

## Report to the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel

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**Title:** Background Information for the Themed Item - Exploitation – preventing Modern Slavery / Forced Marriage / Honour-based Crime

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**Author:** Khalid Ahmed, Scrutiny Officer, Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel



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### Gay people being subjected to forced marriages in UK, police warn amid nationwide crackdown

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/forced-marriage-uk-victims-gay-countries-airports-police-help-a9006006.html>

Gay people are being subjected to forced marriages to spouses of the opposite sex by families in the UK, police have warned amid a national crackdown.

Officers are being stationed at major airports across Britain this week in a bid to prevent victims being taken out of the country and raise awareness of how to seek help.

A record of 1,764 potential forced marriages were investigated in 2018, but police say they have not “scratched the surface” of the true figure because victims do not realise the practice is a crime or are not willing or able to report relatives.

Children as young as two have been pledged to one another, according to figures released by the national Forced Marriage Unit, and cases have related to more than 110 countries.

Det Sgt Trudy Gittins, who leads on forced marriage at West Midlands Police, said the practice has carried down to the third generation of immigrant families living in the UK.

“One of the big focuses for us is the LGBT community,” she told The Independent. “It’s a real risk in some cultures to be outed or come out as gay if your family doesn’t approve.

“That can be a huge risk for forced marriage and what you also find is sham marriages, where gay people marry each other to placate the family but live their lives.”

Det Sgt Gittins said some families also believe in “corrective rape” – the practice of forcing a gay victim to have sex with someone of the opposite sex in an attempt to change their sexuality.

She highlighted the case of Jasvir Ginday, a British-Sikh gay man who murdered his wife six months after they were married in India in 2013. She had been unaware of his sexuality and when she confronted him after discovering gay pornography, he strangled her and burnt her body.

At his trial, Ginday claimed his wife had threatened to “expose” his homosexuality to family and friends and he “panicked”.

A third of reported forced marriages involve under-18s, while the majority include under-25s and three quarters of victims from the UK are women.

Reported forced marriages have rocketed by 47 per cent in a year but officials believe that the prevalence has not increased, and the rise was caused by greater reporting.

The UK’s first successful prosecutions generated significant media coverage and the Home Office launched a major awareness campaign last year.

A Forced Marriage Unit report said the problem is “not specific to one country or culture” but the nations with the highest known prevalence are Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Somalia, Afghanistan and Romania.

Only 7 per cent of reported cases saw forced marriages take place within the UK, while the rest involved travel overseas.

In the first successful prosecution, a mother was jailed for forcing her daughter to marry an older relative in Pakistan who had raped her when she was 13.

The second prosecution was of a couple who tricked their 18-year-old daughter into travelling to Bangladesh to marry her first cousin, bear his child and enable him to obtain a British visa.

Det Sgt Gittins said victims who want to seek help can be discouraged by the prospect of their parents or relatives being prosecuted, or the concept of “shame and dishonour” for their family.

“If marriages don’t go ahead there might be consequences and problems for the wider family,” she added, saying that some mothers had threatened to kill themselves to force their children to go ahead with a marriage. “You’ve still got deeply embedded cultures in the third generation, and people are still migrating who bring these beliefs with them.”

The officer said West Midlands Police investigates around two alleged force marriages a month, but investigations are frequently ended because victims withdraw or the required evidence cannot be gathered from foreign countries.

If a prosecution is not possible, authorities can impose forced marriage protection orders to prevent families taking steps towards non-consensual weddings.

More than 1,800 orders were imposed between 2008 and 2018.

Det Sgt Gittins urged schools to raise awareness about forced marriage at school, amid a campaign to train teachers, social workers, NHS staff, police, the Border Force and airline crews to spot warnings signs.

She spoke during the first ever national crackdown on forced marriage, which is seeing police officers stationed at airports for a week of patrols as the summer holidays start.

The operation, codenamed Limelight, has previously focused on female genital mutilation (FGM), breast ironing and other honour-based abuses. Officials are targeting flights to high-prevalence countries to speak to passengers, observe any suspicious activity and gather intelligence.

The National Police Chiefs' Council lead for forced marriage, Commander Ivan Balhatchet, said: "Police will investigate every case fully and take all available steps to detect and prosecute those involved in this heinous crime. Forcing someone to marry is punishable by up to seven years in prison. "I urge anyone with concerns around forced marriage, or any other harmful practices affecting our children or vulnerable adults to come forward."

