



Anecdotal Report on the Incidence of Forced Marriage in Western Canada

Submitted to Justice Canada

By

Indo-Canadian Women's Association

Prepared by

Zohra Husaini, Ph.D
Jagjeet Bhardwaj

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Introduction

Objective of the Study

The objectives of the study are to explore the incidence of forced marriage occurring in Western Canada through the collection of anecdotal data (stories from Alberta and British Columbia) and to document relevant information, including services available for those in forced marriages, which will help with policy and program development.

Forced Marriage in Canada

Background of the Issue

Forced marriage is a little known, complex and largely unreported reality in Canada mainly because it is often shrouded in a wall of silence. There are many reasons for the silence including:

- a) a vague awareness within ethno-cultural communities that it is not an acceptable practice in Canada, although not everyone is aware that it can violate civil and criminal laws in Canada;
- b) a silent agreement among many members of the communities that it is the right thing to do “under the circumstances”; and
- c) hesitation in reporting for fear that the community may be stigmatized and/or that someone may get into trouble.

Young men and women trapped in such marriages are afraid of being ostracized and/or being censured by the family and community. They worry about tradition, shame, and family honour and are also afraid of creating problems for their parents by bringing the situation to the attention of the authorities. Hence forced marriages go unreported most of the time, and remain a hidden reality.

In addition, until very recently, this issue did not get much attention from Canadian authorities and society. Not much has been done in this area partly because of lack of awareness and possibly also because of concern with offending cultural sensitivities of ethno-cultural communities in Canada. Forced marriage is often confused with arranged marriage and so considered a cultural practice and a private family matter not open to

public scrutiny. Because of the history of cultural imperialism by western countries, there tends to be a disinclination to say or do anything that may be construed as cultural imperialism. To date only a few cases appear to have come to the attention of the public and authorities. It is very difficult to determine in many cases whether there was parental persuasion or the victim was truly forced. When Canadian-born ethnic minority girls are taken abroad and married off, that marriage remains legally valid in the absence of a court ordered annulment, even though it may be socially unacceptable to many Canadians. Generally only abused women talk about their plight.

This issue of forced marriage is not only an issue in Canada; it is an issue world-wide, found across the boundaries of all cultures, religions, regions and periods of history. The English Common Law on which Canadian marriage law is based has historically contained references to marriages that took place under duress as a ground for annulment. Today, there are reported incidents of forced marriages in all western societies in Europe and North America. This issue is embedded within the larger question of human rights facing all western democracies as they struggle to balance the rights of individual citizens with the rights of ethno-cultural communities with what some see as “cultural preservation”. Edwige Rude Antoine in Strasbourg (2005) published a study of forced marriage in 28 European countries mainly within the South Asian, Middle Eastern, and African communities. In addition, the *Annotated Bibliography on Comparative and International Law Relating to Forced Marriage* (Dostrovsky, Nadine et al. 2007) gives a comprehensive account of forced marriage in western, Asian and African countries.

Concept of Forced Marriage Relevant for Ethno-Cultural Communities

(a) Forced marriage is usually viewed as an issue of the denial of a person’s right (especially, but not exclusively, a woman’s right) to choose her or his life partner. Recommendation 21 of the UN Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), states that “A woman’s right to choose a spouse and enter freely into marriage is central to her life and her dignity and her equality as a human being” without force or coercion.¹

¹ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm>

However, in South Asian, Middle Eastern and African communities, women do not always have the right to choose their spouses or enter marriage with free and informed consent. In these communities, cultural traditions dictate that marriage be arranged. Partners for young people are almost uniformly chosen by others. Partner selection most often happens in gender segregated, patriarchal and family oriented societies, where the majority of young men and women do not date or socialize and so do not know *how to choose* and *whom to choose*. As they generally know very little about other eligible young people, the only logical option is to enter into an arranged marriage with a person of their family's choice. Nonetheless, the expression "enter freely" remains important and relevant. Young people are conditioned to obey and to accept parental choice. Most of the time they accept to marry obediently out of propriety, knowing very little about their future spouse. They submit to their parents' decision and will, because assertion of personal will is seen as selfish and improper. So the right "to choose" remains to a large extent a theoretical concept, as it does not work in practice in some societies. However, many parents will accommodate objections by their children to a particular marriage partner who is unacceptable to them.

(b) It is essential to understand that an arranged marriage is not a forced marriage because in the case of the former the young person has accepted the choice of their parents and the marriage is therefore consensual. But it is equally important to note that *all* forced marriages began as arranged marriages. It is hard to know in each individual circumstance what was involved in a person's "acceptance" of an arranged marriage. If that marriage turns into a forced marriage, it is often hard to figure out at what point it became a forced marriage. In other words, it may be unclear at what stage force or coercion may have entered into the plans for an arranged marriage to turn it into a forced marriage. Although forced marriage and arranged marriage are not the same, the boundary between them may be ambiguous and fluid. For instance, the arranged marriage of a child-bride to an older man is generally a forced marriage as a child is not legally capable of giving consent. However, in communities where such marriages are the norm, people do not consider them as forced marriage.

(c) No one definition of forced marriage tells the whole story therefore any simple definition of forced marriage is likely not helpful in the context of ethno-cultural communities. It may be necessary to discuss situations beyond the core definition in order to understand forced marriage. Definitions put brackets around a reality leaving a lot beyond its boundaries. Provisionally, however, a forced marriage can be understood as a marriage where one or both spouses did not consent or gave consent under duress or trickery.

Complex Reality of Forced Marriage in Western Canada

There are many factors involved in forced marriage. The two main factors that influence forced marriage in Western Canada are economic and cultural factors.

Economic and Cultural Factors in Forced Marriage

Forced marriage is rooted in centuries old patriarchal socio-economic systems which are often maintained because they are confused with religion. The belief is so deeply rooted and emotionally charged that it is not easy to unravel all the factors involved. To begin to understand the phenomenon, one has to look into various elements of these systems which give rise to certain traditions and myths, cultures and beliefs that are used to support forced marriage.

1) Cultural factors

Cultural factors include family loyalty, patriarchal authoritarian family structures, women's subordinate position in society, vested interest in maintaining male privilege and belief that women are a burden and "property" to be disposed of for the family's advantage or family honour. Parents wish to marry off their children within their own racialized, ethnic, religious, socio-economic status and linguistic groups. The fear that their children may not adhere to these constraints in a multi-cultural society drives the parents to force even under-age children to marry someone the parents choose. In some cases, adult children with a different sexual orientation are forced into heterosexual marriages to continue the family line and avoid bringing dishonour upon the family. So,

parental fear, concern and worries play an equal role with parental power in sometimes forcing their children to marry someone they do not wish to marry.

2) Economic factors

Another important factor is poverty in Asian and African countries and the desire to escape it through migration to Canada. For example, many families force their daughters into an unwanted marriage with a Canadian citizen for the money they receive from the future sons-in-law. A marriage may also be forced as a means to get immigration for the whole family for economic reasons. In some other cases where the parents of the girls may be approached with a marriage offer that does not include the usual request to pay a dowry or expensive marriage gifts to her in-laws, they may force their daughters to marry an unwanted partner to save money.

Migration Experience

When people migrate to Canada, they carry many of their customs, beliefs and traditions with them. Living in Canada, there are other factors that get added to this mix of tradition, custom and beliefs, such as parental fears of assimilation. Parents may worry about the next generation losing their culture and faith and adopting the values of their peers -- by, for example dating, drinking, partying, losing their virginity – resulting in unacceptable choices that would threaten their children's futures and the family's honour. The perceived logical solution of many tradition-bound families, who are caring and loving families, is to choose a suitable spouse for them and to marry them young, willingly or unwillingly, before they reach the age of independent thinking, judging and making choices. Parents consider this to be for their children's own good and long-term happiness.

Intergenerational Conflict

When families migrate to Canada, young children are socialized not only in their own traditional culture but also in the culture and values of Canada through their schooling and the influence of their peers. Here they learn about individual choice. Hence, they may not be as willing to accept their parents' choice. But, for many of them, marriages are

arranged according to their ancestral traditions and so conflict will arise. When such marriages are arranged, many of them successfully resist for a number of reasons (exemplified in the stories), but, as the stories also tell, many young women and men either unsuccessfully resist and then face the consequences of a forced marriage or capitulate. The stories also tell how and why and with whom such marriages are arranged and portray the picture of life within a forced marriage.

At the heart of this generational conflict is that, while parents and families remain attached and loyal to their ancestral culture and are sincerely convinced that they act in the best interest of their Canadian children, some young people become aware that individual choice is both a necessary condition of marriage and their right under Canadian law.

These are some of the unexplored structural and cultural factors that need to be taken into account in addressing the issue of forced marriage. They are hard to address. But as long as these factors remain inflexible, it will be very difficult to prevent the occurrence of forced marriage. The stories illustrate all of these issues: parents' concerns for their children, choice, consent, but also force, poverty, greed, and desire for immigration. It is only through education, culturally-appropriate services and supports for parents and for victims, economic empowerment of dependent offspring and strict enforcement of women's and children's rights that these practices can be slowly changed. In the same communities, most people do not force their children to marry against their will and many do not approve of or support arranged marriage. These parents make reasonable accommodations within modern societies and see their children as persons to be guided while exercising autonomous choices, not as possessions to be disposed of at parental will.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology with a narrative approach was used in this project. This method was chosen as most suitable for a study about forced marriage because it captures people's experiences and emotions and not just events in their lives. The research was

conducted by interviewing service providers in order to gather information on forced marriage. No victims were approached because it is a highly sensitive topic. Service providers were identified from a list of organizations in Western Canada. The stories and other data on services provided, on general features of forced marriage and on respondents' views on addressing the issue of forced marriage were collected through questionnaires that were analyzed. This report is prepared from the stories and other information received from service providers.

Structure of the Report

Organization

The information on forced marriage obtained from the interviews, is organized into three sections in this report.

Stories

The first section contains 22 stories of forced marriage collected through interviewing service providers. This section also contains some information on demographic characteristics of the subjects of the stories whenever available, specifically the age, gender, education, ethnicity and country of origin of the victims. As stated above, the data are then presented graphically for ease of reference and are not meant to be taken as statistical representations of forced marriage victims overall.

The stories presented here highlight the issues outlined in this introduction. They depict stories of women and men who were forced to marry under duress and threats. This section includes events that occurred in Western Canada of child marriage, telephone marriage, marriage between cousins, marriage with payment of bride price and overseas marriage. They portray the misery and helplessness of those trapped in forced marriages as well as the courage and independence of the victims, their efforts to escape and the support they receive. There are cases of marriage through fraud and monetary exchange as well as cases of marriage for immigration purposes, and in order to have a "slave" for household work.

The stories are presented as they were related by the service providers; hence, they differ in structure as details were provided by different narrators.

