overlook local customs, mores, and laws and even potentially dismiss their relevance. There are critical components of effective integration that may be lost due to a need for cultural supremacy within the family and/or community. Families may engage in harmful practices under the banner of culture when it is questionable whether behaviors like physical and emotional intimidation, for example, could ever be justified within any cultural context. Some families may misconstrue religion or culture in order to facilitate a forced marriage. In some instances even when there are explicit safeguards in place for individuals against being a victim of a forced marriage, the religion or culture may be misconstrued in a way to justify the forced marriage or the need for marriage. For example according to Zillehuma Hasan, the Executive Director for Wafa House, she stated “Culture supersedes religion. We are here to educate victims of their religious rights.” One of those rights includes having the right to consent to marriage. In addition to religious rights, interviewees reported the need for clinging to harmful cultural practices even in light of being in violation of certain laws was an issue that should be investigated further by trying to understand why certain communities may let go of some practices, but not others. Tabassum Siraj, the Senior Program Analyst for the Office of Refugee Resettlement stated:

“We need to look at aspects of cultural supremacy which make refugee/immigrant parents cling to their traditions even at the expense of breaking the law.”

At the same time one important point some individuals noted was this challenge in trying to strike a delicate balance between being respectful of communities and culture while still responding to abuse that may be disguised under the cloak of culture. The concern was in being politically correct, forms of abuse such as forced marriage may go unaddressed. For example the following quote from Nazir Afzal, the Chief Crown Prosecutor from the United Kingdom demonstrate the need to strike a balance between being respectful of culture and community and simultaneously addressing forced marriage:

“There is also the potential for people to feel above the law... We have experienced the need for political correctness in the United Kingdom; we have also experienced religious hatred. We cannot afford to see this as a barrier to taking action on the issue of Forced Marriage...”

IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT ISSUES

In a related issue to culture, interviewees further stated they have seen cases of forced marriage practices among some in the immigrant community or the refugee community. Some of the interviewees reported that enhanced integration training for new immigrants or refugees to the United States may help in educating newly arrived immigrant and refugee communities that certain practices aren't acceptable legally within the United States. For example the following sets of quotes illustrate the ways in which responders are coming across the practice of forced marriage within refugee and immigrant communities.

“Many of my clients are or have fled persecution, because their government has/had not protected them against forced marriages in the country of origin. Running a multicultural mental health program for immigrant communities quite often the “forced marriage” phenomenon pops its head up”- Rupa M. Khetarpal

“We have had an opportunity to engage in initial discussions with women in several refugee and immigrant populations... Many of the women in the groups had marriages that had been arranged or forced in their countries of origin and did not have other marriage models to reference.”- Lisanne Divine

“I knew a couple of women in Chicago who had experienced forced marriage, and a few women mentioned being married off at age 18 and then being used (by their husbands) to get green cards; they were not given the choice to reject the marriage. There was a lack of awareness of their rights to refuse the marriages arranged for them. When we look at compliance with US laws, this illegal practice and the mindset behind it are huge barriers to cultural integration.”- Tabassum Siraj

For some first generation immigrants, the practice of forced marriage may be a barrier to effective integration. For other non-recent immigrants, the creation of a dysfunctional family unit can create a dangerous and volatile set of obstacles.

No CHOICE/CONTROL

In our interviews with survivors we heard the lack of awareness of rights contributed to placing individuals at-risk for a forced marriage. Some of the survivors we spoke to stated they wanted to please and honor all of the wishes of their families. The fear of being disowned, beaten, and being ostracized by their families was reported as influencing their decision to cope with a forced marriage. The fear of losing a family and being left devoid of a family identity led individuals to accept their family’s decision to choose the individual they would marry or even when to marry. This decision was reported as influencing individuals irrespective of age, class, and educational status. There is a willingness among some individuals to forgo individual choice and control over their own life and specifically the marriage process due to the fear of being ostracized—even in cases where it results in living with abuse.

TYPES OF ABUSE AND VIOLENCE USED AGAINST VICTIMS

Across the spectrum from domestic violence professionals, students, refugee service providers, and professionals working on the issue of violence against women, respondents reported forced marriage encompasses a wide range of abuses. Forced marriage in numerous instances involves coercion, intimidation, threats, but in many cases interviewees reported coming across multiple forms of abuse that were applied to victims. **Graphics B and C** below document some of the more common forms of abuse that may encompass a forced marriage. **Graphic B** presents some of the forms of abuse seen committed at the hands of families to lead to a forced marriage, or abuse seen after the forced marriage. It must be noted there can be multiple perpetrators. One may be involved in the lead up to a forced marriage, while other forms of abuse may be seen after the forced marriage has been carried out and the abuse may be committed in the form of domestic violence at the hand of in-laws or the husband.

Graphic C documents the effect on victims of forced marriage; for example in interviews we conducted, interviewees reported victims may experience one or all of these forms of abuse and the effects. Further interviewees did report that typically they saw the violence on a continuum. **Graphic B and Graphic C** present one continuum that cases of forced marriage may take. We created these two continuums based on our review of cases and during interviews with first responders. We do—however want to caution that forced marriage can be a highly complex form of violence and that one continuum cannot be representative of all cases. We have presented **Graphic A and Graphic B** together because interviewees reported the forms of violence used by abusers and the impact on victims is interdependent.

Graphic B Characteristics of the Types of Violence Used by Abusers	Graphic C Effects on Victims of Forced Marriage
Homicide	Suicide
Sexual Abuse	Attempted Suicide
Immigration Issues	Self-Harm
Forced/Abandoned Overseas	Alcohol & Substance Abuse
Isolation/False Imprisonment	Poor Work/Academic Record
Physical/Economic Abuse	Excessive Absence from Work/School
Coercion/Intimidation	Depression

For example in some cases the forced marriage can lead to depression. By utilizing coercion and intimidation as a foundation, a variety of harmful practices may be used to achieve a forced marriage. The **Physical/Economic Abuse** may result in **Poor Work/Academic Performance**. **Isolation and false imprisonment** may be used to withdraw children or adults from school and remove individuals with physical or learning disabilities from their routine activities. This has been used in conjunction with the removal of cell phones and internet to increase the level of pressure used to coerce and intimidate. Minors and adults have been **forced overseas** against their will and sometimes **abandoned** there for months or years depending on their willingness to comply with the forced marriage. Different types of **immigration issues** have been reported as well. Examples include the use of identity theft for the purpose of bringing a foreign spouse to the United States and the use of physical violence to compel the sponsorship of a spouse.

