

Report for: Stockton-on-Tees Local Safeguarding Children Board  
Date: 17 January 2008

## **FORCED MARRIAGE**

### **1 Purpose**

This report is presented to Board members as a safeguarding and community safety issue following a conference held by Cleveland Police in November 2007 to raise awareness of Forced Marriages.

### **2. Background**

In November Cleveland Police established a confidential help line for victims of forced marriage and domestic violence – **0800 5 999 365**. It is manned around the clock by police volunteers and could be a potential lifeline for the BME communities in the northeast. It was unveiled at a conference, which was one of the most powerful I have been to for quite some time, organised by Det. Supt Tony Hutchinson. The messages from it should be cascaded to all organisations working with children and young people within the borough to make sure young people, in particular, know they are not alone, do not have to endure abuse and that help and support is available.

Det. Supt Tony Hutchinson said: "We have not had a so-called honour-based killing in this area but there have been incidents of female suicide in the Asian community and of course, as is so often in cases like this, the unanswered question is what drove them to the suicide. "Victims are often ostracised by their family and friends so the help line offers them somewhere to turn.

"This is not about arranged marriages but forced marriages and associated practices where the young people concerned have no say and are forced through intimidation or violence into co-operating."

Forced marriage is a gross violation of women's human rights. It is a form of domestic violence and/ or child abuse. A distinction must be made between forced marriage, where there is a lack of free consent, and an arranged marriage where both parties give consent freely. Although men can also be forced into marriage, research indicates overwhelmingly that forced marriage affects women and young women adversely. In forced marriage situations there can be a number of influencing factors for example, emotional blackmail, social pressure, threatening behaviour, abduction, imprisonment, physical violence, rape, sexual abuse, suicide and even murder.

An example of a tragic case, which received a lot of media coverage, was that of Rukshana Naz, a 19-year-old Asian woman from Derby who was

killed by her family for refusing to stay in a forced marriage. Rukshana Naz was strangled by her brother while her mother held her down by her feet; the family stated that the reason for killing Rukshana was because she shamed the family by refusing to stay in a forced marriage.

Although the issue of forced marriage has been highlighted amongst women from the Muslim communities, cases have also been reported in other religious groups such as Sikh, Hindu and amongst different ethnic groups from the Middle Eastern, East Asian, Turkish and African communities. Forced marriages may also exist within other tight knit orthodox communities such as Chinese, Japanese and Jewish.

Forced marriage cannot be regarded as a cultural practice that is respected or tolerated because it is a violation of human rights. Nor is it sufficient to allow the various communities, where the practice exists to police themselves. Forced marriage like domestic violence and racism must not be tolerated. All women must be able to make free and informed choices about their lifestyles.

There are no comprehensive or official statistics on the scale of the problem. Most agencies do not keep records on forced marriage. Even where statistics on domestic violence or child abuse are collated, cases of forced marriage are rarely identified and categorised.

Women encountering forced marriage are placed under considerable pressure to stay in or reconcile themselves to abusive situations and face severe consequences for having shamed their family if they do not remain or entire into the marriage. Often the choice whether to accept the abuse of forced marriage or lose the family they need and love is a very difficult decision for a young person. Those who lose their family but escape the forced marriage often go onto experience depression and anxiety as they grieve for the loss of their family. Men forced into marriage can be abusive to their spouse and are more likely to commit adultery and domestic abuse such as neglect, abandonment and marital rape.

Refusal to proceed with a forced marriage is seen by some members of the BME community to bring shame on the family, 'It is the daughter's duty to carry the family honour'. This is known as izzat, which is very powerful and persuasive. It is izzat that can lead to so-called honour based killings however, there is no honour in killing or violence of any kind. This shame can lead to social ostracism, harassment and other acts of violence, including 'honour' killings / murders. In these circumstances the law takes precedence over culture.

The LSCB regional procedure relating to Forced Marriage that provides information relating to potential warning signs for professionals and how to proceed is available on the SLSCB website.

When a referral is made to a statutory or voluntary sector agency such as CESC, Police or Women's Aid, the person may not mention the words

forced marriage. Cases may present with a variety of problems such as truancy, a person reported missing or episodes of depression or self-harm. Professionals need to be sensitive to the fact that these presenting problems could mean that forced marriage is an underlying issue, and ensure that they consider this when dealing with the case.

It should be stressed that there is a difference between forced and arranged marriages. Arranged marriages are consensual, forced marriages are not.

### **3. Proposals for Consideration**

Where an adult is forced into marriage they are experiencing domestic abuse. If a child is forced into marriage they are subjected to child abuse. Where people refuse to enter into arrangements for forced marriages they can be the subject of exclusion from their family and community, violence; physical and mental, and are therefore in need of support. Stockton is working hard to tackle domestic and child abuse and interconnectivity needs to take place between the Safeguarding Children Board and the Community Safety Partnership to ensure both boards are working together to provide safe environments for potential victims.

All agencies need to be aware of Forced Marriages as a Safeguarding children issue. Staff and young people also need to be aware of the help that is available to potential victims and professionals. This should be reaffirmed by revisiting the procedures to make sure the information contained within it is up to date and awareness of the Police 'Choice' help line should be displayed wherever possible. The displaying of the posters is particularly relevant in schools as this is where the majority of young people will access information either for themselves or friends.

### **4. Recommendation**

Board members are asked to:

- i. Note the Forced Marriages report
- ii. Share the Forced Marriages report with the Community Safety Partnership
- iii. Approve the circulation of 'Choice' – Forced Marriages help line posters for display in schools and other public buildings to raise awareness of the help line
- iv. Request a review of the current Forced Marriages procedure

**Contact Officer:** Pauline Beall, Business Manager  
(01642) 527632 pauline.beall@stockton.gov.uk