Themes

Several common themes emerging from an analysis of the stories are presented in this second section. These form the findings of the research. These themes bring out similarities in reasons, nature and consequences of forced marriage in the stories from three different locations in Western Canada (Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver). The main themes, common to all the cases, are:

- (a) all the victims come from communities where arranged marriage is the norm,
- (b) the reasons for which forced marriage takes place are comparable,
- (c) the way force and coercion operate in forced marriage is similar,
- (d) elements of fraud and false information are present in forced marriage,
- (e) there is a lack of choice and consent in forced marriage, and
- (f) the consequences of forced marriage and the vulnerability of the victims to violence within marriage are alike.

Hence, we conclude that victims of forced marriage all face similar issues and traumas no matter where they reside in Western Canada or what their background is.

Services Provided

This third section outlines the services provided or currently available to victims of forced marriage. It contains an account of services actually rendered to the victims and the services available to them. There is also an account of referrals made to government institutions and NGOs in order to seek help for the victims. Further, this section contains an identification of services that are needed but lacking in Western Canada.

Views of the Service Providers on Forced Marriage

This section outlines a number of ideas the service providers offered, about how to address the difficult issue of forced marriage in Western Canada. These may be grouped under six main categories:

1. Awareness campaigns, specifically in schools
2. Education of communities, service providers and youth
3. More resources for the service providers and new services for the victims
4. Immigration and sponsorship
5. Empowering women
6. A balance between individual rights and group rights

While not all of these suggestions may be workable, they are important as indications of what is seen as needed by the service providers who are either frontline workers in the field or who deal with this issue in an educational, legal or medical capacity. They are the ones who are most knowledgeable about the extent of forced marriage in Canada and the consequences of it.

Conclusion

The four main conclusions are as follows:

- As forced marriage is a hidden reality in Canada at present, extremely limited specific services currently exist for the victims of forced marriage.
- The immigration sponsorship policy provides a powerful incentive for misuse by parents and families to sponsor relatives through forced marriage of Canadians.
- The stories show that women are most vulnerable to and in forced marriages and need to be empowered through relevant policies and programs.
- The conclusion from the responses of service providers is that forced marriage is *not a sporadic* phenomenon in Western Canada and, according to one respondent will likely rise in the next 30 years due to the opportunity of sponsoring relatives.

Methodology

Qualitative Research

The methodology used in this study is qualitative research conducted with narrative inquiry. This approach was chosen because the study of narratives is the study of ways in

which human beings experience their world. Narrative is a powerful tool of knowing and sharing. The narrative approach captures the emotions of joy and pain and turbulence of life and not just events in a person's life. This method is based on the idea that knowledge can be held in stories that can be relayed, stored, and retrieved. Nussbaum claims that the narrative style is uniquely qualified to present to the reader a deeper and richer view of life, which is not available in discursive reasoning. She argues that it can make a person a better juror and a better public thinker.

Hence, a narrative approach was considered to be uniquely suitable for understanding forced marriage in all its complexity; it permits a deeper understanding of the issue and is expected to contribute to a better basis for the development of informed and sensitive policies and programs. The main methodological procedure in this research was to collect stories of forced marriage by interviewing service providers who deal with cases of forced marriage.

Although this study is primarily a qualitative inquiry, some data is also presented graphically to facilitate viewing the findings. This by no means is representative of the extent of the occurrence of forced marriage, because the sample size is too small. However, it is indicative of what people in the field think is a growing trend in the area of forced marriage.

Specific Methodological Procedures Used

The following procedures were involved in conducting the current research study:

Research Team

A research team was put together for guidance and supervision of the project. It consisted of a sociologist, a chartered psychologist, a biological scientist working in a voluntary organization and a lawyer.

Project Director

A project director was hired who met the research team and planned all the details of the project.

Target Population

The data were collected from the communities where forced marriage is known or suspected to be taking place across the religious and cultural spectrum in Western Canada, viz. South Asian and Middle Eastern communities from rural and urban areas of those countries of origin.

Resource List

With assistance from the project research team, the project director prepared a resource list of organizations and government agencies in Alberta and British Columbia for the purpose of making contact with them for identifying and interviewing service providers. The service providers selected were from social services, the legal profession, immigration officials, schools, police, community workers and medical practitioners. Open-ended questionnaires were used for the interviews.

Questionnaire

A draft questionnaire was prepared according to the guidelines set in the contract. The questionnaire was adapted from another questionnaire prepared earlier for a similar study conducted in Montréal and Toronto. It was reviewed by the project research team and tested in the field on five volunteers. It was submitted to the project authority for input before the questionnaire was finalized.

Organizations Contacted

Various governmental and non-governmental agencies that provide services to victims of forced marriage in Western Canada (Alberta and British Columbia) were contacted from the resource list prepared, with a request to identify service providers who deal with cases of forced marriage. Fifty organizations and individuals were identified out of which thirty-two were contacted. Twenty-two of them responded.

Collaborative Partnerships

Out of these organizations, an attempt was made to establish collaborative partnerships with two organizations each in Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver for locating interviewers and training them. In Edmonton, the Inter-Cultural Action Committee for the Advancement of Women and the Welcome Center for Immigrants were willing to collaborate. In Calgary, the Alliance to End Violence and the Alberta Network of Immigrant Women agreed. In Vancouver, the India Mahila Association and the Surrey RCMP Victim Services agreed to collaborate. Partnerships were established with both organizations in each location.

Interviewer's Training

Interviewers were hired and trained either by the project director or by the officer of the partner organization. Training guidelines were prepared emphasizing not only interview skills but also how to maintain confidentiality and to show respect for cultural sensitivity. All the names, dates and locations of the interviews were kept confidential to maintain the anonymity of the subject of the stories. All personal information will be destroyed according to project requirements.

The interviews were scheduled in Edmonton and Calgary in the first and second weeks of February 2010. In Vancouver, the interviews were to be done in the second and third week of February. However, the schedule varied depending on the availability and convenience of local interviewees. Data were recorded and organized according to themes emerging from the interviews, immediately following the interviews.

The Data

Twenty-two stories of forced marriage were collected. Information on services provided and available to victims of forced marriage was also recorded, as well as suggestions from service providers. The interviews were conducted either in person or through telephone interviews. Only six interviews were recorded on tape, as most respondents did not consent to be recorded. In transposing the stories, attempts were made to be true to

the language and structure of the stories as narrated by the respondent. The only changes made were editorial or to shorten some of the stories.

The Stories

Introduction to the Stories

The stories presented here highlight the issues outlined in the introduction. They are stories of women and men who were forced to marry under duress or threats. These include stories of child marriage, telephone marriage, cousin marriage, marriage with payment of bride price and overseas marriage of young Canadian women and men in Western Canada. They portray the misery and helplessness of those trapped in forced marriages as well as the courage and strength of the victims and those who assist them. There are cases of fraud and monetary exchange as well as cases of marriage for immigration or domestic slavery purposes.

After reading the stories, one learns that the issue of forced marriage is not a theoretical matter, a past historical phenomenon or about events happening in far-away parts of the world. These are stories of individual human beings, suffering in the modern, advanced, democratic society of Canada in the 21st century. Each of these stories is true. Only the name, location and professions have been changed to ensure anonymity. These stories carry the voices of the service providers who deal with the consequences of forced marriage. Many service providers told the investigators how affected and enraged they were. One said “we are trained to maintain objectivity and that is hard. We are taught that this is not our journey but someone else’s journey. We are here to help them; that we are instrumental in their healing keeps us going.”

The stories differ in language, structure, length and the service provider’s involvement in the case. The integrity of the stories and of their narrators has been upheld to the highest possible standard.

Note: Demographic Data has been produced from stories where available and is presented at the end of the following Stories section.

Story 1

As a settlement counsellor, I come across many cases of problem marriages, including arranged marriages and forced marriages. This is a story which started five years ago. It is a story of cousin marriage of a Canadian man to a girl in Pakistan. His family went to Pakistan to marry him off to his cousin. After the marriage ceremony was held he came back with his family to Canada but the bride and groom did not meet each other at all. Before coming he said to his in-laws that an immigration visa for her is not available so he will call her later. The bride waited for five years to come to Canada. Her family and she were worried and asked why she was not getting the visa. They were told that her husband had applied for an immigration visa and was hoping it would come soon. However, it took five years for her to get the visa and come to Canada. When she came her husband was not willing to have anything to do with her. The very first night he told her that he was not ready to marry her and that his parents forced him and he kept quiet. It was because of respect for his parents' decision and concern for their health. But he is not interested in marriage and there is no future for them. Then he asked her to leave his room. She wanted to talk to him but he refused to talk.

The next day she told her in-laws about this conversation. They told her to try and win him over and he will be OK. They said it was "her moral duty to do so". So she tried to please him and serve him but he rebuffed her. He told her not to bother because he can take care of himself. She kept quiet and tried to save her marriage for four months. When she failed then she told the whole situation to her parents in Pakistan. They advised her to talk to her relatives in Canada. So she talked to them and her uncle and his wife came to her house to discuss this situation with her and her in-laws. Her in-laws were very unhappy about this and asked her to leave their house. She pleaded and said she wanted to stay with them. But they said no, go away. So she went to her uncle's house because she was forced to leave her in-laws' house.

It was then that she called me and asked me what help can she get in Canada. Then she came to see me and told me her whole story. I told her about available resources and ways to get help. I referred her to an agency which has more resources and expertise. However my agency continued to work with her and informed her about laws in Canada, human rights, family violence and also about educational opportunities.

She was threatened by her in-laws and was told that her sponsorship will be cancelled. She was very worried but I assured her that they cannot do so. She felt relieved. I also provided her with information about legal aid, options of housing, and social assistance. But she preferred to live in her uncle's home. I advised her to think about joining ESL and other government educational programs.

It was four months ago when she first came to see me. And the last contact was made two weeks ago. At present, she is with her uncle and is going to ESL classes. When she came to me, she was very frightened of her situation and worried about her future. Now she has gained confidence. Recently she contacted me and told me that she is thinking of going to Pakistan for a visit. But she learnt indirectly that her in-laws plan to cancel her immigration sponsorship and hide her immigration papers. But I assured her that all her papers are with the immigration authorities and they cannot do so. At the end of her visit she also said in tears that her own family in Pakistan is saying that she could not win over her husband's heart and that is why her marriage failed.

This study is very important. People will come to know through such studies what can happen to them and their sons and daughters.

Story 2

I am a medical social worker in a large hospital. I see people who go through trauma, I also see their families. Lately I have been seeing refugees from Somalia.

When they become comfortable, issues of forced marriage come up. In their culture it is common for forced marriage to be arranged with strangers, sometimes for immigration, or to send them out of the country for better future. Sometimes for money they get from another party by selling their daughters, often into very abusive situations. That covers the kind of cases I see. When the girls open up, they say there is abuse, emotional and physical. They are not happy, they are afraid; they don't know where to turn. This information comes from the family of the patients.