Sexual Abuse is another aspect that has been reported in a variety of ways. Children may be sexually abused by their father, uncle or close family friend. One report reveals years of sexual abuse by a father of his daughter. The daughter describes her experience as one of submission and obedience. Another report tells the trauma of a 15 year old girl who was sexually abused in the home of a 47 year old close family friend for over a year. She describes her experience as “being loved by her uncle.” This young girl also shares the deep need she felt to be submissive and obedient. Other reports of sexual abuse include parents locking their children in the bedroom, not allowing them to use the bathroom or leave the room until they consummate the marriage.

“ONE WOMAN, AGED 17, WAS MARRIED OVERSEAS, ABUSED PHYSICALLY AND LEFT FOR DEAD. HER ABUSER IS FACING A CHARGE OF 25 YEARS JAIL TIME.” –ZILLEHUMA HASAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, Wafa House

Substance abuse such as alcoholism and the misuse of various medications have been reported by frontline responders as being used to incapacitate victims by their abuser and as a form of coping with the forced marriage for victims. There may be a link between being forced/abandoned overseas and the consistent use of various substances to either self-medicate or cause self-harm. Reports regarding substance abuse overseas while being forced/abandoned include details regarding the ease with which alcohol and prescription medication can be obtained in many of these countries. Attempts at **self-harm and suicide** have been reported ranging from overdosing on drugs/alcohol and self-harm/cutting. There are several well documented cases of **homicide** perpetrated by parents and family members in the United States and Canada. The homicides have been of the children themselves or of relatives abroad. The latter used to deliver a specific message as the consequences of non-compliance with a forced marriage

DECEPTION

Deception is a tactic sometimes used to cause a forced marriage. Young women have been falsely told that a grandmother is on her death bed and they must travel immediately to see her. Indeed in one case, the grandmother herself received the young woman at the airport, and much to the shock and dismay of the young woman her grandmother wasn't dying. This was used as a method to deceive her. Other examples include a father telling his daughter that once she marries she can return to the United States without her husband. He convinces her that her husband wouldn't be able to come with her since he has no visa. The bride returns innocently to the United States believing that the marriage was done to please family elders—only to be beaten into signing immigration papers for her husband in the United States.

There are different types of deception that can result in far reaching consequences for the victim and the family. For example *Naheed Bahram, NY Program Manager, Women for Afghan Women*, shares

“People may not have birth certificates so they sometimes lie about their ages to cause a forced marriage. Also, they sometimes lie about the first wife, they may not disclose this.”

Tabassum Siraj, Senior Program Analyst, Office of Refugee Resettlement, shares the following:

“I know of male doctors whose parents forced them into new marriages because they didn't approve of the partners their sons had chosen. These men didn't tell their wives they were married (one even had children) and within six months their new marriages were annulled.”

DIMINISHED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE/EXCESSIVE ABSENCE FROM SCHOOL OR WORK

The coercion, violence, and/or fraud that may be used to force a marriage and the repeated shaming that may be used to enforce it can have various negative consequences. Diminished academic performance and excessive absence from school or work are distinct consequences. One Indian American 15 year old gifted student started failing classes after her parents started repeatedly shaming her for talking to boys. She started consistently cutting classes, yet no school official questioned her academic record. She became a smoker and an alcoholic in high school, yet no one questioned her erratic behavior. She was secretly seeing a 47 year old man who would take her to his house and sexually molest her repeatedly. She started shoplifting and was arrested by the police. At the age of 18, her father forced her to go overseas and forced her into marriage.

A 22 year old South Asian American woman was made to quit her job because she refused to marry someone of her father's choosing. He kept her under house arrest, took away her cell phone, and never allowed her to go anywhere without the presence of an older male escort. She was forced to go overseas and then drugged and married against her wishes.

ISOLATION

The question is sometimes asked, "If the victim is over 18, why don't they just leave?" The power of consistent isolation is underestimated and becomes a significant enabler of forced marriage. Restricting the movement of the victim, carefully controlling who he/she interacts with, enforcing early curfews and minimal interaction with the outside world ensures a lack of awareness.

Sara Merhaba, Case Worker, MCC, Dallas, TX., shares the following:

"These girls are restricted to outside resources, as it is evident in their families that they are not comfortable."

Nasim Hoomanrad, MSW, Outreach Coordinator, Ohio Domestic Violence Network states the following:

"The minimization and isolation also led family members to blame the victim for the abuse brought on by the partner. The lack of support, institutionally and personally, helps perpetrators continue the violence and reaffirms the family and culture's stance on marriage."

ABDUCTION, FORCED/ABANDONED OVERSEAS

There have been reports of women being drugged and forced to get on the airplane to a foreign destination. Once they reach the foreign destination, they are kept under house arrest with their passports, cell phones, and internet access taken away until they are married. In extreme cases, they may be abandoned overseas if the family perceives that they are unhappy with the marriage and may run away if they are allowed to return to the United States.

Naheed Bahram, NY Program Manager, Women for Afghan Women shares

"I know of one case where she was 16 years old and her parents took her overseas and left her there until she was 19 or 20, then they brought her back. Her husband was quiet until he got the green card, then he was beating and raping her. She came to me for a protection order and filed for a divorce. Her husband wanted to come to the USA, he wanted the green card, then he wanted to leave the marriage."

One 20 year old South Asian American woman was forced to go to the UK with her new husband to the home of her older sister. She shares that her family forced her to go to the airport with no warning. Her mother had packed her things and never told her where they were going. She shares that they did this because she refused to consummate her marriage. She managed to email the local police in the UK who came to the house and escorted her out. The local police told her, based on what they had observed inside the home, that it was unsafe for her to remain in the UK and she must return to the USA immediately.

FALSE IMPRISONMENT

Reports have come in from women who are being violently beaten and falsely imprisoned in their homes because they refuse to marry. Often, women are beaten and threatened if they refuse to sign immigration documents to sponsor their grooms to the United States. These women want to know their rights but they typically don't want to send their families to prison and they don't want themselves to be imprisoned either.

This creates a labyrinth of challenges that one must navigate through to get to the other side. So daunting does this task seem to many that the tendency to succumb to immediate circumstances is not uncommon.

