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Muslim legal group says forced marriages causing a crisis

Jun 12 2008

Britain's Muslim community is facing a "crisis" because hundreds of forced marriages go unreported and unnoticed, a legal group has said.

According to the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal (MAT), more than 70% of marriages in the Muslim community which involve a foreign spouse have some element of coercion or force.

In its Liberation From Forced Marriage report, the organisation also claims young Muslims in Britain are "under siege" from older generations and alienated from mosques.

The MAT claims that while there are currently 300 reported cases of forced marriages brought to the attention of the police and government authorities, the true figure is in the thousands.

The report says: "These figures reflect the crisis that has loomed within the Muslim community without being noticed or dealt with for the past two decades.

"The figures that are reported to the authorities are only the tip of the iceberg."

According to the report, forced marriages are a reality for many young Muslims in the UK.

It adds: "Young Muslims in Britain are under siege from their elders and parents because of the generational and cultural gap. They are alienated from the mosques because these mosques are mainly controlled by the elder generation."

The report recommends that Muslim community leaders work alongside the Home Office and Foreign Office to resolve the issue.

It also calls for a summit on forced marriages to be held at Downing Street with the Prime Minister.

Shaykh Faiz Siddiqi, chairman of the MAT's governing council, said it was crucial that the Muslim community worked alongside the Government. He said: "We will work closely with the Government. It has to be joined forces but up to now the leadership of the Muslim community have not been forthcoming.

"We are trying to achieve an awareness that the community is now taking very bold steps to self-regulate."

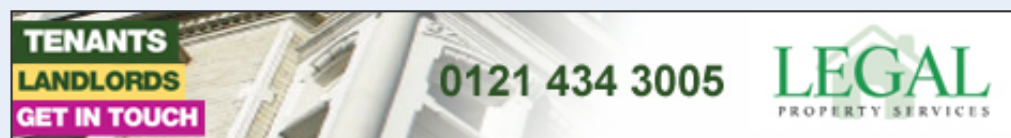
The report's publication coincides with a national gathering of Muslim leaders, organised by the MAT to discuss the issue of forced marriages. Mr Siddiqi said he was hopeful of the outcome of the report, and today's convention.

"Everyone is making the right noises. The Government seems to be welcoming it and I think the community is welcoming it as well," he said.

The MAT was set up in 2007 and, according to its website, provides a "viable alternative for the Muslim community seeking to resolve disputes in accordance with Islamic Sacred Law and without having to resort to costly and time-consuming litigation".

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