A wife of a patient of mine, when she felt comfortable with me told me about considerable abuse, including verbal and physical abuse in her marriage. She was afraid to seek help because of fear of the community. She felt that she needed to break away from her community if she is to get any help. Forced marriage is the cultural norm in the Somalian community. She was 13 years old when she was married off. I saw her when she was 22 years old. All these years she has gone through great mistreatment. She was treated like a servant serving her husband's extended family not just her husband and child. She was very fearful when she talked to me. She was not allowed to go out or talk to outsiders. She came to the hospital only because her husband had an accident and severe head injury. So she was allowed to come. But that stopped after a couple of weeks. She told me that she has no support in her own family as all of them are in Somalia. She is living this abuse in silence and isolation.

So I tried to refer her to an immigrant serving agency. I talked to a women's group. I also contacted a refugee program of the federal government and they connected me to another organization. When I talked to this organization, they said that she had to come personally in order to get help. I told her to go there and made a referral officially and made an appointment for her. But she did not go to that agency and when I asked her why she did not go, she told me that she is afraid and she is surrounded by her husband's family all the time. Her husband was in the hospital for four months but she did not come to see him after two weeks. I called her home to find out how she is but she was too afraid to talk to me. So at present, I

have no way of knowing how she is suffering but I know that she is living under overpowering fear and cannot do anything else but obey. So she seems to be trapped in her situation.

Story 3

I work in the family services department of a women's organization. This is the story of a girl from the Middle East whom I met accidentally. I was in a grocery store when I noticed a young girl wearing dark glasses and trying to read labels on food boxes. She looked like an immigrant from the Middle East. I asked her does she need any help in reading the label, and the way she answered, I knew her English was not good. As I knew her language, I explained the labels to her. I also noticed that she had bruises on her face and arms. I asked her what was wrong and she told me her story.

She was given into marriage to a man from Canada when he went to her home country. She did not want to marry him and come to Canada. But her parents accepted the proposal and the marriage took place and right away she came to Canada. He had given false information about himself and his job to her family. She thought he was rich and had a good job but he lived in low income housing and had a very low paying job. Soon after coming here, he started beating her. He indulged in aggressive sex and also perverted forms of sex. He would hit her, pull her hair and then have sex. She was locked in when he left home. She went shopping only with him. The day I met her she could come out because she had told her husband that she needed some groceries to cook food for him and his friends. As she came out of her apartment her neighbour also came out of her house and she asked the girl what was wrong. She (the neighbour) had heard her cries and his shouts. But she (the client) was so afraid that she told her neighbour that nothing was wrong.

So I gave her my card with my work address and phone number and asked her to memorize it and give it back to me. I watched her from a distance that she

memorized it and left the card on the shelf and walked away. Then I picked up the card and went home. After ten days, she was brought to my workplace by the police. I learnt that her husband wanted to sell her body to his friends to get money for drugs. She resisted, there was a beating and the neighbour heard and called the police. So she escaped with her neighbour's help and told the police to bring her here. We provided her with some necessities of life, translated her statement for the police and then I went with her and the police to the shelter. We also supported her emotionally by telling her "what you are doing is right, you stood for yourself and escaped from an abusive situation, you have no reason to be ashamed and to regret." What we could not do at that time was to allay her expressed fear of her husband and community. There she stayed for two weeks and then the police flew her to the East. Before going she said she wanted to come and see me. The police brought her here. Again I phoned her relatives in the East to make sure that she would not face any abuse. My agency gave her some stuff that she needed. She wanted me to go with her to the airport but the police said no because her husband's friends may be there watching and so we said goodbye and she went with the police. She was taken into the airport through a special entrance and the police flew with her to the East to make sure that she reached her destination.

After two years she got her divorce because of the police involvement and witnesses, otherwise her husband was not going to give her a divorce. She phones me once in a while. And now she told us that she is married and she is a mother now. But she also told me that she was accused of adultery by her in-laws, and her own family blamed her for not making her marriage a success. It is because the onus of making a marriage work is always on a woman's shoulders.

Story 4

As a community worker, I know of and help my community in cases of family conflicts. This is the story of the forced marriage of a girl in our community in Canada. She was going to school with a young man from a different faith. I don't

know about the girl's parents but the boy's family knew about this relationship. The girl used to visit him at his house as well as visit his sister. Everything was going well. I don't know how her parents found out but one day they followed the girl to his house. The girl noticed them and tried to run away. The parents called the boy out and started to beat him up. The neighbours noticed and called the police. The police came. The police didn't charge anybody but took the girl and did not let her go home for the security reasons. For 3-4 days the parents did not know where the girl was. I tried to talk to them to trust their daughter's choice, but they did not heed me. During that time they were sending messages to her boyfriend's parents and once they even went to his house to say that once they find the girl they will marry her to their son, so the girl came home. But, a few days after she came home they said "why don't we go to India. Your grandmother is old. We should go visit her." So the girl went. This was a game they were playing. In India their relatives had already arranged her marriage and soon after she arrived there, they forced her to marry a young man in India. She could not come back to Canada because she was not allowed until she got pregnant with her husband.

Story 5

I was approached by a young man who was contemplating suicide as he did not want to continue navigating the conflict between his desires and his responsibilities. The young man was recently married to a girl from India but was also involved with a girl born and bred in Canada from a different culture to his.

The marriage came about through a series of interconnected events, expectations and family responsibilities. The young man's sister was married to a man from India 4 years previously and she had one child - a girl - by the marriage. The brother-in-law had sponsored his parents and siblings but now wanted to sponsor his married brother and family. However, due to the financial undertaking already taken he could not show sufficient income to meet the family sponsorship requirements. The brother-in-law demanded from his wife's family that they marry

their son (the young man who approached me) to his niece (which would then allow her to sponsor her parents and siblings). He also threatened that if this marriage did not occur then he would divorce their daughter (the young man's sister) and disown his daughter. The young man and the family were faced with several dilemmas:

1. A divorced daughter with a child would be stigmatised in the community. She was young but her future life would be bleak.
2. The young man was in love with a girl and they were making plans to marry and settle.
3. The family was Hindu and had a long-standing tradition of never giving a daughter in marriage to a family and then taking that family's daughter in marriage into their family. (This principle has in fact been followed by most Hindus and has helped to not only support an ever-increasing genetic pool but is the basis of attempting to ensure that the leveraging and coercion element in family dynamics can be avoided.)

However, at the end of the day the young man was "persuaded" to support his sister's and his niece's well-being and future by marrying his brother-in-law's niece. This was a marriage of convenience that was arranged through coercion and it was performed with the young man and his father going to India with the brother-in-law; the *roka* (engagement) happened on Day 1; the *mahian* (pre-wedding celebration) happened on Day 2; the wedding occurred on Day 3; the boy and girl went on a "honeymoon" Days 4 and 5; Day 6 the brother-in-law and the young man went to the Embassy to lodge all the papers including pictures that were taken at every occasion and on Day 7 the boy returned to Canada.

The young man returned to Canada; tried to break up with his "girl-friend"; his wife joined him 6 months later. At the point the young man came through to me he was at point of finishing his life because he was married to someone whom he had no feelings for but was responsible for not only her, but his brother-in-law's demands that he start the sponsoring papers for his wife's family - otherwise the brother-in-

law would divorce his sister. In fact there was a fair amount of physical abuse being directed against the sister by the brother-in-law.

The young man did not know how he could continue to cope with the trauma of what was happening to his sister; his niece his wife and his feelings for his girlfriend.

The young man did not commit suicide. He chose to support his sister by staying with his wife and sponsoring her family and is now so embittered and angry that he uses violence against his wife and then the cycle of coercion and leveraging begins again.

Story 6

I am a chartered psychologist and volunteering as a counsellor to a women's organization in Alberta. This is a story of a 19 year old run-away girl who was in a youth shelter and they referred the girl to my organization and asked us to help her.

She came to me and told me her story. She is from BC where her parents live. She said they were going to marry her to a stranger but she wanted to continue her studies after high school. But one condition that the man's family made was she cannot study after marriage. But that was not the main reason that she ran away. Her story is much more complicated. Her elder sister was married to a man from India. The marriage took place in her parents' village in India and then the couple came back to Canada. After some time, her mother-in-law came and stayed with the couple. She was very controlling and abusive to the daughter-in-law. For example, she told her son, "Your wife was talking to a man in English because I may not understand what she was saying. I picked up the other phone and it was a man's voice." Her husband believed his mother and beat his wife. The mother-in-law kept on talking against her and the husband started to distrust his wife, controlled her movements and started checking her odometer, letters and phone calls and forbade

her to talk to any relatives. She was very unhappy. Then her sisters-in-law brought another marriage proposal that her second sister should be married to her sister's husband's cousin. But the married sister did not approve because the family was so abusive. She said that my sister will not be happy marrying into a family which does not care for and respect the brides who come into the family. Her husband's family came to know about this objection and became physically violent to her. They deprived her of money and were verbally abusive all the time. Then her family tried to mediate. But the husband's parents told her family that their first daughter was very disobedient, does not respect her in-laws, and is very spoiled. She has to be disciplined. If they marry their second daughter into our family then, seeing her, the older sister will become more obedient and the abuse will stop. "Discipline is not to be called abuse. This is the way White people talk. "

So her family decided to give the second daughter into marriage to the second cousin of their son-in-law. The new couple did not have problems for two years. Then the second daughter's parents in-law started pressuring her family to get the third daughter, that is the girl who came to me for help, married to their younger son who will then get his immigration. As the family hesitated, her second sister was also subjected to verbal abuse and humiliation and other forms of emotional manipulation. So this girl suddenly realized that she will be also forced to marry in that family to save her second sister from abuse. At that point she decided to run away to Alberta and cut off her relations with her family temporarily.

So when she came here we gave her moral and emotional support. I found her to be courageous and independent thinking at the age of 19. We asked her what she wanted us to do for her. She said she wanted us to arrange a host family for her to live with and also she wants help in getting a student loan. We arranged a place for her to stay and sent her to an education counsellor who helped her with getting a student loan. She has finished her training and is now working.

Story 7

As a consultant to a women's service organization, this case that I will talk about, was referred to me by a lawyer. She sent me her client, a woman, with a written brief on her case and asked whether our organization will write a letter explaining why her client should not be deported to her home country. So I interviewed the client and wrote a letter explaining the circumstances under which she was brought to Canada. We explained that she was an innocent victim.

Her story was that she came from the Punjab. Her mother died when she was 10 years old then her father remarried. Her stepmother considered her a burden, an extra mouth to feed. Moreover she would have to be given a dowry at the time of her marriage. As she grew older, she became fond of a neighbourhood young man but she knew he would not marry her without a dowry. When she was 18, the proposal of a 45-year-old Canadian widower, a truck driver with two children, came for her marriage. She was not willing to marry him. Her parents forced her to agree to it. They argued that if she does not marry then she was going to work as a maid in someone's home and may be treated as a concubine. So very unhappily she agreed to this marriage.