For example one 22 year old woman frantically texted in the middle of the night stating that this was the only way she could communicate with the outside world while hiding in the bathroom of her home. She shared that she was escorted everywhere and was not allowed a cell phone or internet access. She had secretly held on to a sim card and used an old cell phone that no one knew of to text for help. She was desperate but feared for her life since her family may hear her and violently beat her again. She spent the next one hour texting the details of her forced marriage and the violence and coercion that had led her to seek help

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The overlap between domestic violence and forced marriage was a reoccurring theme reported by frontline responders. For example frontline responders reported they have seen cases of forced marriage where the family unit, the extended family, and the community may become hostile or coercive towards a victim; hence they reported multiple levels of victimization and various forms. Further we heard victims of forced marriage face a host of forms of abuse that can include domestic violence, sexual abuse, and physical violence among others. For example Nasim Hoomanrad, the Outreach Coordinator for Ohio's Domestic Violence Network stated:

“Forced marriage and domestic and sexual violence all result in the power and control over one person (or in some cases, many persons within a family) of someone else.”

Nasim Hoomanrad's points were echoed by others that they have seen an overlap between domestic violence, forced marriage, and sexual abuse. We also heard that in some cases there are multiple abusers that can range from the immediate family, the extended family, and in some cases members of the community—hence further complicating the abuse.

We further heard that in forced marriage cases the family unit or the community may have the perception of losing their child to an external factor outside of their control. For example the child may start dating someone, giving an appearance of being too “Western,” or may go against the wishes of the family. That perception of losing their child may trigger the need to exert control over the individual's life and deciding who their child should marry is one form of exerting control. If the individual refuses they are then shamed by the family. This form of shaming may include the use of the following forms of physical and psychological forms of abuse: 1) Physical violence; 2) Coercion; 3) Emotional abuse; and, 4) Imprisonment within the home.

However, despite mentioning the existence of a range of reported forms of family violence within forced marriage cases, domestic violence was reported as one of the forms of abuse that numerous respondents brought up. In an interview with Zillehuma Hasan, the Executive Director of Wafa House, she reports:

“Because we deal primarily with domestic violence, when we delve further into an individual's history, we find that Forced Marriage may have been a part of it. About half of our domestic violence cases are forced marriages”

However one of the issues we heard from survivors was there is a lack of information available on domestic violence resources for victims of forced marriage; these resources could potentially form a first

“MY SISTER’S SCHOOL WAS HELPFUL BUT SOME THINGS THEY DON’T UNDERSTAND. THEY NEED TO UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS IS. I TRIED TO TELL MY DOCTOR BUT HE ASKED ME IF HE SHOULD CALL MY FATHER, HE DIDN’T UNDERSTAND THAT I DIDN’T WANT HIM TO CALL MY FATHER. EVERYONE THINKS THAT THEY CAN TALK TO MY PARENTS AND CHANGE THEIR MIND. THEY DON’T BELIEVE ME WHEN I TELL THEM THIS WILL NOT WORK.”-SURVIVOR

line of defense or initial safety net for these individuals. Victims consistently report on how hard they have to search before they can find someone to assist them.

CHILD PROTECTION ISSUES

There are many challenges in this aspect starting with the awareness level of front line responders who interact with victims. There is often a decision made to send the victim back to their family or look the other way out of a need for political correctness. Sometimes, due to the lack of remedies for minors, the front line responder may become an unwitting perpetrator of violence.

Naheed Bahram, NY Program Manager, Women for Afghan Women, shares “When the 16 year old girl was gone from school, no one noticed. The ACS worker was there and the father said he was going to take the daughters back to Pakistan because he could not control them here. The ACS worker said, “That is good.” I told them that they cannot take the daughters back to marry their cousins.”

Rupa M. Khetarpal, MA, MSW, LCSW, says “Sometimes when I get calls from schools, there is nothing I can do because there hasn’t been active domestic violence so a restraining order is out of question and even if we can get a RO, where does the child go....Also the threat of being disowned by the family forever is a huge threat to the younger generation.”

TRAFFICKING

Both minors and adults have been trafficked for the purpose of forcing a marriage in the United States. Because of the lack of data on forced marriage it is challenging to correlate the overlap between trafficking and forced marriage in the United States. Bride trafficking has been written about extensively in the United States. The Virginia Journal of International Law published a piece written by Jane Kim on 12/01/10, “[Trafficked: Domestic Violence, Exploitation in Marriage, and the Foreign-Bride](#)” and presented an in-depth view into the trafficking of foreign brides.

Dr. Mei-Mei Ellerman, Founding Board Member, Polaris Project shared the following about the intersection between human trafficking and forced marriage:

“It seems to me that there are numerous parallels between human trafficking and forced marriage. Just to list the main ones: lack of consent, coercion through psychological or physical threats or violence, fraud, oppression, rape, imprisonment, abuse, and profit.”

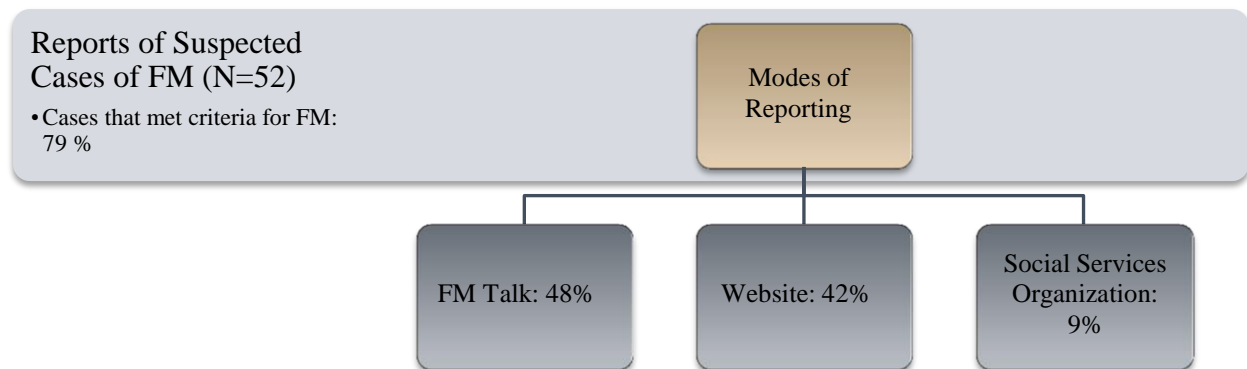
However *Julia Alanen, Co-Founder and Director of The national Forced Marriage Prevention Initiative at Global Justice Initiative*, stated the following:

“While forced marriage cases can involve elements of domestic violence, rape, sexual assault, and sometimes even human trafficking, this is a very distinct issue that merits a very distinct U.S. national response.”