Forced marriage sees a spouse married against their will or – in cases involving children or people with learning or mental difficulties – where they cannot consent.

It was made a specific criminal offence in the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, but forced marriages are also linked to rape, violence, domestic abuse and coercive control. It is illegal to force someone into marriage, deceive someone into going abroad for a marriage or arrange the marriage of someone without mental capacity.

Inspector Allen Davis, of the Metropolitan Police, said airports were the "last line of defence".

"Teachers, nurses and social workers should all be having conversations about these issues," he added. "We want to prevent it from happening in the first place."

**Men make up 20 percent of the victims of so-called honour-based violence, but campaigners say they are being overlooked.**

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/pkd9yz/we-need-to-talk-about-the-male-victims-of-honour-based-violence>

Forced marriage (FM), threats, verbal abuse, blackmail, humiliation, abandonment and physical violence are just a few examples of HBV. HBV is a global issue and not specifically endorsed by any religion or culture but is nevertheless most associated with the Middle East or South Asia. In Britain, many HBV cases occur in South Asian communities.

2,024 cases of HBV were reported in England and Wales in 2019-2020, according to official Home Office statistics, but the true figure is likely to be much higher, due to a reluctance by victims to come forward. 80 percent of HBV victims are women, but a significant number of men are suffering in silence.

HBV stems from a grossly misinformed notion to protect a family's "honour" from anything that might harm the family's reputation – like premarital sex, divorce proceedings and refusing to get married to a person of their parents' choice.

Dr Mohammad Mazher Idriss of Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) is one of few researchers investigating male victims of HBV, describing it as “under-discussed, under-researched and under-funded”.

Since 2005, the UK has had a Forced Marriage Unit (FMU), run by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, operating nationally within the UK and internationally, providing support and advice to victims of forced marriage.

Karma Nirvana, a national charity dedicated to victims of HBV and forced marriage, says 10 to 15 percent of their HBV cases involve male victims, equating to 200 to 300 cases per year. In 2019, the FMU reported 19 percent of HBV victims were male.

Having escaped the prejudice of his family, Sidhu went on to face racist discrimination in the gay scene. So he wrote *Bollywood Gay*, a spiritual self-help book for LGBTQ+ South Asians where terminology and advice is translated into 13 different languages – a tool he would have liked growing up.

Karma Nirvana employs a number of measures to ensure the safety of HBV victims, such as putting them in touch with appropriate support agencies or the police. The majority of UK refuges are women-only, but Karma Nirvana has access to temporary housing across the UK.

“There are many agencies now working to support men experiencing domestic abuse such as Respect and Mankind as well as those organisations who support LGBT individuals,” a Karma Nirvana spokesperson said.

HBV can begin from a young age, so campaigners say schools should raise awareness about it. “It’s important for children and young people to understand this practise is not part of any religion or community,” the spokesperson says.

Over time, Sidhu managed to reconnect with his family and his mum appeared in YouTube videos discussing his sexuality and parental pressure in South Asian households – but due to family pressure, she stopped. Now, he creates content to help people in a similar situation to him.

Azam's family moved without telling him – and now he has no idea where they are. Pandemic forcing girls in south-east Asia and Pacific out of school and into marriage – study

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/16/pandemic-forcing-girls-in-south-east-asia-and-pacific-out-of-school-and-into-marriage-study>

Thousands of adolescent girls across south-east Asia and the Pacific are being forced to leave school and get married instead as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, a charity has warned, saying “a generation of girls could be lost”.

A new report by Plan International Australia highlighted the importance of secondary education for girls and detailed the increased risk and long-term impacts of child, early and forced marriage in the region.

“At the heart of child marriage is the view that female children are an economic burden,” the gender equality charity’s CEO, Susanne Legena, told the Guardian. “When girls are married, they are viewed as adults and their education typically stops.”

“Your job then is to be a wife and a mother.” 'He treated me as a slave': Women face rising violence amid war in Yemen.

Last year, Save the Children found the next four years could see as many as 250,000 adolescent girls across south-east Asia and the Pacific face child, early and forced marriages.

In Indonesia in the first half of 2020, the number of applications to marry underage was more than two-and-a-half times the figure for the whole of 2012, said Plan International. Last year, about 33,000 girls were married.

### **Why Covid school closures are making girls marry early**

In June and July 2020, India’s children’s helpline saw a 17% increase in distress calls about early marriage compared with the same period in 2019.

Leaving school also disrupts girls’ sexual and reproductive health education, said Legena, and girls who leave school early are less likely to make sure their own daughters finish school.