After marriage as she was in transit, she learned that without her knowledge she was being smuggled into Canada with a false passport and visa. Before the plane touched down in B.C. her husband told her to do the following. She was to go to immigration and tell them that she was travelling alone and has lost her papers and she should show them her ticket. So she asked him what will happen to her. He said they will arrest her and then may let her go. If she says that she came with her husband, he will deny it. He said he will tell them that he does not know who she is. When she went to immigration, she was arrested as an illegal alien. A police woman who knew her language was brought in as an interpreter to interview her properly. She said to the policewoman that she is travelling alone to meet her aunt who will pick her up from a Gurudwara (Sikh temple). So if they will send her there the aunt

will meet her there. So the interpreter took pity on her and paid her bill. She was freed on bail and went to Gurudwara where her mother-in-law picked her up and then it was as if she disappeared and escaped the bail. When she went to her husband's home she discovered that he works in the USA and lives with another woman. She was brought to Canada to work for his family and his children. Whenever he visited Canada he slept with her and she had a son. Most of the time, she was treated cruelly, scolded and humiliated. Her mother-in-law and husband threatened her that if she tried to escape she will be deported as illegal.

When her son was five years old she met a woman in the Gurudwara, who came from Alberta and became friends with her. Gradually she told her story to this woman who became very sympathetic to her plight and wanted to help her. So one day she left home to go to the Gurudwara with her son and never went back. Her friend took her to Alberta and gave her a job in their motel as a housekeeper. But her husband's family kept looking for her and finally learned that she is living in Alberta. They reported her to immigration but her friend, the motel owner, engaged a lawyer to defend her. This lawyer asked my organization to act as a cultural interpreter and let the court and the judge know what will happen to her and her son if they are deported to India.

I wrote that her son, if he goes to his father's family in Canada, will be at high risk of neglect and abuse because of his mother's escape. If he is sent to India with his mother, he will not be able to get proper education as his mother could not afford to send him to a school with English medium. The boy only knows English. He will be destined to remain uneducated and unskilled and will be poor all his life. The mother, as a separated wife and unskilled woman, will be under the stigma of leaving her husband and will have to work as a maid servant somewhere and may be forced to give sexual favours. This is the argument that my organization put forth.

The lawyer fought the case and then let us know that she won the case and mother and son stayed in Canada. Her son is a bright student in an elementary school and has a chance to be a productive citizen of Canada.

Story 8

Our social influence (pressure) not intentionally, can lead to manipulation in marriage of young people. This is the story of a young man who was persuaded, gently, to marry a girl from back home in India when he was not willing to marry her. It is very common in South Asian communities to arrange the marriage of adult children with young men and women back at home. I became aware of the situation after the emergency services were called.

This young man is a Canadian citizen. His marriage was arranged in India through the help of family and community members there. It was performed in the traditional religious manner with involvement of the community, like any typical traditional marriage. After the ceremony, the young man came back to Canada and sponsored his wife. He maintained contact with her all the time while she was waiting for immigration. He was committed to this marriage though the marriage was arranged under pressure from his family. His family was very supportive. They have a good standing in the community. The bride came after she got her immigration. Within a matter of a few weeks she called 911 and reported that she was facing spousal abuse and family abuse. When 911 responded, the police heard both sides of the story and assistance was offered to both. After a few days, she made another call to 911 and reported escalation of abuse. After the second call, further assistance and resources were offered to all those involved in the situation. Following the desire and interest of the girl, she was assisted to leave the family and was connected with other resources. The main objective was to ensure her safety. Once her safety was ensured, then she was provided with further resources needed during this transition stage.

An elaborate assessment of the situation was made by the police and social workers in the police domestic abuse unit. It came to the knowledge of service providers that the girl had no intention of committing and honouring her marriage. The surmise is that she was also married under duress and may have a boyfriend back at home. She had planned and prepared for her escape at the earliest possible opportunity immediately after becoming an immigrant. She used the laws and resources in Canada in her favour to gain her objective. In this case, the young man was the victim because he suffered from emotional, psychological and financial abuse. He also suffered from the social stigma of having his wife leave him.

Story 9

I worked with the case of a lady (from India) who was not married and who was in her 30s. Her brother found it difficult to find her a spouse. Eventually he found a man from Alberta who was quite older, in his early 60s. She was forced to marry him. However, once she arrived in Canada she found out that the man was an alcoholic and had not told her that he had older children so there was a lot of abuse and other problems between them, so much so that she even went to a shelter at one point.

The reasons behind her marriage were financial. The girl's family was very poor and when her brothers heard of the man from Alberta who had a good job and was well off they used that as means to pressure her into the marriage. But her life was hard because the man's adult children would not accept her. Usually financial reasons are the basis for arranged marriages, where one individual would be well off and the other individual's family sees that as a way to help them out of their financial difficulty. In the majority of cases, women are the ones whose families are in need of help and they get forced into a marriage and come to live where her future husband is.

I found a pattern of emotional abuse and trauma surrounding such marriages. The woman (who came from India to Canada) was financially deprived, and not allowed to go out because he did not want her to go into society and learn about her rights. Some women are not even allowed to go out and meet anybody, often there is violence, and it was not until the police found out that these women began to be allowed out. In some cases, it was the neighbours who called the police. Some of the women became aware of their rights by watching TV or talking to others and they then called the police themselves. Some cases have now been resolved; where families changed their ways of life (the couple worked on the problems and resolved the issues themselves). In some cases women left home but many go back to their husbands due to pressure from their own families.

Story 10

I was involved in a situation where a woman came and confided in me about her situation, she wasn't my client, she just wanted some help.

The reason why she came and confided in me was because she was in an arranged marriage which she did not want and her husband and in-laws were abusing her. It was a situation of violence. Individuals who come from rural India or from a traditional Indian family, not only come and live with their husbands but with his family too, so if you marry the youngest son you live with his extended family. In this case, the person was being abused by all these members. She was in her 20s (mid 20s), she had been married for about 2 years. At first she never did leave home and just took the abuse. She was actually quite educated and began to take courses at a school but prior to this she only had grade 12 (high school education). She was pressured by her in-laws and husband to go get a job and then she decided to go to school and was even volunteering. She had landed immigrant status and was waiting for her citizenship. That was another thing that the family had over her, because they had sponsored her, she was a sponsored bride and was threatened that

if she did anything they did not like that they would pull the sponsorship and send her back home.

People from rural areas (who tend to be more traditional) find it a big deal if the daughter or son is able to marry someone from Canada. Then that would mean a better life for the rest of her family, i.e. that eventually the rest of the family can come to Canada or at least can get some financial support. If she qualifies (gets her citizenship status) then she can begin to bring her family over. This is the main reason for girls agreeing to an arranged marriage unwillingly. This woman obviously did not think she will encounter an abusive situation. She agreed thinking about getting a better life for herself and her family. In this specific case the girl was a very simple girl and the husband was very 'Westernized'.

After marriage, there was domestic violence and the individual was basically trapped. She couldn't go back home because most brides who come out here and then decide to go back home probably cannot because there is a huge stigma. Parents do not want their daughters to come back home in that kind of situation because of family honour. The family honour is paramount so she would probably not tell her family back home but try to find resources here in Canada. She had heard of a girl who had gone back home and her family rejected her because of family honour; the family would have been ostracized if they had accepted her. So, women in these situations do not try to go back home and just take the abuse and remain in these marriages. Many of the women end up committing suicide or if the situation is really desperate they would find resources here to help them like the police or a shelter. It is very shameful for a traditional Indian girl to have a relationship before marriage; the fear is that she might have premarital sex or even get pregnant. In that case, they would not hesitate to have her killed, known as an honour killing (again this occurs in traditional families). *Honour killings have also occurred here in Canada.* In the present case she did eventually leave him; she was able to educate herself, then enter a profession. When she did leave she was able to go to a shelter and brought her child with her. The husband was not particularly

interested because the child was a girl and daughters are considered a liability. She did well for herself and her daughter on her own.

This is the case in communities that are very traditional; there are communities that are progressive and educated who will allow their children to choose their own spouse.

Story 11

This is the story of a woman from India who was in her early 30s with no education. She came from a South Asian background and is a Canadian citizen. She was forced to marry an older man - 25 years older than her, because he lived in Canada. Her family thought by doing this she would be able to sponsor them.

In her marriage, she suffered emotional and physical abuse from all members of her husband's family. They did not want her to get pregnant because they thought it would dilute the inheritance so when she found out she was pregnant they gave her herbs to induce an abortion. But now she has left him.

In this culture, children are taught to obey their parents and not think for themselves. Therefore they are not able to make their own decisions based on what is best for themselves, they make decisions based on what other people will think. If you do not respect yourself no one else will respect you.

Story 12

A girl from a Middle Eastern origin came to see me. She told me she was nearing her nineteenth birthday, had only finished high school, and was a Canadian citizen. Her parents told her that she had to get married. She could marry "person x" who is a Canadian citizen and was living in Canada or the "person y" who was not a Canadian citizen and who lived overseas. She was made to feel that she had no

other choice but to make a decision between the two her parents had chosen. So she was forced to choose to marry the one living in Canada. Unfortunately she ended up in a very abusive marriage.

It was a very typical wedding with all the trimmings of a large wedding. Before the wedding, she was taken aside and asked if the marriage was forced, and as she did not wish to embarrass her parents, nor did she understand what it meant to be forced, so she said no.

It was a rough time. She said she was forced to do things she had never done, She could do nothing right, and began to lose her confidence, and her self-esteem. She did not know how to handle the abuse. She said she did not know who could help her.

Later on she learned that her sisters also had marriages that they did not want. She said “No one was on my side when I said I did not want to marry either one of the suggested men”, and added, this is how girls are married off in her country.

Story 13

The girl whose story I will tell you is from Lebanon. She was 18 years old, just out of high school and she wanted to go to University. She grew up in Canada. In Lebanon everyone knows from your last name who you are, from what village and what status in society you have. Her husband was from a well-known family and when his parents asked for her hand, her father felt very good. Her father had always admired the family of the groom to be. She was pressured and manipulated to think that this was the best for her. She heard, constantly, comments like “what is education- husband is better”, “if you go to University you will be too old and no one would want to marry you.” And so she got married. It was a traditional marriage. They went to the mosque and afterward there was a reception for five hundred people. Her husband is not from Canada. She got pregnant right after

marriage and it made the marriage harder and it grew worse. There was a lot of miscommunication between them. She jumped to conclusions blamed his family and he would blame hers. It was as if she wanted him to leave her. It is much easier for the man to leave the girl in her religion and culture than for the girl to divorce her husband. But her husband was open-minded, he was supportive of going for counselling. He compromised and tried to understand the state of her emotions during her pregnancy. After a few years of a lot of hard work things got better and they agreed to make the marriage work for the kids. She has three kids now.

Story 14

I will relate the story of a young girl from Lebanon. She is 20 years old, has a university degree. She is a landed immigrant from the Middle East.