CASE REVIEWS

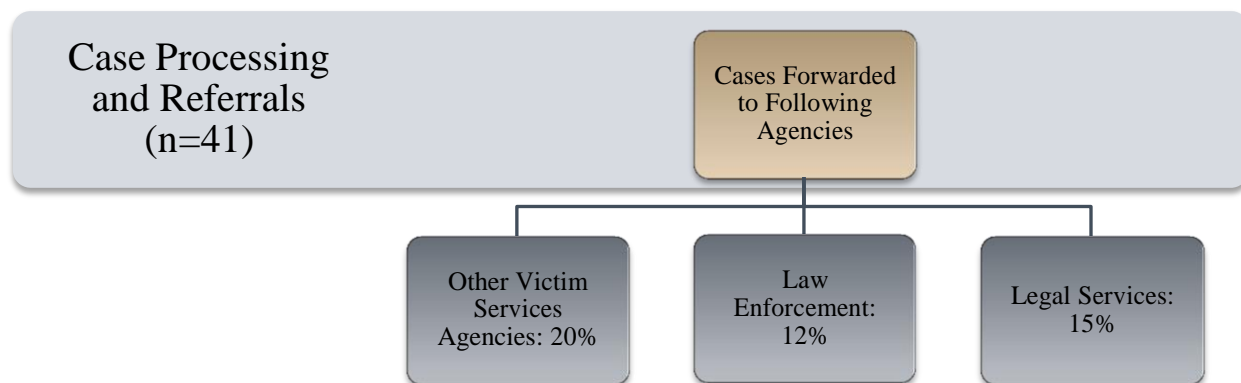
One of the gaps in information interviewees reported was the importance of understanding case processing, modes of reporting for cases, the screening process, and case closure. As a result of these findings we reviewed the caseload for Gangashakti. Gangashakti was founded by Vidya Sri because there were no support groups for survivors of forced marriage. The aim of the organization was to empower survivors by building a support network. One component of Gangashakti's work is to provide advocacy to victims of forced marriage. As a result we agreed to review 52 suspected and confirmed cases of forced marriage that Gangashakti responded to from August 2011 to August 2013. We have provided information on the mode of reporting for cases, the types of referrals that victims asked for, and case processing. It is important to note that some of these cases are still currently open, and even cases that were labeled closed don't necessarily reflect that victims have left the forced marriage.

The standard used to screen cases is Gangashakti's definition of a forced marriage. Gangashakti defines a forced marriage as a marriage with an absence of consent from one or both parties. A forced marriage is one in which coercion, violence, and/or fraud is used to cause the marriage. There is no ability to choose one's partner and the right of refusal may be denied by the family for one or both individuals. The family and community play a complicit role in perpetrating the violence, coercion, and/or fraud. Significant shaming and intimidation is used to cause a forced marriage. The specific criteria used to screen cases were whether force, fraud, and coercion were present in order to facilitate the marriage. The chart below covers the modes of reporting.



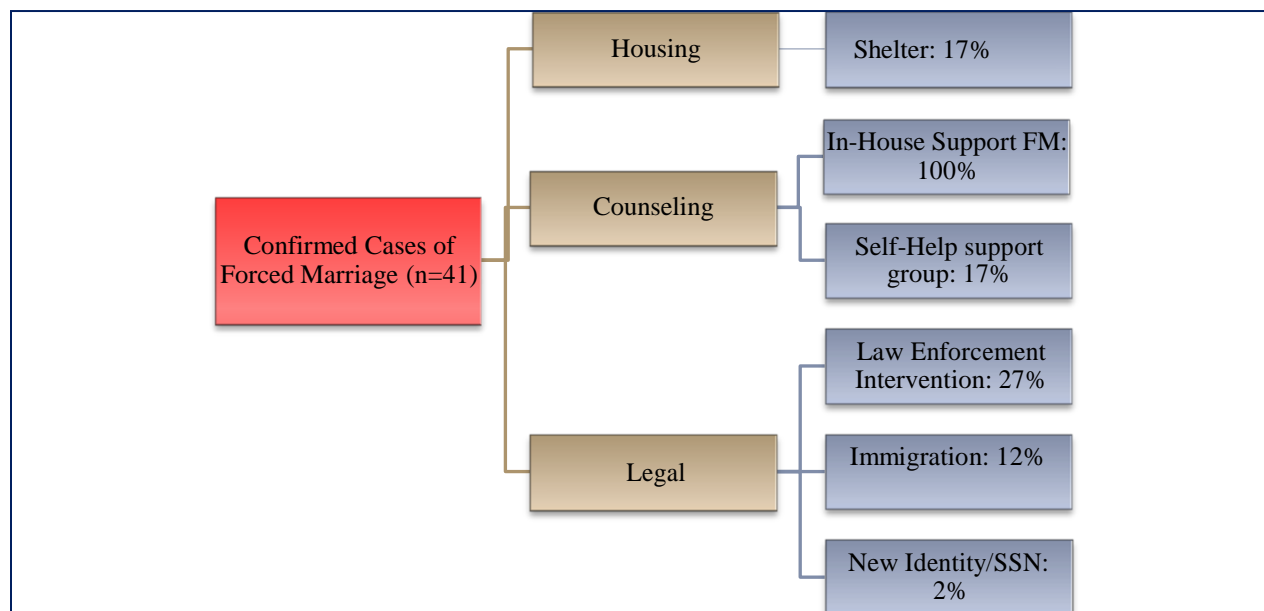
According to incident reports, most cases were reported after a talk on forced marriage was given to students. It is important to note these are the same talks from where we administered surveys. Gangashakti received 48 percent of their entire caseload from giving talks to students on the issue of forced marriage. The Gangashakti website was the second source of how reports were received. Only 9 percent of all cases Gangashakti worked on were reported as referrals from other social services organizations. Once reports were received by Gangashakti, 79 percent of all reported cases met the criteria for a forced marriage based on Gangashakti's screening process.

The next chart below covers what types of referrals were given for cases. Given Gangashakti doesn't have the capacity to provide all of the various forms of services victims of forced marriage need, we have included the percentage of cases that were forwarded to other victim services providers, law enforcement, and legal services. Under legal services this covers lawyers who may need to provide help in an immigration case, a divorce case, or any other form of pro-bono legal support a victim may need.