According to the report, “Girls forced into early marriage are more likely to experience poverty, violence and early pregnancy, threatening their lives and their health.”

The report found that more than 1.2 million girls from pre-primary to upper secondary school in east Asia and the Pacific could drop out as a result of the pandemic, adding to the already 15 million girls who were not enrolled in school before coronavirus.

One in five – or 40 million – girls in east Asia and the Pacific were not able to continue studying via distance learning.

The girls spoken to for the report “overwhelmingly” wanted to stay in school, said Legena. “Girls know the value better than anybody.”

But almost half of the 1,200 girls aged 15-24 surveyed by Plan International in an earlier report said they were worried about their chances of returning to school.

When they are allowed to stay in school, their families typically gain an education too, said Legena, with parents often learning that their daughters are capable of far more than they knew.

The pandemic has also had a marked effect on girls’ mental health, with three in five girls in the Pacific saying that they were “sometimes, quite often or always anxious or stressed because of Covid-19”. Four in five said the pandemic had made them feel lonely.

Schools can be protective environments away from the home, with teachers serving as role models, nutrition programmes providing a greater level of food security, and the company of peers offering “informal education”, too, said Legena.

"We can't afford to lose a generation of girls to the pandemic," she said.

According to the World Bank, before the pandemic, 5 million people in south-east Asia and the Pacific were expected to fall below the poverty line in 2020. The pandemic is expected to add 33 million people to that figure, marking the first increase in overall poverty in the region in two decades.

In India, child marriage has increased not only because of the economic impact of the pandemic on household incomes, but also because social distancing restrictions have made it more acceptable to hold smaller, less expensive weddings, according to the report.

The findings are based on online surveys and interviews with 450 adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 in 10 countries, including Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand and Fiji, as well as workshops with girls in Indonesia, Vietnam and Kiribati.

## **Abducted, shackled and forced to marry at 12**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-56337182>

Farah, a 12-year-old Christian girl, says she was taken from her home in Pakistan last summer, shackled, forced to convert to Islam and made to marry her kidnapper. It's a fate estimated to befall hundreds of young Christian, Hindu and Sikh women and children in the country each year.

On 25 June, Farah was at home in Faisalabad, Pakistan's third most populous city, with her grandfather, three brothers and two sisters when they heard knocking on their front door. She remembers her grandfather going to open it. Then three men burst in, grabbed Farah and forced her into a van outside.

They warned the family that if they tried to get her back "they'd make us regret it", says Farah's father, Asif, who was at work at the time.

Asif went to the nearest police station to report the crime - even providing the name of one of the abductors, whom Farah's grandfather had recognised - but he says the officers showed little interest in helping.

"They were very unco-operative and refused to register the crime. Not only that but they pushed me around and verbally abused me."

Despite repeated complaints to the police it was three months before they finally registered the incident. And even then they took no action.

During this time, 12-year-old Farah, who'd been driven 70 miles (110km) to a house in the nearby city of Hafizabad, says she was raped, shackled and treated like a slave.

"I was chained most of the time and ordered to clean the abductor's home as well as take care of the animals in the yard outside. It was terrible," she says.

"They'd put chains on my ankles, and tied me with a rope. I tried to cut the rope and get the chains off, but I couldn't manage it. I prayed every night, saying, 'God, please help me.'"

This crime is committed by many people, and the authorities don't do anything

There were about two million Christians in Pakistan at the time of the last census, just over 1% of the total population.

According to human rights organisations as many as 1,000 Christian, Hindu and Sikh girls are abducted each year. Many of them are forced to convert to Islam, because it is widely believed in Pakistan that marriages under the age of 16 are acceptable under Sharia law if both of those marrying are Muslim. And this is what happened in Farah's case: she was forced to convert, then married by her abductor.

The National Council of Churches in Pakistan (NCCP) says the number of such abductions is increasing.

"It's hundreds, hundreds, many girls, many girls. This crime is committed by many people, and the authorities don't do anything," says the NCCP's general secretary, Bishop Victor Azariah.

Farah's desperately worried father, Asif, sought help from his local church, which then organised legal aid for the family.

In early December, after five months of desperate lobbying for the abductor to be arrested and for Farah to be set free, police finally took action.

"Four police came to the abductor's house and told people there that the court had ordered that I must come with them to a police station," says Farah.

On 5 December, her case came before Faisalabad's District and Sessions Courts and the magistrate sent her to a shelter for women and children, while further investigations were carried out.