Her husband had lived here for ten years, he went back home because he wanted to get married. The families arranged it. She was pressured to marry him. She did not know him but agreed because she thought he was a good guy. She moved to Canada after the wedding, and then her husband started to control her. His family started telling her what she could and could not do. They said if you do not listen to us we will deport you, you do not know the law here and we do. Nine months later she had a baby. Things got worse after that.

She was emotionally abused until she could no longer take it. She is now in a shelter with her eight month old baby, hiding from her in-laws waiting for a family member to come and help her out.

Marriage is hard and it's a mystery. If it's not successful, not everyone can get a divorce.

Story 15

I work in an organization that deals with cases of family violence. The client did not approach my organization directly. Her family acquaintance approached the organization for a food referral. This acquaintance further asked us if there were any financial support that we could give as she had a woman (client) living with her who had no income. I met with the woman (my client) separately. Client did not speak English, her first language was Arabic. I spoke with the client about her living arrangement. She said she was living with this family friend who was helping her. She and her husband had separated. We booked a second appointment to meet and complete a needs assessment. Upon the second meeting client disclosed that she had left her husband and that he did not provide any financial support. I asked the client if she had any family in Canada and she disclosed she did not. She was living with a family friend whom she did not know very well. In the third meeting the client disclosed that her husband had abused her and that he was involved in extra-marital affairs. He had locked her up in their home with her then infant child. Client escaped from the house by climbing out of a window. I then referred the client to an outreach shelter worker. Both the worker and I met with the client several times after.

After several meetings with the client, she disclosed that she had not met her husband prior to her father deciding to marry her to this man. As he was from Canada, her father believed that he could provide a better life for her. When asked why she did not refuse the marriage she disclosed that she could not as her father and family would not support her in that decision and that she felt that she did not have an option as this was their cultural norm. I did not ask the client about the details of the ceremony aside from that fact that she had the wedding in Iraq. Client suffered physical, financial, emotional and sexual abuse by the husband whom she married. She was financially and emotionally abused by the family acquaintance that she was staying with. Client's child also displayed signs of

emotional stress. As of 2 years ago, Client was in sustainable housing. She had divorced her husband and was enrolled in ESL classes and was also working.

Story 16

The victim was a 32 year old woman living in a South Asian country when her first husband (father of her 2 teenage daughters) died. The victim's children were very young when death occurred. The victim raised the children on her own until they were teenagers.

The victim was forced to marry, by her family, a relative in Canada as it was felt the victim needed someone to care for her and that her new husband would need care as well. The proposed husband in Canada was more than 30 years older than the victim. Despite the age difference, family members advised that it was the best solution for the victim and that her daughters would have a better life in Canada. Shortly after arriving in Canada the victim felt strain in the marriage and wanted to separate. Her new husband began behaving oddly and spent a lot of time on the internet. The victim was required to work and suffered a lot of abuse at home from her new husband. The victim advised her new husband that she wanted to move out and wanted separation. The victim soon found a basement suite and began the process of collecting furniture. The morning the victim and her daughters were to move her new husband killed her daughters and attempted to murder the victim. The victim suffered serious injuries and witnessed one of her daughters' murder.

The victim is now staying at a shelter; this place has made an exception to allow the victim to stay longer given her lack of support in Canada (victim has only one extended family member in Canada) and her emotional trauma. She continues to suffer as the case proceeds in court. It is important to understand that in certain cultures/countries, arranged/forced marriages are the norm and everyone is expected to go through it. Such a marriage is preferred/valued over "love marriages" where

two people get to know each other, decide they are compatible, and choose to marry each other.

As this is a high profile case, we tried to seek help for her from many different sources and the response from the government agencies was as quick as possible. We contacted our local MLA. The MLA's involvement assisted this client in sponsoring her family from India to attend the funerals and to keep the victim supported. Canadian Immigration was also helpful in approving the extension of my client's family's visa.

Help also came from other agencies. I saw my client one month ago and assistance is still currently being provided by: Hospital (for Psychiatric Care), Counselling Centre, Outreach workers for the client to attend various appointments, Multicultural workers for Language Barriers, Legal Aid Lawyer for Family Court Matters, Mental Health Workers, Crown Counsel, Police, Immigrant Services. My client is now conscious and has somewhat more ability for limited speech (her throat was slashed) and has some mobility (suffered broken bones) which is more than what she had initially after the attack.

Story 17

This is the story of a client of mine who was sponsored to Canada with a deal. My client was 20 years old and immigrated to Canada on a family class application. Part of the deal of sponsoring her and her family was that she would return to India and marry a man in her brother-in-law's family and sponsor him. She had concerns about this man because she had heard that he abused alcohol and he was a lot older than her. She did not want to marry him but was forced into this marriage. When we met the client she said they had been married for 3 years and it had been a very abusive relationship. She was separating from him and she accessed our agencies for help with family law issues.

The relationship was abusive and at the time of the marriage the client was stuck between her needs and those of her family.

Story 18

This is the story of a 22-year-old girl living in B.C. She has done her high school in Canada. She was in a relationship with a young man and her mother knew about this relationship. The family did not like it at all and quickly arranged her marriage without her consent and pressured her and married her off in the traditional manner.

The girl was very distraught at the marriage and told her husband that she did not want him to touch her at all. She stayed in this marriage only for two weeks while she planned her escape. She called the man she was having a relationship with and walked out of the marriage. Her family disowned her. And her lover's family wanted to have nothing to do with her because they did not want a divorced woman as their daughter-in-law. So she had to turn to other people for support. Her father's friend supported her and arranged her wedding to the man she loved. The marriage took place and they started living together. For a long time, she suffered from the consequences of her first marriage and was deeply affected by the loss of contact with her family. Today she is a happily married woman, married to the man of her choice and has children.

Story 19

This case came to me from a 24-year-old woman who had lived through forced marriage. She was born in England but moved to Canada and became a Canadian citizen. She had a single mother who arranged her marriage when the young woman was not willing to get married. But under the pressure of parental obligation to marry her daughter, the mother pressured her daughter to obey her, accept her choice and uphold family honour.

The young woman kept begging her mother not to marry her but it was of no use. She was married according to traditional customs. After the marriage, she did not want to have any relation with her husband. She told him that she does not know him at all and cannot have any relations with him. She stayed in her mother's house with her husband for two years but could never get adjusted in this marriage. She was very unhappy and asked her husband for a divorce, luckily avoiding any violence. She is 35-year-old today and is still a single woman with no desire to marry at all. She has lived her life alone.

Story 20

This is a story of a girl who was 16 years old at the time of her marriage. She just finished Grade 10. She is a Canadian of South Asian origin.

She was taken to India for, she was told, a vacation. And there she was married at the age of 16. Her mother took her to India and left her with her grandparents who were asked to arrange her marriage. Although she refused to get married, still she was married off. It was an emotional trauma for her with total alienation from her home and family and her country that is Canada. She was living in a country that was totally foreign to her. She wanted to go back to Canada but the only way she was allowed to come back was after marriage. The main reason for forcing her to marry was that she was of marriageable age and if parents did not marry her off then the fear was that she may choose someone inappropriate (from another culture). She was married in a traditional ceremony; after 2 years she came back to Canada and stayed in the marriage until there was additional trauma in her life. Her daughter was murdered. She could not cope with the existing continuing stress of her marriage as well as coping with her grief. It was then that she walked out of the marriage and never looked back.

Story 21

A young man was in grade 12 but was not doing well in his studies. He also got involved with bad company. His parents were worried about his behaviour and tried their best to discipline him through advice and counselling but they did not see any results. The family was very unhappy. Then his father thought of one solution: marry him off and he will straighten up with the responsibility of having a wife and children. As he turned 18, the father, over the telephone, negotiated his marriage to a distant cousin of his in Pakistan. His mother did not want him to marry because he was so young, but his father insisted, and she had no say in the matter. The young man was not willing but he was pressured to marry though he had not seen or heard anything about the girl. So in the end he capitulated to please his father and agreed to get married. The marriage took place according to Islamic ceremonies over the telephone. One priest came to his home in British Columbia, Canada while another priest was in the girl's home in Pakistan. Over the telephone, the two priests conducted the ceremony and declared them married. After a few months, he sponsored his wife who came to Canada within the year.

The young man's mother came to see me, in my capacity as a volunteer director in a women's organization. After three years of their marriage, she told me that they are having problems and asked whether I would agree to talk to them and help them come to some understanding. I agreed to meet them and both came to see me. During the conversation I figured that the wife was very controlling and, by her own confession, had a problem with her uncontrollable anger. I also learned that her family was interested mainly in getting as much money from a Canadian son-in-law as they could and were also interested in getting immigration status, which was the main reason for marrying off their daughter in Canada. The young man himself had a bad temper but there was no physical abuse. The problems escalated because of her uncontrollable anger and his changing response between giving in to her demands and also getting angry at her. Though he was forced to marry her, he said that he is trying his best for the honour of his family since he married in the family.

After two years, and a child, he couldn't take it anymore and left home to "find peace". His parents were very upset and tried their best to help their daughter-in-law, who was abusive to them also over the years. After a few months, she also moved out. The young man told me that he cares for her and will do all he can to help her but he cannot live with her.

On his mother's request, I arranged for them to meet at least once, a marriage counsellor and community elders hoping that mediation would be possible; but that effort failed. For a long time, she didn't let him see the child. He asked me to help him to find a lawyer so that he could have access to the child. Before helping him, I had to make sure that he is still supporting his wife and child, which he was. Then, I got him an appointment with a lawyer and a counsellor. Now, he can see his child according to the agreement and is thinking of getting a divorce. Last that I saw him, he told me that he is not happy but at least he said he does not live in fear of harassment all the time and has some peace.

Story 22

As a school teacher in BC I meet many women with problems with their children, and try to help them with suggestions and advice. Sometimes it helps solve their problems.

A few months ago a women I know slightly, came and asked to talk to me privately. She told me her story and asked for my advice.

She went to Pakistan with her children. There, her two brothers asked for her daughter's hand in marriage for the son of one of the brothers. Her daughter was 10 years old and the boy was 13. At first she did not take it seriously and tried to dodge the issue saying that she is very young when she is older we will see. But they insisted and emotionally blackmailed her by saying that our mother is old, she may die anytime. And she wants to see her grandchildren married. So there was a lot of loving pressure on her. And finally, as the girl's guardian she gave her consent to

Nikah (legally contracted Muslim marriage) but not Rukhast (sending the girl to live with husband and in-laws). As you know in our South Asian and Middle Eastern cultures very often the marriage can take place in two stages. First stage is legal contract and second is cohabitation.

The 10 year old was married with traditional customs and festivities with hundreds of guests. She got jewellery, cloths, sweets and money. As a bride she was very pleased to be center of attention and with all that she got. And all the relatives were happy. Lots of pictures were taken and a video was made.