In reviewing cases we found 20 percent of all cases were forwarded to other victim services agencies. In 12 percent of all cases, law enforcement intervention was required, and 15 percent of cases that met criteria were forwarded for legal services.

Table 11: Case Processing Flow Chart



The flow chart above shows the types of services victims needed. We were able to separate the categories and needs of victims into three categories: 1) housing; 2) counseling; and, 3) legal. Major findings from our case processing analysis found the following:

- 100 percent of victims needed in-house support from Gangashakti;

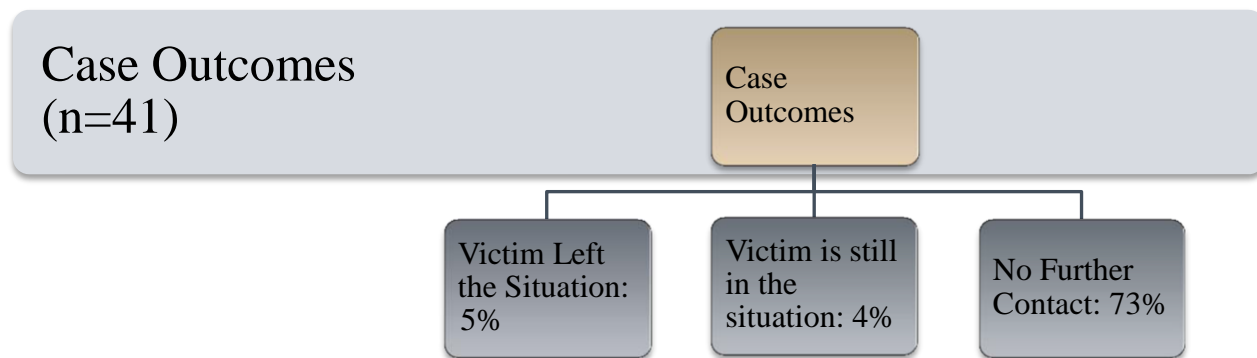
➤ **Case Processing**

Once we looked at case outcomes, we found in most cases there was no further contact with victims. They either disappeared or stopped reaching out for support. In 5 percent of cases, a victim left the forced marriage situation, and in 4 percent of cases, victims confirmed they were still in the forced marriage.

In-House support means being available 7 days a week to provide advocacy to victims.

- 27 percent of victims needed law enforcement intervention;
- 17 percent of victims needed shelter;
- 12 percent of victims needed immigration help; and,
- 2 percent of victim needed a new identity in order to escape the forced marriage.

Our final chart below documents the outcomes of cases. We tracked 41 cases to see what types of outcomes existed for cases that were closed.

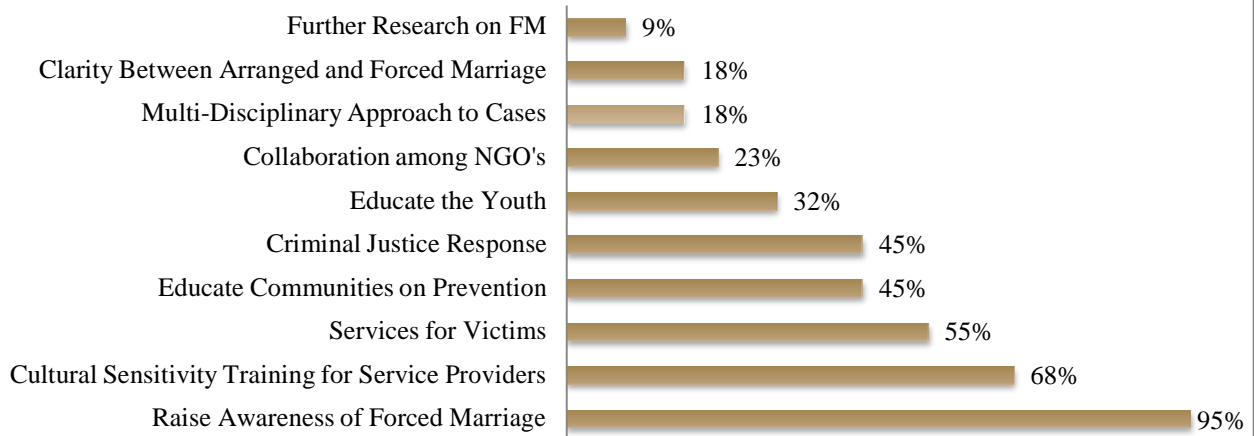


We found that in most cases victims disappeared or lost contact with Gangashakti. According to case notes within most of these cases victims typically made contact to find a support network. Typically within these cases individuals weren't ready to leave the forced marriage but wanted a safe and secure network of individuals who shared similar experiences. Furthermore in only 5 percent of all cases a victim actually left the forced marriage. Within those 5 percent of cases some individuals needed new identities and social security numbers in order to escape a forced marriage. Our findings show that based on a sample of 41 confirmed cases, it isn't clear whether victims are still in the forced marriage or not. In some cases they reached out for help, received it, and then ended reaching out to Gangashakti for support. Gangashakti reports that in many cases victims within forced marriages seek out support systems that are safe and they can turn to for support and help with coping. Within such instances victims aren't ready to leave, and they may never be ready to leave but are still searching for ways of receiving services and help. For the remaining 18 percent of the cases that we haven't included here, they are currently ongoing, pending, or it's cases where individuals may lose contact for a long period of time, and then may reach out for support at a later time.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents major recommendations from interviewees on how to improve responses to forced marriage. After examining the themes across all 22 interviews, we found respondents recommended the following list of major recommendations for improving responses to victims of forced marriage.

Table: MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS ON FM FROM INTERVIEWEES



1. RAISING AWARENESS ON FORCED MARRIAGE

Interviewees highlighted the need for more awareness among stakeholders and communities that are directly impacted by forced marriage. For example interviewees reported awareness should be targeted among the following core group of stakeholders:

- a. Service providers;
- b. Criminal Justice System (courts, law enforcement);
- c. Schools (Staff within schools such as teachers and guidance counselors);
- d. Communities experiencing forced marriage;
- e. Clergy; and,
- f. Youth

Stakeholders recommended there needs to be more community engagement and education on forced marriage. Interviewees recommended more workshops and town hall style conversations with responders and the communities that are directly impacted by forced marriage. Raising awareness among responders and communities was followed by the need to prioritize forced marriage. Several interviewees felt that there wasn't a focus on forced marriage in the United States. Everyone reported forced marriage is a "hidden problem."

