

Articles of faith

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June 12, 2008

Seven in ten marriages 'forced'



More than seven in ten marriages involving an English citizen and a spouse born in Asia could have an element of 'force or coercion' about them, according to [document](#)

[published today](#) that contains some of the strongest language used by community leaders to date. The [Muslim Arbitration Tribunal](#) claims that forced marriages reflect a 'crisis that has loomed within the Muslim community without being noticed or dealt with for the past two decades.' The tribunal, founded last year and based in Nuneaton near Coventry, says the official figures of 300 forced marriages a year represent the tip of the iceberg. Muslim lawyers on the tribunal council based their figures on decades of experience within the community, and from observing their own friends and families.



They believe that the number of marriages involving an element of coercion is in fact far higher than 300 a year and could represent as many as 70 per cent of

those involving one foreign spouse. The tribunal is chaired by Shaykh Faiz Siddiqi and includes on its council about 75 Muslim lawyers, barristers and judges from around the country.

The 28-page document, *Liberation from Forced Marriages*, to be published in London this morning, where Shaykh Siddiqi, pictured here, will deliver a lecture, represents the first attempt by a grass-roots Muslim organisation in Britain to tackle the problem head-on. It comes on the eve of tomorrow's 168-page report by the Commons Home Affairs select committee on domestic violence and forced marriage. MPs heard evidence that marriage visas are issued in cases where the sponsor has been forced into marriage and ordered to sponsor the visa. The committee also heard that some schools seem reluctant to discuss the issue of forced marriage because they fear offending parents and the wider community.

Here are some extracts:

'The institution of marriage in the Asian sub-continent is largely based on custom and practice that has been handed down from generation to generation. This culture has been infused with true Islamic practises where the faith was deemed important. The practises have largely remained entrenched in local cultural and traditional values. The conflicts within the Islamic practises and the culture have, to a large extent, remained unchallenged. This is primarily due to the lack of institutionalisation of the Islamic faith, either in the times of the Muslim Kingdoms or in the modern Islamic Republics. Therefore issues such as forced marriages on the pretext of religion or absolute arrangement have largely remained unchecked.'

'There are currently 300 reported cases of forced marriages brought to the attention of the Police and other Government authorities. The reality is that in over 70 per cent of all marriages that take place, where the spouse is an English citizen and the other spouse is a foreign national from the Asian sub-continent, there is an element of force or coercion before the marriage takes place. 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.'

'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. There is no comprehensive fusion for them in society as a whole because there remain signs of mistrust, prejudice and discrimination. Coerced and forced marriages are a reality for many young Muslims directly or indirectly, through someone they know. As stated at above the incidence of the vast majority of these marriages occurs when the British citizen is coerced into marrying someone from the original homeland of their parents or family.'

Later this year the [Forced Marriage \(Civil Protection\) Act 2007](#) will come into force. On top of current criminal protection, the Act will provide civil protection for vulnerable people threatened with forced marriage and give courts the power to prevent forced marriages. Courts will be able to make a Forced Marriage Protection Order to stop someone from forcing another person into marriage. A breach of this order would be contempt of court and could carry a prison sentence. The FCO also has [a forced marriage unit](#) that keeps official tabs on this issue.

However, grass-roots Muslims fear that many of the victims of forced marriages and their families will be too frightened of reprisals within the community to use the Act. The tribunal, which is already operational in London, Birmingham, Bradford and Manchester, claims in its report that its proposals, set alongside the new act, mean that 'such hideous acts of forcing people to marry without their consent shall find no sanctuary within the English legal system.'

The figures were last night disputed by the [Muslim Council of Britain](#). A spokesman for the council, Inayat Bunglawala, questioned where the seven-in-ten figure came from, and pointed me to the longer-established [Islamic Sharia Council](#) which offers advice and arbitration on marriage and divorce,

although Inayat also asked me to make absolutely clear that the MCB and Sharia Council are bodies independent of each other. 'The allegation that 70 per cent of marriages involving a foreign born spouse has an element of force or coercion involved appears to be completely unsourced, he said. The MCB earlier this year published new guidelines condemning forced marriage as "unIslamic". The council [has also warned against 'malicious' intervention](#) by third parties into legitimate arranged marriages.



Update: Present at the launch was Meena Patel, of [Southall Black Sisters](#). She and other Muslim women there applauded the attempt to address this critical issue, but were sceptical about the effect on a family of an imam turning up at the front door to discuss the legitimacy of a marriage. She helps many women on the run from arranged marriages, and also knows of a number where murder has been committed to prevent 'dishonour'.

(Note: picture credit to [Kathrine Lassen's blog](#). It is from a play about a father who mistakenly kills his daughter when she objects to an arranged marriage.)

Technorati Tags: [forced marriage](#), [Islam](#), [Muslim Council of Britain](#)

Posted by Ruth Gledhill on June 12, 2008 at 12:01 AM in [Islam](#), [Marriage](#) | [Permalink](#)

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[snip]

MCB's stance on forced marriages are found here

<http://www.mcb.org.uk/uploads/wrongnotright.pdf>

rg writes: thank you for this James, I also heard from Inayat and have amended the post accordingly, Ruth

Posted by: James Arberry | [12 Jun 2008 06:20:11](#)

I attended a conference organised by South Asian Muslims in Bradford in the early 1990s, in which young women running away due to impending marriage was identified as a major community problem. It's tragic things have taken so long to come to a head, but its not only the South Asian community that has had its head buried in the sand with regards to this issue.

Posted by: Yunus | [12 Jun 2008 06:31:05](#)

Following the action by the West Midlands Police (involving Channel 4)I believe there is now a question of a lack of enthusiasm to help girls in this distress. The schools in that area also seem to be reluctant to report obvious cases when children have gone missing and may be in danger of genital mutilation or enforced marriage or even murder. Many people are beginning begin to wonder if the West Midlands has become a State within a State where the Police have usurped the prerogatives of Parliament and where the writ of the UK Govt. no longer runs.

Posted by: Keith | [12 Jun 2008 14:41:44](#)

Without the phrase "involving one Asian spouse", the headline of this piece is a statistic taken out of context so it appears far more shocking than the truth. That's not okay.

Posted by: Andrew Taylor | [14 Jun 2008 13:51:17](#)

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