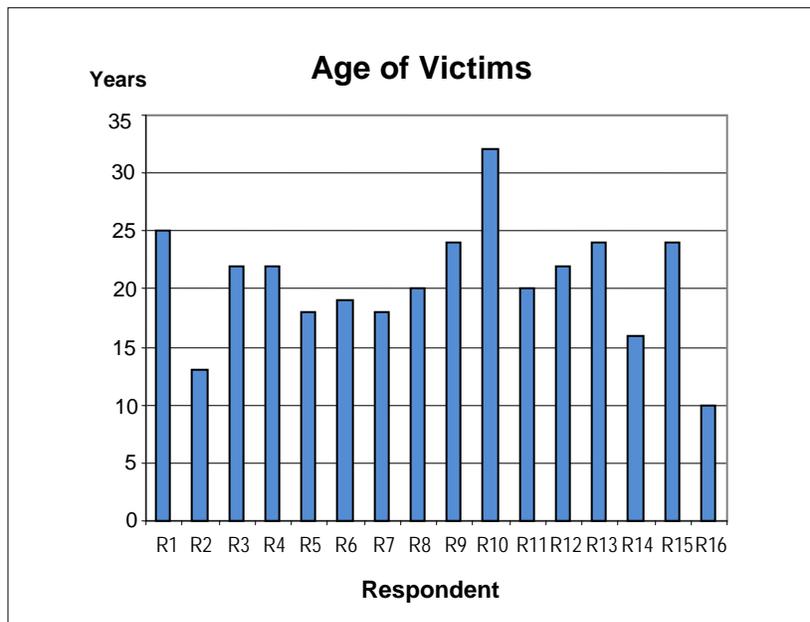
After the legal ceremony the family came back to BC with gifts and traditional sweets. Meanwhile the child had missed school so she went back to school. Other children asked why she was absent. She said that she went and got married. She also had the pictures of the wedding which she showed to the children. She also wondered when she will have another wedding like another birthday party. So children talked about it in their homes and also teachers came to know about this. And they were very concerned; they phoned the mother and asked her what is going on. At that time the mother got worried she told the teachers that it was not a wedding just a proposal for her and a little celebration. She knew that it will not be looked upon favourably in Canada. She scolded the daughter and asked why she said that you got married. The reply was that because "I did get married." The mother strictly forbade her to talk about it, to anyone.

The mother came to see me to ask me what she should do. I know about this form of marriage that occurs with a guardian's consent; it has acceptance in Asian and Middle Eastern communities even in Canada. So I advised her that either she should have the marriage annulled by an Imam (priest) or treat it as an engagement. And I said that when the children grow up then they can decide whether they will accept this marriage or not. She was shocked to hear me say so because she said that is totally impossible. They are married and will remain married. Then I realized that it

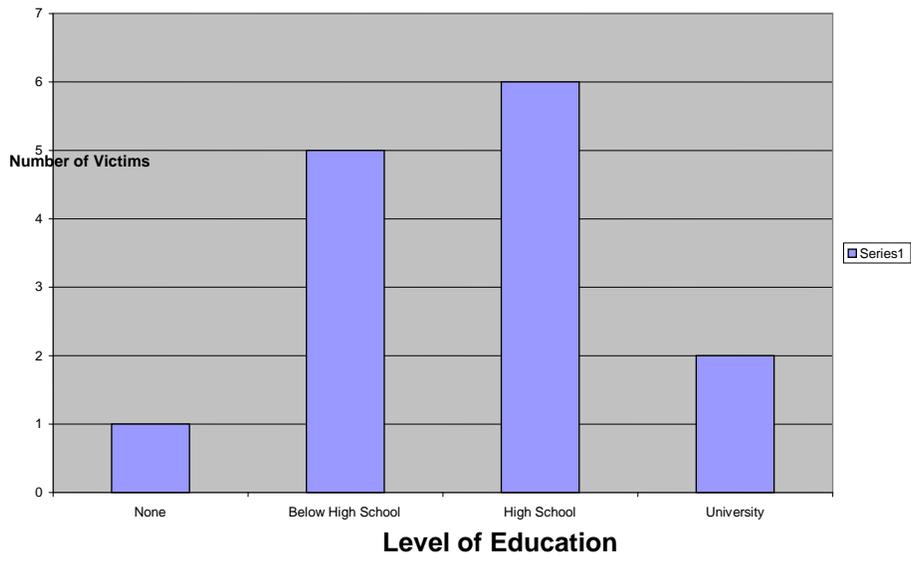
is nowhere in the horizon of thought of many parents that reaching adulthood their children could even think of opposing such a marriage.

Demographic Data

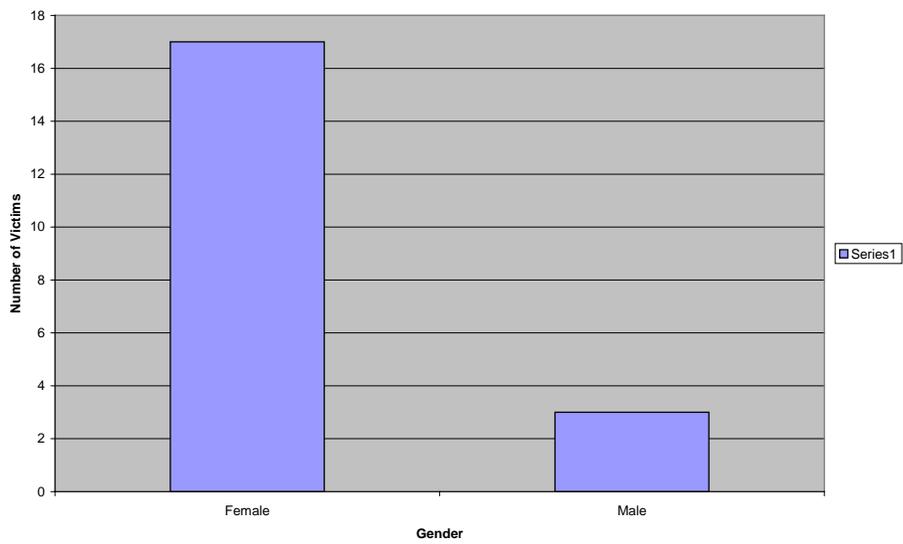
The following demographic data indicate the age, education, gender and country of origin of the victims. The ages of the victims vary from 10 to 32. Most of the victims are either high school graduates or only have a few years of high school education. There are a disproportionately larger number of women forced into marriages than men. The majority of victims, in this small sample, come from India and Pakistan, and then from Middle Eastern countries. These graphs are presented only for visual understanding of the demographic characteristics of the victims whose stories are depicted in this study. They are not statistically representative of forced marriages.



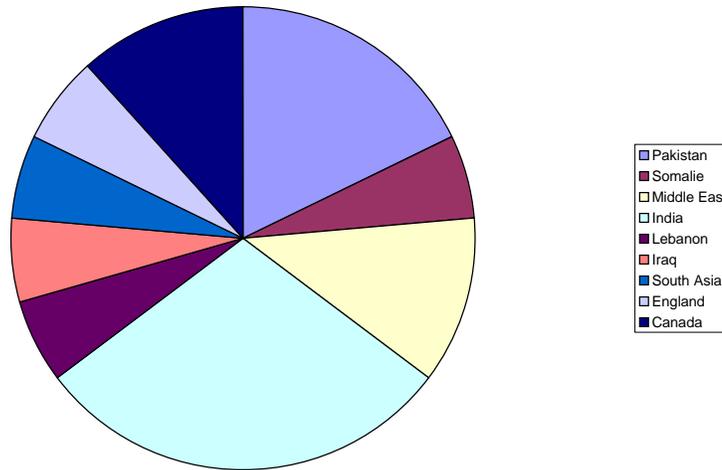
Education of Victims



Gender of Victims



Country of Origin of Victims



The Themes Emerging from the Stories

Findings from the Stories

From an overview of all the stories a set of themes has emerged out of which five main themes are selected and presented here. These form the findings of this investigation from the stories. Although these themes do not portray the richness and complexity of these stories, they do point out certain common features in the occurrence of forced marriage in three Western Canada locations, where the data were collected.

1. Reasons for Forced Marriage

In all the stories the reasons given for forced marriage are very similar. Forced marriage takes place for a number of reasons including: economic considerations, socio-religious considerations, family-related factors such as structure of the family, and a concept of family honour (izzat). In addition, forced marriage occurs in Canada to obtain immigration status through sponsorships as well as to preserve cultural heritage. The reasons given in the stories of forced marriage fall within one or more of these categories.

a) Family Honour

Family honour among tradition-bound authoritarian families is a powerful motive to force both sons and daughters to marry a particular person or to marry into a particular family and to remain in that marriage. Family honour is threatened if for example, one does not keep the promise of a childhood betrothal or, among Muslims, if the custom of marriage among cousins is not honoured. Adult children who have a different sexual orientation may be forced to enter a marriage chosen by their parents to cover up their “deviant tendencies” which, if exposed, will dishonour the family.

b) Economic Reasons for Forced Marriage

Marriage decisions for young men or women are very often dominated by financial considerations. Partners for them are chosen from well-off families with the motive of getting financial rewards and/or links with influential people which will also bring financial gain. If the young people do not agree they are often pressured and forced into obedience and acceptance of the proposed marriage partner.

Poverty is found to be another reason for forced marriage of girls especially to a Canadian citizen. One respondent said “they think that dollars are strewn on the streets of Canada.” Many stories reflect situations of girls overseas forced to marry a Canadian because the chosen husband will provide money to their poverty-ridden families and parents are comforted by the knowledge that they have married their daughter into economic security. They are also forced to marry older men in Canada who agree to forego the demand for a dowry from the girl’s family. On the other hand, men in South Asian and Middle Eastern countries are known to pay money to the family of a Canadian girl on the understanding that they will be sponsored for immigration regardless of whether the Canadian wants to marry the man. Not all families who seek sons or daughters-in-law in Canada for immigration are poor. They do it to be sponsored by a Canadian often through forced marriage of their children.

c) Socio-Religious Considerations

Marriages are arranged to ensure that racial, religious and linguistic boundaries are not violated. If young people refuse to marry the partner their parents select or choose a partner from a different caste or religion then immense emotional and social pressure is brought upon them in the name of religion, culture, ancestral tradition and duty to obey the parents. Such marriages have cultural sanctions. Several stories in this report illustrate this point.

Young people in love are often forced to marry someone else whom the parents choose, as stories show. The argument is that love is not to be trusted as an appropriate emotion to determine the suitability of marital partners. Parents in their “wisdom” can choose what is best for their children. Moreover, love crosses boundaries of religion, race and caste, which cannot be permitted in traditional families. There are stories that show both men and women in love who were forced into marriage with someone else. So the question of love is irrelevant in an arranged marriage because the purpose of marriage in these communities is to propagate and to ensure economic security and family support for their children. Love is not needed to achieve this objective. In fact it becomes a threat to the structure of patriarchal authoritarian social order. Maintaining stability of this order is very important in such societies. In the patriarchal and authoritarian family hierarchy, the power is in the hands of the head of the family (usually the father). Women and young children (male and female) have less power and owe obedience to the head. Hence most of them find it hard to rebel against a forced marriage and give in.