"Forced marriage needs to be prioritized – a larger national forum is needed to bring about awareness."

• Tabassum Siraj, Senior Program Analyst, Office of Refugee Resettlement

"We need to re-socialize our communities by raising awareness of this issue."

• Shamita Das Dasgupta, PhD, DVS, Co-Founder, Manavi; NYU Law School

"Raising awareness in schools and the many diverse ethnic communities where “culture norms” are at odds with a clear human rights violation, is equally critical..."

• Mei-Mei Ellerman, Founding Board Member, Polaris Project; Scholar, WSRC, Brandeis

2. CULTURAL SENSITIVITY TRAINING

The need for cultural sensitivity training was recommended as key in empowering front line responders. In order to understand forced marriage, interviewees reported training for frontline responders must cover sensitivity and respect for victims, their families, and their culture. Educational institutions, social service providers, faith-based settings, healthcare and social service providers, and the criminal justice system play a critical role in serving victims of violence. Frontline responders noted these institutions could benefit from training that can give them the knowledge and understanding they need to screen cases appropriately and give them a timely response. An additional point to note is some frontline responders reported there is a difference between cultural sensitivity and turning a blind eye from violence committed under the guise of culture. Frontline responders reported by dismissing the very real existence of forms of abuse that are committed under the cloak of culture deserves a response; and, by not responding—we may risk becoming part of the problem and enabling the violence.



“It is critical to focus on understanding the dynamics that are involved in these situations and training social service providers, schools, law enforcement, health care professionals in asking the right questions. If there is faulty assessment, response will be ineffective.” - Rupa M. Khetarpal, MA, MSW, LCSW



“At the point we are currently in the United States working on this issue, the priority should be on making sure there is an informed response to forced marriage situations.” - Heather Heiman, Forced Marriage Initiative Project Manager & Senior Policy Attorney, Tahirih Justice Center



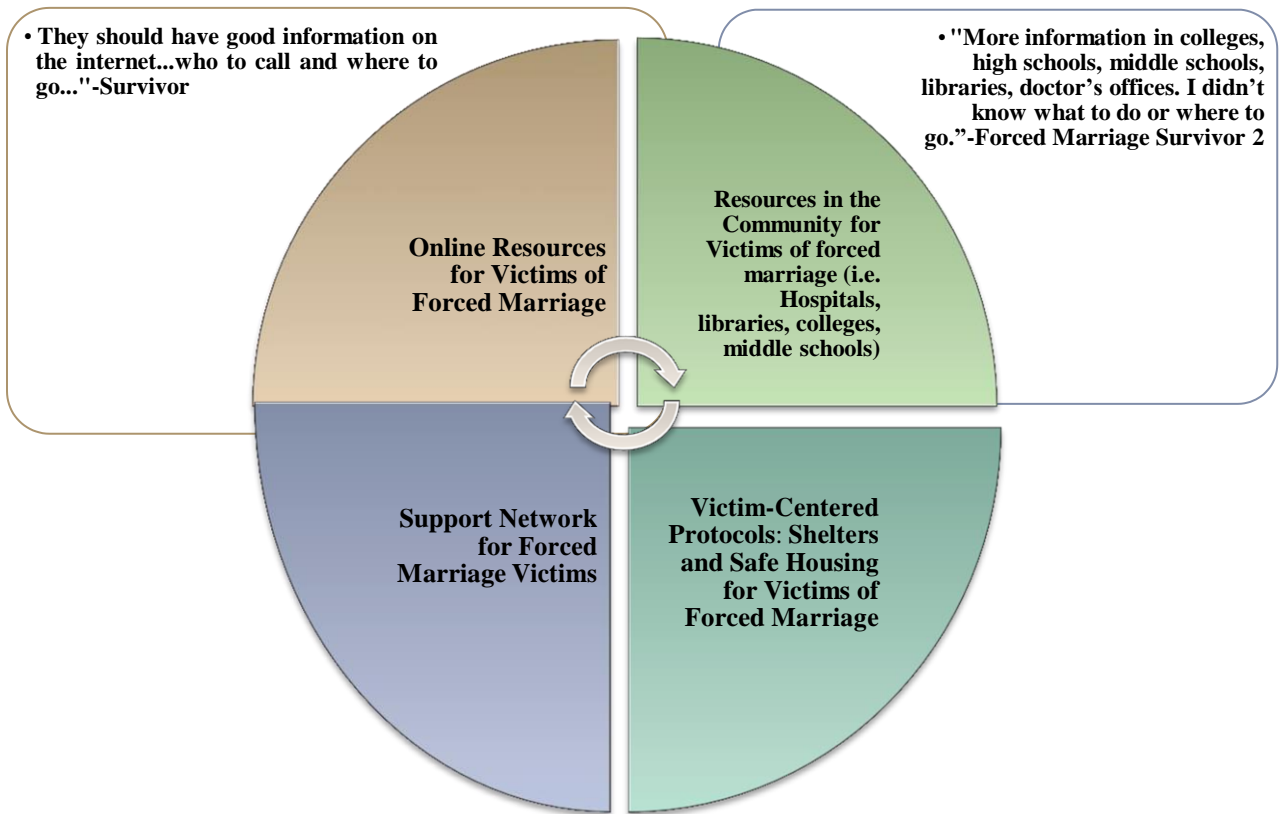
“Courts and child protective service agencies to be trained to assess forced marriage in a girl (minor or adult)” - Rajashree Ghosh, Scholar, WSRC, Brandeis University

3. SERVICES FOR VICTIMS

Currently the victim services structure is in its preliminary stages of development for forced marriage victims. At this point victims and advocates report having to find resources in an environment where there are rarely any resources for victims of forced marriage. Many interviewees reported there isn't an infrastructure within the United States where first responders understand the context of forced marriage; for example in cases where teen and school-aged girls are impacted, schools may not know how to respond to reports of forced marriage.