The shackles on Farah's ankles left wounds that needed bandaging. But once again there was bad news. While the family waited for a final decision from the courts, police told Farah's father they were dropping their investigation - because Farah said that she had agreed to both the marriage and the conversion.

Farah then repeated this in court on 23 January. But court officials were suspicious that she may have been coerced into making the statement - and Farah says this was indeed the case.

"I said this because the abductor told me that if I didn't he'd first kill me, then murder my father, followed by my brothers and sisters. My whole family. I was really afraid that he'd do this, so I agreed to say what he told me."

Three weeks later on 16 February, nearly eight months after she was taken from her home, judges ruled that Farah's marriage had not been registered properly and was therefore invalid.

She was saved thanks to a technicality - and reunited with her family.

Even when abducted children are rescued, their ordeal is often far from over. In many cases threats are made to abduct them again, or kill family members, and the trauma goes on.

This is what happened in the case of Maria Shahbaz, a 14-year-old Christian girl, who managed to escape after being kidnapped and forced to marry her abductor. She and her family have since been forced to go into hiding following repeated death threats.

In an effort to help Maria, a 12,500-name petition organised by the UK-based charity, Aid to the Church in Need, was recently handed in to the UK government. Signed by more than 30 British parliamentarians, including bishops, peers and MPs, it calls for her to be granted asylum.

Aid to the Church in Need's Spokesman, John Pontifex, says the situation facing many abducted girls and their families in Pakistan has become desperate.

"The trauma these children go through is often compounded by the threats they and their families face after being freed from their abductors. For some, like Maria, asylum in the UK is their only hope of safety."

Pakistan's prime minister, the former cricketer Imran Khan, has ordered an investigation into forced conversion of religious minorities in the predominantly Muslim country.

His special representative on religious harmony, Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, recently stated: "Forced marriages, forced conversion of religion and abduction of underage girls of other religions in the name of marriages, will not be tolerated."

However, Asif's experience with the police suggests that there is a long way to go. He has pledged to continue his efforts to get the three men accused of abducting his daughter prosecuted.

## **BAME sexual abuse: 'Failures' of victims to be investigated**

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tees-56301463>

Three policing bodies are to investigate how police in England and Wales deal with sexual abuse victims from ethnic minority backgrounds. It follows a super-complaint citing failures in responses to reports of sexual abuse within a BAME community.

Areas of concern included excessive focus on "community impact" and failure to consider family reprisals when abuse was reported to the police. The super-complaint was raised by Tees Valley Inclusion Project (TVIP). Super-complaints allow organisations or charities to raise issues on behalf of the public about harmful patterns in policing.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, the Independent Office for Police Conduct and the College of Policing will investigate police responses and report their findings.

The charity Halo, which supports abused people from minority communities, wrote the report on behalf of TVIP, which works with BAME individuals to aid social inclusion.



The complaint highlights obstacles unique to ethnic communities in the investigation of sexual abuse cases. These include:-

- A "disproportionate focus on community impact"
- The "failure to consider honour-based abuse" where complainants face family reprisals
- An "overuse of voluntary suspect interviews" where alleged perpetrators can attend police interviews at their own convenience

Failure to consider honour-based violence was an area the Halo project found was particularly failing black and ethnic minority victims. "The ramifications of not considering honour really can be devastating," Yasmin Khan, director of Halo, told BBC Newsnight.

Victims are discouraged to disclose sexual abuse to officers because it brings shame and dishonour to the family and sometimes whole communities, Ms Khan said.

Over the course of a decade, Rahila, not her real name, was raped and sexually abused by members of her extended family since she was in primary school.

Fifteen years later she disclosed her abuse to the police but some of her alleged abusers were not contacted for more than a year. All denied the allegations and there were no prosecutions.

The former North West chief crown prosecutor Nazir Afzal, who helped convict grooming gangs in Rochdale, is a contributor to the super-complaint and patron of Halo.

"When victims from the minority community come forward, unfortunately, there's a tendency amongst some police forces and officers to be hypersensitive about what the community might think, which they wouldn't do for any other victim."

Mr Afzal believes it is a by-product of the so-called grooming cases and "that means these victims are just being neglected".

Former police officer Maliha Berridge, who specialised in so-called honour-based violence, said "the police are so frightened of putting a foot wrong and being accused of racism, Islamophobia, singling out BME people". She said "The law should be neutral. If somebody breaks the law, he's a criminal. We need to arrest him. We need to deal with it."