2. Force in Marriage

From the analysis of the stories, the concepts of force and coercion emerge as a two stage occurrence in a forced marriage.

Usually the concept of forced marriage is - a marriage performed without the consent of one or both of the parties, often by force.

This represents only one stage of force in forced marriage that is, pre-wedding force or coercion by the family to make the person go through the ceremony. But marriage which is performed under force can also involve force “after the wedding” if the person feels trapped and is forced to continue to live in an abusive and violent marriage under threats or fear or out of duty toward family honour. This ongoing force is the case in the lives of many of the women and men whose stories are depicted in this report. Hence, the concept of force in this study is viewed as extending from pre-wedding force to post-wedding force. No single definition of forced marriage tells the whole story. Marriage may be forced both at the point of consent before marriage and force may continue to be an issue after the marriage.

The stories depict many forms of force and coercion, from pressure to threats to extreme physical violence. Before marriage every one of the victims was forced with pressure and threats. All of them married unwillingly. After marriage most of the victims were forced to act against their will under threats and violence. Hence, through the lens of these stories, forced marriage appears to be a saga of force throughout the life of the marriage. For details, the stories speak for themselves.

3. Use of Fraud in Forced Marriage

The stories reveal that very often forced marriage takes place under fraud and false pretences.

Fraud is used both by the parents to force young, unwilling adult children into a forced marriage and also by young men and women to find a way to please their parents as well as have their way. This is especially common in overseas marriage

of Canadian citizens. As a result, there is also fraud involved in terms of the information given to immigration authorities.

a) Forms of Fraud

From the description in these stories, fraud is involved in the following ways

- (a) Giving false information about a future spouse and his/her family;
- (b) Hiding information about the future spouse or family;
- (c) Marrying unwillingly with no intention of sponsoring the spouse;
- (d) Marrying someone under pressure with no intention of committing to the marriage;
- (e) Forced marriage also takes place to please the parents with the intention to leave the spouse and marry a previous boyfriend or girlfriend;
- (f) Parents use fraud to take their Canadian-born children on some false pretext (“Your grandmother is ill”) to their countries of origin, where they are forced into a marriage already arranged by their relatives in that country.

Fraud and false pretences are also used to get sponsored and/or to bring relatives to Canada by forcing a son or daughter to marry a Canadian Citizen.

b) Fraud for Obtaining Immigration Status

Getting married to a Canadian citizen solely for immigration purposes with the intent to divorce them and bring a previous boyfriend or girlfriend to Canada is a form of fraud.

Some of the respondents pointed out that the Canadian immigration policy supporting family reunion through sponsorship of relatives provides a significant motivation for forced marriage. Very often Canadian-born adult children are open to being used as a lever to sponsor “connected” relatives through marriage. What the stories show is that Canadians as well as women and men from other countries use deception in marriage to gain immigration status.

4. Choice and Consent

In many South Asian and Middle Eastern countries there is either gender segregation and/or strong disapproval of young people meeting, mingling and dating. There is very little possibility of a personal choice of a marriage partner in such a cultural ethos. Even in many such communities in Western Canada, Canadian-born young people are not permitted to choose their own partner, despite having opportunities to meet other young men and women. Choosing their own partner is unacceptable to their families for fear that they may choose someone unsuitable. The stories show how young people, especially women, who may want to marry by choice are either not allowed to make a choice, or if they do, their family strongly disapproves. Very often a marriage is arranged for them with a person of their family's choice. Many of them have no commitment to marriage and may not even live with the spouse or, may live an embittered and frustrated life. Although some inter-cultural, inter-faith marriages take place, young people face a lot of opposition and pressure to end the marriage. In one of the stories, her family disowned her for this reason. In one case, even physical violence was used. In all of these cases of forced marriage, although young men and women have to formally give their consent, in most cases they do not do so freely or do not mean to commit to the marriage.

Thus the stories reveal that giving consent under duress is a not a matter of a simple yes or no; it is complex. The stories also show that consent is often not considered important or necessary; it is taken for granted.

5. Consequences of Forced Marriage

In all the stories forced marriage is found to be closely linked with domestic abuse and violence in all its intimidating forms. Forced marriage, as long as it survives, appears to do so with the disastrous consequences depicted in most of the stories. A repeated theme of abuse and violence runs through all but two of the twenty-one stories. The plight of victims within forced marriages is described by the respondents in horrific terms.

The victims suffer from emotional, psychological, physical and sexual abuse. The abuse ranges from milder forms like neglect and rejection, to extreme forms such as actual and attempted murder. The following list of descriptive words (in quotes) are taken from each story, as narrated by service providers, to convey the nature and extent of abuse.

Women in forced marriage, in these stories, live under:-

“Suspicion, rejection, neglect, humiliation, accusations, manipulation, threats (of deportation, of cancelling sponsorship, of divorce and taking children away), control by husband and in-laws, financial deprivation, isolation, marital rape, divorce, assault as in beating, pushing, pulling hair, sexual assault, demand for prostitution, attempted murder and murder.”

The above descriptive words portray the painful lives and experiences of the victims and show how vulnerable victims of forced marriage are, and the kind of vulnerability they face. Noorfarah Merali, in an article in *Feminism and Women's Rights Worldwide* (2010, p. 112 – 117), has reported, based upon the findings of a number of cross cultural and international research studies, the outcome of women's forced and arranged marriage. She identifies and discusses the following factors associated with such marriages: “spousal abuse”, “mental health problems”, “self harm”, “suicide attempts”, “criminality”, “male control”. She adds: “International arranged marriages have been found to increase women's risk for various kinds of emotional abuse”. She concludes that immigration policy of sponsorship “enforces women's social and economic dependence on their husbands and husband's exclusive control of resources. [This is] part of the etiology of gender based violence” (p. 117). She goes on to suggest that, to ensure a sponsored bride's basic material subsistence, family immigration policy may consider creation of spousal allowances for the bride in the amount that government expects the sponsors to devote to their new brides. (p. 124)

In all the stories the pervading emotion is fear:

(a) Fear is the main tactic that seems to be used for controlling the behaviour of the wife, the daughter, the daughter-in-law, and even of young men in the stories.

(b) It is obvious from the above accounts of life within forced marriage that violence is widespread in forced marriage.

(c) The stories show that disproportionate numbers of women are subjected to violence. Only in two stories does no violence exist because the victims say that their husbands were considerate and compromising. This fact is significant as it confirms that most violence in these forced marriages comes from men.

(d) Our findings show that most marriages, depicted in these stories, ended in misery and then divorce. Those which did not end in divorce survived out of fear: fear of more abuse, fear of dishonouring the family, fear of immigration being cancelled, fear of losing their children and fear of the unknown.

In cases of forced marriage violence starts at the very beginning of marriage. Girls in forced marriage may be unwilling to consummate the marriage, and from that moment force and violence often starts. Then for various reasons it continues throughout marriage. The husband and family want to make her subservient and compliant through violence.

These are some of the themes that are found to be common in most of the stories. The similarity among cases in different locations appears to identify some of the basic features of forced marriages. This information is significant because it may help in the identification of preventive and remedial measures and services needed for the victims of forced marriage, across Western Canada.

Services for the Victims

This research study looked into the services provided and available for victims of forced marriage. As specified in the methodology, the data on services were collected by interviewing service providers from various organizations in Western Canada. The findings of this study cannot be generalised, given the small sample size. They are however important in that these are what some front-line service providers, working with victims of forced marriage, have identified as gaps.

1. Services that already exist for victims of domestic violence were available to those experiencing violence in forced marriage situations. These are at the first point of contact, NGOs, social services, police, doctors, hospitals (in cases of injuries) and shelters. At the second point of contact are financial aid services, legal services, employment services, language services, settlement services and immigration.
2. No services or programs were reported that *specifically* address instances of forced marriage.

To elaborate on the first issue:

Many victims of forced marriage seek help when they begin to face abuse and violence from their spouse or have lived with violence and abuse for some time. First they go to ethno-cultural organizations. Most of the information for this research has come from such organizations; however, some very useful information has also come from other sources.

The data on services rendered to the clients show a variety of measures taken to help them. They range from offering information, advice and support, to making referrals to community resources, other NGOs, as well as providing translation services and arranging for housing and shelter.

Depending on the needs of the client, the service providers also arrange for legal counselling, medical help, police protection, and accompaniment to courts, shelters and

hospitals. They also provide information, referrals and help with immigration and sponsorship problems. When clients talk about their situation then such problems are revealed. Quite often the clients are so emotional and traumatized that they cannot express their needs. Service providers have to figure out how to help the client from their conversations with them. They place different options before the client for a course of action for their protection and safety. Many clients are too afraid to avail themselves of the assistance. Some women seek advice but out of fear, they do not act. They go back to the same situation. However, as the stories and service providers relate, most clients received adequate help (with referrals to other agencies) and their situation improved. But all this help is given under the category of domestic violence.

Service providers interviewed indicated that they had referred their clients to the following government institutions:

List of Government Agencies Contacted by Service Providers Interviewed: Federal, Provincial and Municipal

Federal	Provincial	Municipal
Canada Revenue Agency (CRA)	AB Works	Counselling Services
Income Support Services	Social Services/ Social Support	Shelters
Citizenship and Immigration Canada	Legal Aid	Sexual Assault Centres
RCMP	MLAs	Help Lines
Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINC)	Employment Compensation	Family Violence Centres (government, NGOs)
Resettlement Assistance Program	Family Justice Centre	Councillors
Immigration Loans Program	Abuse and Assault Counselling Programs for Women	Rape Crisis Centre
Housing Programs and Financial Assistance	Subsidized Housing	Women Against Violence Against Women
Student Loans	Provincial Homelessness Initiative	Victim Link
Federal MPs	Rental Assistance Program	Surrey RCMP Victim Services and other RCMP Centres
	Immigrant Settlement Services	Battered Women Support Services
	Employment Services for immigrants	Department of Community Services (Edmonton)
	Child Abuse Prevention	Edmonton Police Service - Victims Services Unit
	Helpline for Children	Family Violence Prevention
	Transition Houses, Safe Homes and Second Stage Housing	
	Crisis Lines	
	Outreach and Multicultural Outreach Services	
	Victim Services	
	Victim's Fund	

Some service-providing agencies and organizations stated that they were well equipped to offer full service to their clients. However, around fifty percent of the respondents stated that their agencies did not have adequate resources to meet all the needs of their clients. Remarks like “it is a challenge” to meet the needs of the clients or “not really equipped” or “I cannot say”, suggest a need to make more resources available to the agencies with front-line workers serving clients.

The situation is less clear with regard to victims of pre-marriage abuse and violence, for example from parents, or post-marriage abuse and violence from other family members, for example a mother-in-law. Service providers interviewed did not indicate the existence of services available for minor children being pressured by their parents, or whether individuals being threatened or abused by other family members would have access to the same services as spousal abuse victims.