Even among children, frontline responders reported child protection remedies aren't adequate in giving youth protection. Given in many instances youth are sent back to their parents, within a forced marriage case sending a victim back to the family can escalate the level of risk and potential harm a victim faces. Consequentially frontline responders made the following specific recommendations:

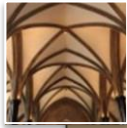
- a. **Online Resources for victims of forced marriage:** Provide easily accessible information for victims that they can easily access online because that may serve as the only place where victims can go to seek resources;
- b. **Make resources available in educational institutions:** Resources and information should be available within educational institutions such as schools, high schools, colleges and universities.
- c. **Engage healthcare providers, hospitals, and emergency rooms:** According to interviewees these individuals are better equipped in screening for cases of forced marriage. For example some interviewees reported having hospital staff and emergency room providers equipped with resources for victims of forced marriage can help victims given they may have to interact with the healthcare system.
- d. **Engage the criminal justice system:** Numerous frontline responders reported the need to engage law enforcement officers. In situations where victims need law enforcement intervention, even if they don't make a report with law enforcement, police officers can be equipped with social service providers who can help victims find redress in case they aren't ready to make a report to law enforcement.
- e. **Create Victim-Centered Protocols:** Interviewees stated they felt the United States lacked coordination among service providers for responding to forced marriage victims. Coordination among victim service providers could include the creation of local protocols for crisis responses among victim service providers, Child Protection Agencies, law enforcement, medical health professionals, immigration, lawyers, and schools. Other recommendations for an effective victim-centered protocol included having a minimum national standard for responding to victims of forced marriage—but one that gave localities, jurisdictions, and states the flexibility to account for the processes used to respond to victims within their own respective area. Others recommended the need for statewide standards and victim-centered protocols that included victims of forced marriage and their families. Having some level of victim-centered protocols that incorporate victims of forced marriage and their families was seen as potentially bolstering and empowering advocates in providing a uniform response to victims.



4. Educate Communities on Prevention

The importance of educating communities on the harmful effects of forced marriage and its harmful consequences on victims, the family, and the community was given as a major recommendation by interviewees. Advocates working within the United States and the United Kingdom shared promising practices in effectively engaging communities that have a higher number of cases of forced marriage. They provided the following recommendations.

Engage the clergy in a community: For example one promising practice recommended by advocates was engaging the clergy within a community. Advocates noted there are examples of clergy within the faith-based community taking a stance against the harmful practice of forced marriage. The voice of the faith-based community and specifically the clergy who hold power and authority in their community was seen as instrumental in ending the harmful practice of forced marriage; advocates reported the clergy can educate the community about how to differentiate between religious and cultural practices. According to our interviewees they reported that while it is clear to them that no religion advocates forced marriage, there are examples where religion is misconstrued and can be used to facilitate a forced marriage.



- “Paramount in all this is our clergy: Sikh, Jewish, Muslim, Catholic, there is a lot that is misconstrued. They need to be taught how to address this issue as they often only know one angle and they need to see the big picture.”
- Zillehuma Hasan, Executive Director, Wafa House



- “Education has to start with everyone; there is a legal obligation for refugees to follow US laws. We must keep the focus on encouraging them to do what is best for their daughters within the confines of the law.”
- Tabassum Siraj, Senior Program Analyst, Office of Refugee Resettlement



- “Ethnic communities need to be engaged in ways that resonate for the community to give up practices that are illegal or cause harm.”
- Lisanne Divine, LakeEffect Leadership; Community Integration Director, MVRCR

- Engage the elders of the community and raise awareness on the harmful consequences of forced marriage:** For example frontline responders reported that within communities, more work could be done in engaging the elders of the community and working on why marriage must be controlled and mandated by community elders. Frontline responders reported engaging the elders within a community and raising information on the harmful effects of forced marriage that victims face such as—depression, diminished performance in work and school, excessive absence from work and school, self-harm, and substance abuse— all have wide ranging negative consequences for the well-being and health of the community. Overall interviewees agreed effectively engaging the community leaders and faith based organizations can create a powerful safety net that can protect victims and their families.
- Empowering parents by giving them resources and tools:** Interviewees reported parents require tools and resources to protect them from engaging in practices like intimidation or using violence/fraud to facilitate or convince their children to marry. The harmful consequences of forced marriage can be used to illustrate the need for parents to clearly define themselves as positive role models of tradition and culture rather than the enforcers of negative cultural practices. Stakeholders reported that emphasizing the need for the safety and health of their children may trigger a positive change that may create a culture where forced marriage is seen as a form of abuse rather than a cultural practice of arranged marriage. Overall the effective community education can celebrate cultural traditions while preventing families from jeopardizing the health and safety of their own.

In summarizing the main points made by stakeholders, we heard it is imperative to engage community leaders and faith based organizations so that they in turn can educate families and the youth. Celebrating one’s cultural roots while refraining from harmful practices like forced marriage is a win-win proposition. Positive guidance from community and family elders on taking pride in one’s cultural identity while not engaging in harmful practices may serve as one of the most powerful ways to prevent forced marriages from taking place within the community.

“THE WHOLE COMMUNITY IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CRIMINALITY WITHIN IT. WE IDENTIFY COMMUNITY LEADERS WHO CAN GALVANIZE AND COME TOGETHER ON THIS ISSUE. WE ARE FOCUSED ON DRIVING A COMMUNITY LED RESPONSE, NOT A STATE LED RESPONSE.”-NAZIR AFZAL

5. Criminal Justice Responses

A primary concern numerous frontline responders shared was that a strictly legal response to forced marriage would drive victims underground. The goal of long term social change for preventing forced marriage is to empower families and communities in letting go of the harmful practice of forced marriage. According to interviewees social change at the family and community level cannot be achieved by only focusing on legal interventions. Everyone reported forced marriage must be framed through a victim-centered lens. Further interviewees reported enacting legislation before a coordinated victim services and community response has been created could result in major problems including putting the communities that experience forced marriage on the defensive. This may shut down open channels of communication with community leaders and faith based organizations. This may also increase the need to engage in the harmful practice of forced marriage by placing undue judgment on families who practice forced marriage. Interviewees were clear that any criminal justice response must take place as part of a comprehensive measure to protect victims and their families. Interviewees cautioned that delivering a premature criminal justice response without building a community infrastructure for victims of forced marriage could do more harm and drive victims underground.

Other specific recommendations included the **need for a central tracking unit for forced marriage cases**. Interviewees brought up the UK’s response to forced marriage as a potential model for the United States. Many asked for a central agency to coordinate or house a national-level response to cases of forced marriage. For example some felt it could be a National Center for Victims of Forced Marriage, and it could serve a two-fold purpose: 1) empower victims through setting and creating protocols on coordinated responses to victims of forced marriage; 2) a clearinghouse that tracks data and works with policy makers to improve responses for victims of forced marriage. Further frontline responders noted they wanted more data on outcomes of the work being done on forced marriage. Many individuals reported this need of having a better understanding of best practices, and whether what is being done to respond to cases of forced marriage is effective, and is meeting the needs of survivors.