It is also very telling that the organizations and agencies in three locations (which were requested to identify service providers for interviews) identified more than half of their clients were from South Asian and Middle Eastern backgrounds.

When asked about the countries from which their clients come, they identified the following countries:

Pakistan	Bangladesh	India	Fiji
Sudan	Somalia	Lebanon	Palestine
Yemen	Iraq	England	France

There were also cases of forced marriage of Canadian citizens taking place in England and France, where large communities from South Asian, Middle Eastern and African countries are settled. Marriages of Canadian citizens are often arranged with their relatives and friends in these countries.

To elaborate on the second issue:

None of the service providers interviewed stated that they had received any case under the category of “forced marriage”. Moreover no programs were found to exist for those who were facing and/or were afraid of being forced into marriage. Those afraid of being pressured to enter a forced marriage, either in Canada or by being taken abroad, have no help and nowhere to turn to. They do not know whether any such help is available. When they are taken abroad, they cannot do anything. Nor do they know whether any mediation services exist which can appropriately mediate between them and their parents in a culturally-sensitive manner. There was no reported educational or social awareness raising program which can apprise communities of occurrence and consequences of forced marriage and of some preventive measures. There was no report of counselling available that can help young women and men to find strategies to prevent such a marriage and there is no intervention program in place. Police and lawyers are unlikely to be able to help them because, unless the victims have been subject to actual or threatened violence, at this stage no crime has been committed; forced marriage has not taken place.

In short, there appears to be no social awareness that forced marriage is wrong and in Canada it is against the law. In the communities it does not even seem to be recognized as an issue.

Help is however, available to those who need it *after* forced marriage when abuse and violence occurs in marriage. Then they may go to social services, police or shelters. It is important to note that these cases are treated as cases of family violence, abuse and marital discord. The issue of forced marriage does not even enter, or if it does it comes up, as a contextual factor. Since this issue is addressed as domestic violence, it is no wonder that there is little awareness of the issue of forced marriage and limited specific preventive programs. The fact that a client is in a forced marriage may be revealed only incidentally in the conversation, when the victims come for help for other specific needs after emotional, psychological, and/or physical violence has taken place. The lack of specific focus may prevent victims of forced marriage from knowing that services are available to them, at least in cases where there is domestic abuse.

Reflections of the Service Providers on Forced Marriage

The data revealed that the service providers who come across cases of forced marriage often think about how incidents of forced marriage may be decreased. It appears to be important to most of them as they see the negative consequences of forced marriage in their work. Many of them have shared their reflections on how *this issue may be addressed*.

Their views can be summarized under the following 8 categories:

1. Most of them seem to think that there is a chance that forced marriage incidence can at least be decreased if communities get involved and face the issue. They believe that:
 - (a) The first step is awareness and acknowledgement of the occurrence of forced marriage and that it is against human rights.
 - (b) The next step is education of communities, especially of parents, elders and new immigrants. They believe that it will be beneficial if they learn about human rights, Canadian values of equality, dignity and freedom and about Canadian laws.
 - (c) Peer support and peer education are also very important in convincing parents and communities about giving consideration to the choice of spouse by their adult children.
 - (d) Community NGOs can play an important role in this effort. They can start some sort of awareness campaign, education workshops, discussion forums and outreach work in religious and cultural centers and organizations. They can seek support from the governments and or charitable foundations for this work.

2. One suggestion which came from several respondents targeted high schools as the main initiator of awareness raising programs for youth regarding human rights of the individual, especially women. For example they need to learn the right to

security and equality, right of choice and freedom of association. In Alberta, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is included in the curriculum. Learning about human rights will encourage thinking among Canadian youth and create a sense of entitlement to their right of choice of their life partner.

3. Service providers talked about their experiences and views on service delivery. They pointed out that there are certain gaps in the services provided to the victims:
 - (a) They think that more direct services are needed as well as new services need to be added for the victims of forced marriage. For example specific services such as mediation services, consultation and some kind of help line can be very helpful for those *facing* forced marriage.
 - (b) They pointed out that not all service providers had adequate information and training in dealing with all the problems of victims of forced marriage, hence they see a need for more information for service providers as well as training in dealing with the victims in a culturally sensitive manner. As an example, the following quote, in the context of forced marriage, comes from a family lawyer, “ I am concerned that family lawyers, especially here in Alberta, have very limited experience with forced marriage...and may be woefully ignorant of how limited their role is and how they need to inform themselves of the steps they need to take. Many lawyers are unaware of how precarious the woman’s situation is and how urgent her needs are. We need to develop some specific expertise in the family law Bar...”
4. With reference to creating awareness and providing accurate information, service providers think that there is need for more data (statistical if possible), more research, studies as well as educational sessions on the nature and consequences of forced marriage. There was seen a need for creating information on various cultural aspect of diverse communities to ensure that the victims receive help in a culturally sensitive manner.

5. There was concern expressed repeatedly about one widespread cause of forced marriage viz. Canadian policy of family sponsorship. As the chapter on themes indicates, a large number of cases of forced marriage take place only to get immigration for relatives. Service providers think that, in view of this specific misuse of family sponsorship policy, some stringent measures are needed to prevent this misuse of the policy. They also point out that new spouses who come to Canada are ignorant of Canadian immigration laws and sponsorship laws as well as their rights. Many of the victims live under the threat that their sponsorship will be cancelled, so the service providers believe the sponsored spouses need accurate information about sponsorship laws and their rights in Canada even before they migrate to Canada.
6. Service providers stressed that women and girls need to be especially empowered through knowledge of Canadian human rights and laws, and knowledge of available avenues of help and support in case of need.
7. In the opinion of a few respondents, some form of premarital counselling for men and women, which could be organized by community NGOs, would be very helpful in their understanding of marriage contract and marital responsibilities. In ethnic communities hardly any such counselling exists. Some respondents even suggested that a marriage licence should be issued after such counselling.
8. Forced marriage has cultural sanction among many sections of the ethnic communities in the name of ancestral cultural practice, family honour, culture preservation and in family reunion. In Canada they can justify practices like this under the right to what they believe to be cultural preservation. Some counsellors and professionals strongly feel that it is very important to re-examine the whole issue of cultural rights. In authoritarian families and communities cultural rights of the collective have precedence over individual rights. The family, for example, as a collective, feels that it has the right to force their daughters to enter into an unwanted marriage for the benefit of two families. The will of the individual is

not important. One reason for this is that cultural rights are understood not as the rights of an individual member of the community but as right of the cultural group. In case of forced marriage there is an obvious conflict between individual rights (e.g. free choice, free association and freedom from violence) and rights of the group (e.g. maintaining cultural and religious heritage). The right of the individual may be violated in upholding the right of the group. The service providers feel that this issue needs to be addressed in concrete terms and there is a need to create a balance between individual's rights, especially woman's rights, and cultural practices sanctioned by communities.

The above are the reflections, on addressing the issue of forced marriage, from those who deal with the forced marriage problems. Many of these ideas may not be practical but it shows that some community members and some professionals are concerned about the issue. One respondent pointed out that Canada has a strong record of implementation of human rights as well as laws safeguarding women's equality. Perhaps some greater efforts can be made through education to ensure that parents understand that the practice of forced marriage is inconsistent with Canadian values and that those at risk of being victimised are aware of their recourses.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the anecdotal incidence of forced marriage in Western Canada and found that not only are there a number of cases of forced marriage involving Canadians, but that according to some of the service providers interviewed, such incidents appears to be increasing. While the investigation is confined to Western Canada, its findings are likely to be relevant to other parts of Canada where forced marriage takes place.

Our research shows that as forced marriage is a very sensitive issue it remains a hidden reality in Canada. Hence, it is not easy to identify. As this issue is little known, no services or preventive programs were found to exist specifically for victims of forced

marriage. We conclude that there is a gap in available services. Those which are available are under the domestic violence category. The stories clearly show that these services did provide very good support to the victims within the limitations of the resources and skills of the agencies. There appear to be no services or supports available for those threatened with a forced marriage before it has occurred. Many service providers mentioned that their agencies are not fully equipped to deal with all the needs of their clients.

From the findings on forced marriage we conclude that forced marriage is a complex issue in Western Canada involving a number of factors. There are three main factors that combine to sanction and prepare the ground for forced marriage:

- (a) patriarchal culture and authoritarian family with unequal power relations;
- (b) poverty in Asian and African countries from where majority of forced marriage brides come; and
- (c) desire for immigration sponsorship. (Among Muslims it is the cousins who are sponsored by marriage. Among other cultures it is relatives one acquires by marriage for example it is the parents or siblings of a son-in-law who are sponsored).

There is very little data on forced marriage in Western Canada. In fact this study is one of the very few studies of forced marriage in Canada. There is need for data collection of forced marriage: more research, follow up studies, documentation of information on forced marriage victims – (socio-economic status, country of origin and cultural background) and on the gaps in services for them.

For the delivery of services to the victims of forced marriage, no specific training programs were found to exist for service providers. Service providers in social services, settlement services, family services, law enforcement services and the professionals, who directly deal with cases and consequences of forced marriage, need specific training to address the problem of forced marriage. For example, many service providers may not know about the importance of counselling a young woman returning to Canada after forced marriage and what her specific needs are and how to address them. They need to

learn about, what one respondent called “a holistic approach” to all the needs and problems of the victims.

Similarly, none of the stories except one involving murder, mentioned that the perpetrators were brought under law, or that justice was done to the victims of forced marriage. Some service providers feel that the perpetrators need to be brought to justice and there should be some way that forced marriage victims may be compensated. It may be possible in case of forced marriage to claim damages (from parents or spouse or a third party) for physical or psychological or financial stress or loss under tort law. There would be practical difficulties in doing so but it worth exploring if there can be a way around the difficulties.

The stories make it clear that it is women who are most vulnerable and victimized in forced marriage because of their low power and low value in the family. Men were also found to be coerced into forced marriage but they may not always be as vulnerable as women because they have more power in the family. So we conclude there is need to empower women through educational and counselling programs.

Based upon the estimate from service providers who are dealing with the incidence of forced marriage in Western Canada, our conclusion is that forced marriage is *not sporadic* in Western Canada. In answer to this question half of the respondents said it is “widespread” or “common” or “becoming common”. Several respondents said “I don’t know.” Hence, it is difficult to determine whether it is widespread in Western Canada, but the data do indicate it is not sporadic. (It is significant to note that in addition to the estimate of the interviewers, all those who heard about this investigation had a story to tell about forced marriage in Western Canada in all the three locations.)

The study shows that the true extent of the practice of forced marriage in Western Canada is not known. There is limited public awareness of it. So we conclude that although the issue of forced marriage has so far been given little attention by society it needs to be

addressed. One respondent estimated that it will likely rise in the next 30 years due to the possibility and opportunity for sponsoring relatives through marriage.