6. Empower Youth



“Putting best practices, resources and safeguards in place to enable young people of marriageable age to say NO to Forced Marriage safely and with support from members of the community and activists.”
*Regina Yau, Founder & President,
The Pixel Project*

“It is important to have culturally specific experts in a community lead conversation regarding what is arranged and what is forced and how do we all talk about this with our youth.”*Tiloma Jayasinghe,
Executive Director, Sakhi*

One of the key recommendations given by interviewees was the need to empower and educate youth on their rights. Specifically the focus was on educating youth about marriage and their rights to refuse a marriage. Interviewees stated creating modules of education and empowerment that respect the culture, religion, and tradition but emphasize the right to freedom from abuse and violence are key in creating healthy spaces for youth. Interviewees pointed to the educational modules for teen dating violence, bullying, or family violence within schools could include pieces on safe marriage practices, which could cover the difference between arranged and forced marriage. Overall everyone stressed it is critical to educate youth within the various communities impacted by forced marriage on their rights.

7. Create Multidisciplinary Responses for Forced Marriage

Interviewees across our study reported victims of forced marriage face a host of problems that may involve responses from the following systems:

- a. Criminal justice system (i.e. prosecution, law enforcement)
- b. Civil justice system (i.e. family courts, divorce)
- c. Immigration
- d. Government Social services agencies (i.e. Child Protection Agencies, Adult Protection Agencies)
- e. Social Services (i.e. victim services agencies)
- f. Faith-based organizations and community spaces
- g. Schools and Universities
- h. Workplaces
- i. Hospitals and Healthcare providers

According to frontline responders a coordinated response among these agencies can help deliver better responses for victims of forced marriage; simultaneously interviewees reported the coordination among agencies should be implemented at the local and state-level given policies, laws, and responses vary by state.

Julia Alanen, Esq. Co-Founder and Director of the national Forced Marriage Prevention Initiative at Global Justice Initiative

• “We will require an integrated, multidisciplinary approach that includes legislative advocacy, training and technical assistance, the full array of first responders, directed funding and resource development, and a robust community-led development component.”

Nazir Afzal, OBE, Chief Crown Prosecutor, United Kingdom

• “Establishing multi-agency risk assessment panels and guidelines will help determine effective responses to cases of forced marriage.”

One example of a coordinated response is The Tahiri Justice Center’s **Forced Marriage Initiative (FMI)**. This initiative was developed to create a coordinated national response to the problem of forced marriage in immigrant communities. They have also launched a National Network to Prevent Forced Marriage—a coalition of advocates and direct service providers from around the United States. Tahiri also convenes a Forced Marriage Working Group, which is made up of a core group of individuals. Another example of a response is **Manavi**, the first South Asian women’s organization in the United States. They coordinate the South Asian women’s organizations (SAWOs) and have been working on raising awareness among these organizations on forced marriage.

Further, **The Forced Marriage Prevention Initiative at the Global Justice Initiative** has been providing legal technical assistance to advocates and service providers on forced marriage and maintains a website that serves as a digital information clearinghouse, enabling anyone who is interested in learning more about the issue of forced marriage to access a wide variety of information (i.e. laws, news, updates, case examples, FAQs and more) and a list of organizational resources. We also want to clarify that there may be other initiatives around the country that are in the process at this moment, but we may not have come across them given we only interviewed 22 respondents.

8. Research on Forced Marriage

The need for data driven policies on forced marriage was a recommendation some interviewees gave. Individuals reported advocates need data so they are empowered to make the case within the community or among policy makers—especially funders. Some respondents reported at this point they are using resources for human trafficking and domestic violence victims for forced marriage victims. While a forced marriage victim may also experience domestic violence at the hands of an intimate partner, the issues and challenges they experience as victims of forced marriage are distinct. For example Judy L. Postmus, the Director at the Center on Violence Against Women and Children at Rutgers University stated:

“There is a need to bring awareness and provide data on this issue. We need research to show that this is a social problem. We need to show that this affects all of society.”

CONCLUSION

In concluding this study we want to draw attention to a few limitations of this study. Foremost the study is only limited to a few states, and hence we can't make generalizations on the occurrence and incidence of forced marriage cases in the entire country. We also want to caution anyone that this study didn't aim to find prevalence hence our findings shouldn't be generalized to all South Asian youth or all domestic violence and refugee service providers across the board. Additionally we couldn't survey all groups/ethnicities so we can't speak in detail to how forced marriage occurs within all communities in the United States. Further while we interviewed 22 frontline responders, scholars and activists we acknowledge that there are hundreds if not thousands of responders out there who have come across cases of forced marriage that weren't represented in this study. Most importantly we want to note that despite all the work that has been done on the issue of forced marriage, the invisibility of the voices of victims of forced marriage in driving this work and directly speaking to their experiences with forced marriage is a major limitation of our study. While we did have a few survivors contribute to this study, we suggest that future studies should prioritize and ensure that voices of survivors are at the forefront of improving responses to the issue of forced marriage.

Additional points we want to add is that despite the limitations of this study, our findings were concerning because of the high rates of victimization reported by youth. For example our sample of questionnaire respondents reported coming across 531 suspected and confirmed cases of forced marriage; we found that most of these cases were reported by students. For example 3 in 5 confirmed cases of forced marriage were reported by students versus 2 in 5 cases being reported by domestic violence professionals and refugee service providers combined. Hence this signals that cases of forced marriage are underreported. Further while we didn't ask youth if they themselves were survivors of forced marriage, or how exactly they came across known cases of forced marriage, we can state that at the least these youth experienced secondary victimization by witnessing a form of abuse such as forced marriage. Many of them also did report witnessing domestic violence, physical violence, rape, and in some of the most severe cases the suicide of someone they know who took their life as a consequence of forced marriage. It is important to note none of the direct service providers reported coming across cases of suicide as a consequence of forced marriage.

These sobering findings coupled with the recommendations of interviewees in our study highlight the need for interventions at all levels of society ranging from the individual, family, community and at the state level. Overall we want to stress that based on interviewees the practice of forced marriage does impact a wide variety of communities in the United States. It does cross religious, cultural, and socio-economic lines.

In concluding we want to highlight that there is a community of deeply concerned, hard-working men and women who are continuously analyzing and assessing the harmful practice of forced marriage in the United States. It is with deep gratitude that this paper was written to document the work of responders that are working to impact the current response to forced marriage in the United States.